

A portrait of the artist



Irmhild Schaefer's paintings transmit the joy of life

Irmhild Schaefer's paintings shine and glow. Their radiance will stay with you for a long time. Your inner eye will remember the colours, mood, beauty and vitality of the paintings without denying the challenges and complexity of life.

For example, there is a woman whose black hair is tied in a knot and her expressive gestures mix with the fiery vermillion quillings of her dress -unifying with a passionate flamenco. Her lowered face expresses sadness which may originate from the source of this dance, the painful Andalusian history. It could also be due to a personal fate that she experiences and overcomes in this emotional moment. The title of this 2019 painting is *'Dance and feel free'*

The artist began her studies in Bochum in 1968 when H. J. Schlieker, an important representative of the German Informal Art Movement set up the 'Musisches Zentrum' at the Ruhr University Bochum. This happened in the middle of the transition towards free thinking. Many artists left the past behind and headed for new shores. Everybody who meets Irmhild Schaefer today sees her open mindedness, her enthusiasm and her creative talent. You can imagine how convincingly she encouraged her students to discover the world and how inspirational her teachings were as a lecturer. After her teaching period she developed her own creative pieces of art motivated by studies with Günter Sponheuer, Markus Lüpertz and Norbert Bisky.



Irmhild Schaefer
lives in North-Rhein Westfalia, Germany

Her body of work is structured in rows and series focused on different main subjects like the 'wonderworld' of circus and the universe of dance . It expresses body and soul not only for the women who are painted by her in different situations. She takes interest in the sky, as well as in water and waves but also meadows, woods, fields and the paradise of flowers.

On the intersection of many of these themes is the 'Quay Wall' in the harbour. This is an area between land and sea. There is a quiet picture in the centre of which we see two women sitting close to each other but each is in her own world. One reading, the other watching the distance. Yet, both are linked by some external likeness and inner intimacy. Behind them the blue water, in the distance green hills. The whole scenery - just like a vignette - is surrounded by a frame of rose and apricot like shades in which the sinking or rising lights converges. The softness of the colours and their cool but warm harmony express ease and peace.



Quai Wall 2, 2021, acrylic on canvas, 80x100cm, photo: Klaus Schaefer

We ask ourselves where and how Irmhild Schaefer's pictures are created and join her in her studio that is part of her home in Sprockhövel where she lives with her husband. The artist works in one of the upper rooms where the light can float in through large windows, sometimes filtered by curtains or supported by additional lamps. She keeps her colours, coats, paper, fabrics and other materials supplies in crates and convenient tool- boxes. Glasses with brushes, boxes of chalk, paint bowls and spray cans are on shelves alongside a library of international catalogues and art books.

Other than easily storable sketchbooks, folders with drawings and prints - her paintings need a lot of space. Some are professionally wrapped for the next transport. Many oil paintings portray her family and friends throughout decades in a rather conventional way- in contrast to the rather vivid works in acrylic paint. Drop by drop the floor, pallets and easels show traces of her artistic creations.

Smaller formats are created on her desk where the horizontal paper can better handle lower viscosity paint like watercolour, Indian ink or gouache. The adjacent room and its higher ceiling allow larger paintings requiring a vertical set up where the painter occasionally is assisted by a step stool to master her larger creations



Female Artists, 2021, acrylic and oil pastels on canvas, 140x220cm, photo: Klaus Schaefer

The two-piece painting `Female Artists` in the dimensions of 140 x 200 cm is one of those. Here Irmhild Schaefer did not depict the breathtaking climax of a performance but rather chose to paint an episode of daily training in the circus ring. Content and formal aspects ascribe the motive - a remarkable tension. A third mysterious figure in a cube-like twisted position almost merges with the dark ultramarine background on the left of the painting while the red suit of the central person meaningfully distinguishes itself from it. Her body is split between the two paintings and she extends her hand as if reaching for our help. Multi-coloured sparks represent the ceiling of the circus tent while the black background extends to the right.

Irmhild starts her work by considering how she can bring the artistic potential of the subject to the surface. Therefore she sometimes takes a pencil and looks for details in naturalistic drawings. From these experiences in her sketches the adaptations of reality follow: a concentration in which the essence of a thing, a landscape, a person, a movement or a constellation is expressed.

Simultaneously she experiments with different background colours before she transfers the sketches with coloured chalk on the canvas filling the thickening layers with acrylic colour. Everything is in motion as the artist describes her technique. "I let the colours blend. I prefer strong colours, the outlines are varying. The impulsive action in the picture is very important. Just like the recognition of the artistic process, the individual stroke of the brush. The background may partly shine through."

The transparent glazes turn into a dissolved atmospheric scenery whose perspective is mostly given through the arrangements of the objects which compose themselves by overlaying colourfields. Just like a mosaic. The pictures of the figures are often only indicated, their individuality is shown by their bodies and dresses, vividly and rich in contrast.

The trimmings of the motives are sometimes extraordinary. Under the ironic title `Shop till you drop` you can see three women from the waist down, sitting next to each other on a bench. Casually dressed in jeans, shorts, or a short skirt and sandals, these `half` ladies stretch their legs, the results of their shopping expedition in bags and boxes at their feet. For Irmhild this is a symbol of freedom and self esteem. The ladies sit back happily and content to relax without any feelings of a bad conscience.

Female emancipation is a constantly recurring topic for the artist. Being a member of GEDOK- a nationwide organisation of female artists of all categories in Germany- she exhibits her series of strong and powerful women. She reminds us of famous female pioneers of the early 20th century and depicts courageous women of the present who live a self-confident femininity. In her paintings these women show their independence and unconventionality.

Irmhild's creative drive is also evidenced by active memberships of 'WBK' in Essen and 'GFJK' in Baden-Baden. Despite limiting Covid 19 restrictions and occasional cancellations she still participated in various expositions. The Wuppertal project 'Out & about' showed jury selected works, including Irmhild's, on billboards all over the city.

Temporarily eased covid restrictions allowed her to participate in exhibitions with a new series of work on the subject of 'water' that she had been working on already in 2002. Part of this series is the fascinating view on a river landscape ('River so deep', 2021) that rises over the light, convex center, between softly oil pastel emphasized algae and rushes. Across the river hills and fields bat in the final rays of the setting red sunlight. Through her metamorphosis the familiar 'Ruhr' receives a mysterious depth. The title hints towards a song of the 1960s and allows for even more interpretations.



Dance and feel free 1, 2019, acrylic on canvas, 200x150cm, photo: ©2019 Vanessa Schweppe



River so deep, 2021, oil on canvas, 140x120cm, photo: Klaus Schaefer

Irmhild Schaefer's paintings are alluring. Every second or third glance will reveal previously unnoticed aspects that stimulate the fantasy to extend the endless scenery of the world on all dimensions and at all times. There is no end to glow and joy.

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