

OTTO RAPP - INTERVIEW ON ILLUSTRATION TOOLBOX - January 2011

The detailed pencil drawings of artist Otto Rapp could be included as part of the rebirth of modern surrealism aside from the fact that he doesn't all reason within his work.

Although his artwork incorporates bold iconic imagery combined with dreamlike, sometimes nightmarish elements, they seem to be more deliberately tied together to convey a singular meaning. His work, which has been created over the course of several decades to include paintings as well as digital art, are an exploration of the enigmatic alter ego he has created for himself as a traditional artist. Before we go any further, I'd like to say thank you to Otto for taking the time to provide such insightful answers to the interview questions.

Interview

1. How did you get your start as an artist?

Ever since I was a small child, I would use drawing as a means of constructing my own inner world, a place I could explore and enter at will. All that was needed was pencil and paper. I had very few toys. I loved to go and stay at my grandfather's place: there, I always had stacks of paper and sharpened pencils waiting for me. I'd sit at his desk and get lost in my drawing for hours on end.

2. How would you describe your style?

Initially, I would say my style was close to Surrealism, but I came to the realization that what I was doing had little to do with the abandonment of rational thought. While I readily immersed myself into a world of dreams and fantasy, aided by automatism and chance of subconscious doodling - the sort of absent-minded drawing one does on a blotter while talking on the phone, for example - I would subsequently pause from time to time to examine and interpret the directions my work was taking. I would consciously push certain areas along, and delete or suppress other things that somehow did not work within the overall flow.

Once I discovered the work of the Vienna School of Fantastic Realism I realized that their methods, and particularly the work and process of Rudolf Hausner, were more like the way I worked also. I formulated this much later, in 1983, for an Exhibition Artist Statement as such:

BOGOMIL'S UNIVERSE the Inner Universe of Otto Rapp

Bogomil's Universe is an excursion into the realms of the Inner Universe - a parallel universe that exists in the mind, and glimpses thereof are presented here. I am increasingly reluctant to speak of my work as strictly and exclusively surrealistic.

While Surrealism provided the initial spark, and some of the methods of Surrealism are employed, I do not suppress the influence of the rational and selective focus. Thus, particularly in later works, there is to be found a conscious juxtaposition of the complementary forces of inspiration and reason.

I do not concern myself with the elimination of the rational, the exclusivity of the irrational and the absurd, but presentation of the conscious and subconscious world as an inseparable whole. I draw my inspirations from the layered labyrinth underground which represents the other side of life, which is an inner imaginative-inspirational counterpart to the outer world, expressed with the help of logic-alogic associations, analogisations and symbolism.

(Note: Bogomil's Universe is a title for a ongoing series of paintings that are based mostly on my decalcomania technique).

3. What tools do you use and what is your process?

I love drawing. When I draw, I work mostly with pencils. Occasionally I also use india ink with traditional steel nibs and/or ink pens such as Micron, Faber Castell or Koh-I-Noor. In painting, I started with oil paints, but I developed a sensitivity to solvents, so I switched to acrylics early on in my career. I learned how to adapt acrylics to some of the oil techniques such as decalcomania (I admire the work of Max Ernst). I am mostly self-taught, although much later, when I had already established myself, did I take formal studies (I eventually graduated from the University of Lethbridge with a BFA). My painting methods that I developed myself by trial and error, resemble very closely the so called Mische Technique of the old masters.

It starts with a strong under drawing and imprimatura, picking out highlights with white (I later started using egg tempera in this process) alternating with color glazes.

4. Who or what inspires you most at the moment?

It has not changed much from my youth: my grandfather had taken me to the exhibitions of the Vienna School when they first started, and every chance I got, I went to the Academy in Vienna to look at the work in their gallery. It was mostly the Northern Renaissance that fascinated me. Artists such as Brueghel and Bosch. I watched as students copied these masters and internalized what they were doing. I was in a pre-teen then. Of international Surrealist Artists, Dali and Max Ernst I always held in high esteem. Of course the artists of the Vienna School, as mentioned before, were deeply influential. Aside from Hausner, I admired the work of Ernst Fuchs, particularly his early work.

Vienna has such a rich culture, and the era of the Vienna Secession, artists such as Gustav Klimt and Egon Schiele were high on my list, and still are. Now I draw a lot of inspiration from the many artists within my worldwide network. There is a new wave of very talented young artists emerging today that embrace the old craftsmanship but also bring a new approach

with the use of new media processes. Tradition and new innovation in a symbiotic relationship.

5. What are you working on right now?

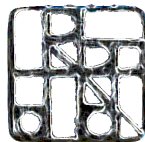
At this time, my studio work has taken a backseat to my work in organizing and managing a growing network of like-minded artists. But the urge to create cannot be denied - I need to draw. It is like taking a vacation. Currently, I do mostly small drawings. I will be collaborating with a few artist friends on "Exquisite Corpses" very soon. I also have a few unfinished canvases on hand that scream for attention. I do plan on doing more painting, following the mische technique. There are ideas swirling around in my mind that demand to be put on canvas. The "Inner Universe" is a vast expanse, and so far, I only explored a very small corner of it.

6. Any last words of advice for anyone just starting out as an illustrator or artists?

Do art for the love of art. If you want to make a lot of money, become a stock broker or real estate agent. But if you are a true artist, then it is in your blood, you couldn't be anything else.

I always held that a strong foundation in drawing is the basis for everything else. Explore, learn new things. Don't follow formulas religiously. Be inventive, make your own rules. Don't be a clone of your teacher or your idol. Take the best from wherever you can find it, adapt it, reconfigure, internalize it and make it your own. If you start repeating yourself, move on. By this I mean: don't become a clone of yourself either. Always learn. Always grow.

Interview by Brian Rhinehart - January 2011



Note:

This interview is no longer on line, since the Illustration Toolbox website has been discontinued by its publisher, Brian Rhinehard. Prior to publishing it in January 2011, Brian Rhinehard sent me a screenshot of the post, which I published March 15th 2013 on my [Blogger blog](#) - it had some illustrations, which subsequently got lost (see history below).

This has an interesting history behind it, from which one can learn to always create back-ups, because you never know when a service disappears from the web. The screenshot of the post, was initially published June 8th 2012 on my [posterous blog](#) (the site does no longer exist) but because I cross-posted all these onto my blogger, I was able to retrieve it, albeit without the images, since they were hosted on posterous.

Using the text retrieved, and guided by our email conversations (where I had sent him my images for posting), I re-constructed the original post including the images and published a PDF on my website, which you find here: [OTTO RAPP INTERVIEW ON ILLUSTRATION TOOLBOX - January 2011](#)

Relevant Links:

Mische Technique

Artist [Cynthia Re Robbins](#) has very detailed instructions on this old-master technique of painting on her website - example: [The Sacred Thread Mandala](#) - you find links to additional examples on her [Studio Page](#) (scroll down).

Vienna School of Fantastic Realism

I wrote an essay about the Vienna School back around 1980 and recently reworked it and published it on line: [The Vienna School of Fantastic Realism](#)

Decalcomania

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Decalcomania>