

Hyperrealism

magazine





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*“Kopfbuche II”
Acrylics on canvas, 40 x 30 cm*



As you explained in your statement you use an analytical approach when you create your artworks. What are exactly the elements that you try to investigate in your subjects?

I think it all boils down to trying to obtain the highest amount of information about the subject by mere observation of its surface. At the end of the day, I think that is all we have as realist artists-surfaces and their interaction with light. I believe most of us try to permeate that surface in one way or another to possibly transcend a technical, photographic reproduction. I especially enjoy paintings that are able to speak to more than just our vision. **I am always obsessed with an object's surface textures, trying to interpret these textures and induce a tactile sensation is very important to me.** Just to be clear I am not referring to the texture of the paint itself, I am referring to the synesthetic sensation, the illusion, that a painted fur feels soft and fluffy because the artist's arrangement of pigment is convincing to us as such. A viewer of my work had once told me she could hear the dried leaves rustle under her feet and smell the earth and moss when looking at my painting, those kind of reactions are the greatest compliments to me.

Besides observation however, **I also enjoy doing literal investigation.** Sometimes I might just read an article about it, once it even lead to me visiting a molecular botanist at the university in Bonn whose students showed me their research based off of Darwin's 'root-brain theory' and plant cognition. I'm somewhat nerdy like that.

In your landscapes we can see a soft contrast in the used tones, they seem to have a filter that's able to emphasize only the parts you want to put in light. Tell us about these very impactful works...

How did this series come into existence?

To be blunt, a walk in the Kottenforst, a forest near Bonn, is all it took. I think the fascination with forests and trees is universal. Trees have always been worshipped or admired by cultures across the globe.

I am neither religious, nor spiritual in the sense of

believing in the supernatural, but who is not struck with awe and a sense of the sublime when experiencing nature? In German, we call this state of meditative serenity in forests *Waldeinsamkeit*. A word also closely linked to German Romanticism, which is hard to avoid when growing up in Germany. So obviously, there is some cultural heritage involved as well.

The depicted trees in particular caught my interest due to their, for beech trees uncommon, growth patterns. A former kind of timber production and the subsequent abandonment resulted in crippled growth in many trees in the Kottenforst. There are no primordial forests left in Germany and yet these up to 250-year-old gnarly trees suggest the opposite.

Only due to human interference did these trees grow to look this wild. I find tragic beauty in this.

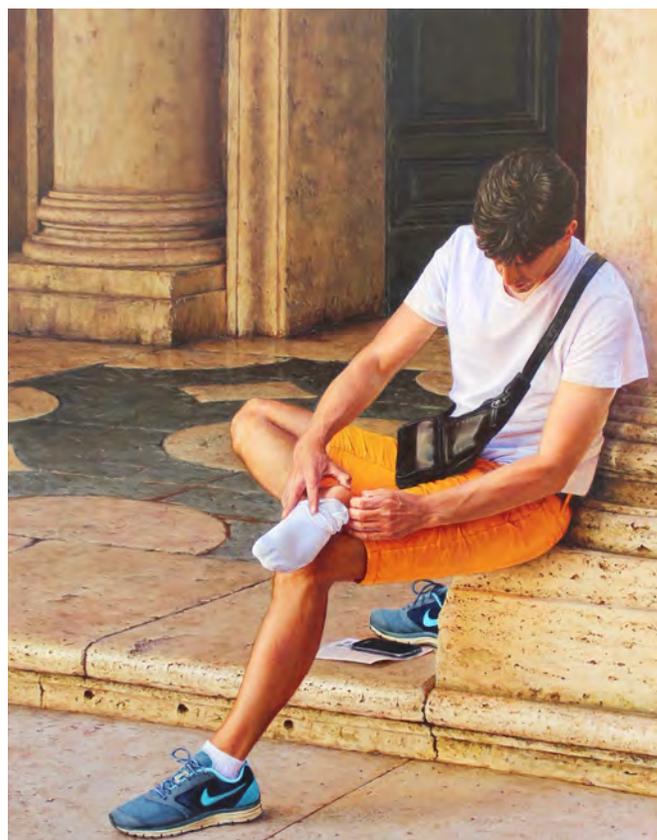
Sadly, many of them are now breaking or falling of old age. Additionally, due to their positioning at the edge of a clearing, there was also this wonderful theatrical lighting. **I returned several times to find the right one.**

I quite enjoyed the idea of a theatre stage setting with one tree in natural spotlight. I purposely darkened the background foliage and closed several visible patches of sky to create a nearly impenetrable curtain of green, thus slightly hinting at the sinister side of forest folklore in juxtaposition to the beauty of the overall scene.

You also started an artistic research in figure and portraits.. Is there a link between lines and forms in the human figure and the natural elements of a landscape?

That's a good question. I suppose one could say a portrait can be treated like a micro-landscape.

Perhaps I even subconsciously do. However, thus far, I believe I tend to treat them as two different subjects.



"Spinario", acrylic on panel, 25 x 20 cm

Whatever you paint, you do it in an extremely detailed and accurate way. We can definitely see there's a lot of study behind your work... What are your phases of painting?

Initially something catches my eye and seems of interest to me. If I consider it worthy of a painting, I will take several reference shots and compose something out of that material later in the studio. Sometimes these images have to sit for a while and the actual idea has to ripen. There might be a problem I don't have an answer to in that moment, other times I'm eager to get started right away. For bigger projects, I might make some thumbnail sketches to see the overall color composition and contrasts. Then I'll transfer my sketch or reference to the painting surface, block in the main colors all over and then work from the background to the foreground and render, render, render. I've started sketching and painting more from life as well, especially my miniatures are usually from life. I mostly work in acrylic because it allows me to glaze endlessly and build up the desired color without much drying time.

You're very young, but you've already achieved several amazing experiences in your artistic path. Talk to us about the most important opportunities that this job has given you up to this day.

I was only just in my second year at University when my former painting professor, **Andreas Orosz** to whom I owe a lot, invited **Ulrich Gering**, a gallerist from Frankfurt, to our school. Gering selected an alumna and myself to be shown in one-artist shows at the *Art Karlsruhe*. I was thrilled! This was a very important moment for me because at that point I was studying art education to become a teacher. **I thought it was unrealistic to assume I could ever make money off my art.**

Being part of an international art fair this early in my studies made it seem more realistic. I shifted gears from high school art teacher to a career as an artist and possibly art professor. This led to me coming to New York to pursue another MFA to expand my skillset and thus increase my chances at an academic teaching position while maintaining a professional studio practice. New York has definitely been an incredible experience for me thus far and given me many opportunities. Recently I had the honor to show alongside works by famous artists such as **Robert Longo**, **Wayne Thiebaud**, **Jenny Saville** or **Kehinde Wiley** at the **Flag Art Foundation**. My work has also been included in major collections like the **Steven and Alexandra Cohen Collection** thanks to the New York Academy of Art's annual Tribeca Ball.

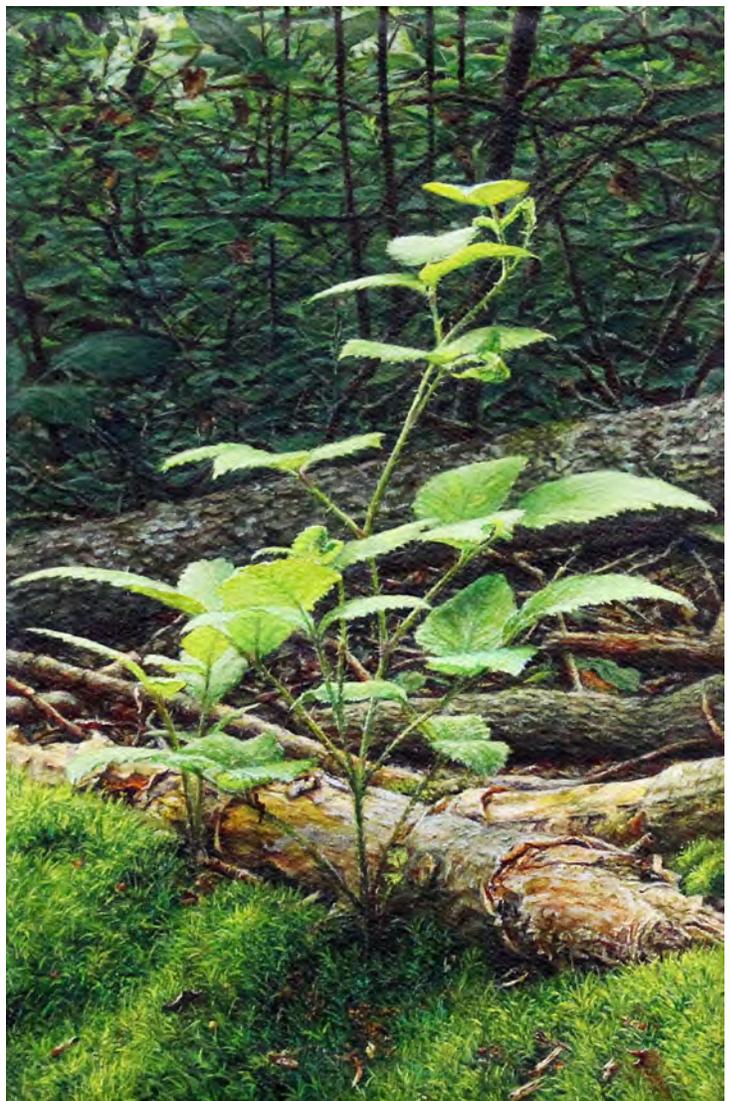
Queen Victoria supposedly said "Beware of artists, they mix with all classes of society and are therefore most dangerous". Leaving dangerous up to dispute, the former has definitely proven true to me and it has been most exciting. As someone curious about almost everything, it has been wonderful to meet people from all different fields and occupations and exchange experiences and knowledge. I'm not aware of many other professions that touch so many different fields and allow you to meet historians, writers, poets, actors, dancers, botanists, entomologists, doctors, architects etc. It's truly fulfilling.

Your style of painting is definitely academic, you are an admirer of the old masters, aren't you? What past painters or artistic movements inspire you the most?

I am very fond of northern renaissance artists like **Jan van Eyck**, **Albrecht Altdorfer**, **Hans Memling** or **Albrecht Dürer** to name a few. I definitely share their desire for detail and tendency to strong local colors. I also usually avoid sfumato or blurriness in favor of crisp lines and overall focus.

The main influence is the 19th Century however. Besides the briefly before mentioned German Romanticists like **Casper David Friedrich** most of all the landscape painters of the Düsseldorf School of Painting and their relationship with the Hudson River School are very intriguing to me. Most of the landscape artists I adore have come through the Düsseldorf School of Painting in one way or another be it **Albert Bierstadt**, **Iwan Schischkin**, **Alexander Calame**... they all studied under Johann Wilhelm Schirmer and Carl Friedrich Lessing or their successors the Achenbach brothers.

Many artists, so called artist-explorers, also accompanied scientists on explorations to document their new findings during the golden age of discovery. In the case of Frederic Edwin Church, he claims to have been greatly inspired by writings like those of Alexander von Humboldt who I also greatly admire. I am very fond of the scientific illustrations of that time in general. As mentioned, **Alexander von Humboldt**, but also **Maria Sibylla Merian**, **Ernst Haeckel** or **Alexander Marshal** are artists whose works have recently been influencing me as well.



"Himbeertrieb", acrylic on canvas, 15 x 10 cm



As an emerging artist, what's your opinion about the art job today and the new possibilities in the art market?

I believe opportunities for artists have generally increased but they might have also become more difficult to navigate. New galleries are popping up all over but there are many possibilities for artists to show their work outside of, or independent of a gallery nowadays as well. However, sadly some of these are also taking advantage of young artists with "pay to play" offers and such.

As with almost everything today I think modern technology has facilitated some things and complicated others. I believe the amount of self-promotion needed as an artist has increased plenty, the competition is constantly growing and the cries for attention are getting louder. Although social media platforms are great to make your artwork public and seen, they are also very time-consuming to maintain. Not to mention the **danger of quality being determined solely by the number of likes or followers. It is also questionable to me in how far platforms like Instagram add to our alienation from the original and increase our oversaturated fast image consumption.** Despite of that, I have also experienced Instagram as an incredible platform for vast community building. When I joined about a year ago, I was positively surprised how approachable many artists are. Artists I admired but thought to be inaccessible like movie stars would gladly engage in a conversation or share their experience. It is also incredibly humbling and inspiring to see what is constantly being created.

What are you working on now? Tell us about your next projects!

I just returned from a printmaking residency at **La Ceiba Grafica** in Mexico. I was working in lithography there. A very laborious technique but it is very satisfying to have multiples of a drawing. I definitely see myself experimenting with lithography further in the future. Currently however, I am finishing some projects I have had to put aside for various reasons, including two portraits in oil, two genre paintings in acrylic, as well as a few commissioned miniature pieces. I recently painted a small series of miniatures, mostly natural curiosity objects mixed with some everyday items. They were not very complex but very well received. I intend to further play with these Wunderkammer items and possibly create larger compositions. I imagine something lighthearted, playful, but alluding to the former mentioned scientific illustrations...we shall see. I am also very eager to return to more landscape paintings I have lingering in the back of my mind, maybe to compensate for the lack of *Waldeinsamkeit* in New York.

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- Michael Weiss

Above:
"Artichoke", watercolor
on paper, 14 x 23 cm

Next page:
"Kopfbuche III", acrylic
on canvas, 30 x 24 cm

