

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS OTTO RAPP

BIENNIAL OF FANTASY ART 2021 - BELGRADE

When did you know you were going to be an artist?

Probably very early in my life. As a child I spent much time with my grandfather who took me to galleries and museums. Whenever I was at his place, he always had stacks of paper and sharpened pencils for me to draw with. I hardly had any toys - drawing was with which I transported myself into a Fantasy World. Later in school, I improved my grades by illustrating my homework.

You said for yourself that you started as a self-taught creator. What knowledge did your education in Canada provide you with?

I was always very good with drawing. Early on, I had problems with painting, I did not achieve the same refined details I did with drawing. However, researching the methods of the masters, as was suggested by the members of the Vienna School, I began to refine my painting skills. I was already an established and exhibiting artist before I entered the University of Lethbridge Art Department in Canada. Initially, I wanted to just audit a printmaking program, but was persuaded to enroll full time. My painting was by then well established, but what I gained was from figure drawing classes. I had a very demanding professor there, and slacking off was impossible. Outside of the formal class structure, we were required to always carry drawing materials with us wherever we went and draw whenever possible. A good portion of our grading was based on what we brought back to class from our outings.

Did you have role models during your artistic maturation and which ones?

As previously mentioned, my grandfather used to take me to galleries and museums. One of them was at the Academy of Art in Vienna, where at that time the later members of the Vienna School were students. I watched students in the museum copy old masters, and also peeked into the classrooms. My early role model was Ernst Fuchs. Another member, the older Rudolf Hausner, I admired very much, and much later, in 1980 while still a student at the University of Lethbridge, I visited him in Vienna for my research for an art history paper I wrote on the Vienna School. Worth mentioning Wolfgang Hutter and also Arik Brauer for their fantasy and of course painterly skills. An early influence was, like for many surrealists, Salvador Dali. Later, I admired and began to emulate the fine work of Max Ernst, his decalcomania period, a technique which I tried to recreate with acrylics.

Do you remember who you sold your first painting to?

I lived in Stockholm, Sweden at that time. It was just a small piece of a ship in a sunset - something I did while busking in Gamla Stan together with a Dutch artist. While I went away on an errand, my Dutch friend sold that little piece for me. I don't know to whom, he said it was a nice looking lady. Years later, my earliest work in Canada was sold through a gallery I worked with, but for the most part I don't know where these pieces went to.

How do you get inspiration for your paintings?

Since as described in my childhood, when I draw I create a fantasy world that evolves seemingly by itself. There are times when I paint after having drawn in this way, or snippets of ideas that come to me while daydreaming. But more often than not I just start with a blank canvas without any preconceived idea or plan. In this regard the technique of decalcomania, gleaned from Max Ernst, is a good start from which to develop my painting further, seeing what fantastic images I can find in those randomly created shapes.

Do you, while creating, let a story precede a picture, or while drawing (creating) do you develop the context in which your heroes live?

For the most part, the latter is the case. A drawing or painting is like a trip into the unknown. But there are also times when I am inspired by a story I read, such as one told by a former lover of Picasso who revealed some curious insights into his private life. Or else the many books of fantasy and science fiction, which inspired and guided my thoughts. But I never, like so many others, would just illustrate literally what is described. A good example would be H.P. Lovecraft's Cthulhu: the way I drew it is found nowhere else.

How would you describe your style?

I lean very strongly toward the definition of the Vienna School, which is a post-surrealist movement. Unlike Breton's definition of complete automatism, I would step back and assess what I had done and make conscious adjustments. It could best be described following apollonian-dionysian philosophy (as in Nietzsche), the balance between inspiration and reason, chaos and order.

What is Bogomils universe?

Bogomils Universe began in the early eighties as an essay for a solo exhibition, where I tried to explain in particular my style of decalomania painting, but also the meandering of thoughts that guided my drawings. One of my first paintings in that style was named 'Bogomils Vegetable Garden' after I read a book about Bogomilism, the slavic sect of Gnosticism. The dualistic belief of their spiritual teachings resonated with my philosophy of balance between two opposites. Again, like with all my work, there was no attempt at literal interpretation. The title suggested itself also after a painting by Max Ernst, called 'Garden Airplane Traps'. Since many more paintings like this followed after that one, I used Bogomil in many titles, still today. I see Bogomil (the Grandfather) as my alter ego, exploring my Inner Universe. Thus the title of that particular show 'Bogomil's Universe'.

Are you preparing something new?

Currently, I am reviving one earlier lost drawing, which I try to create in large format. It will, like the original lost one, be called 'Family Reunion'. But this version will be different, yet also based on a short story I once illustrated for an obscure magazine in the late seventies. One of the few pieces that in some way followed the narrative. It tells the story of a woman who believes she is dying, because a large family reunion was called and centered around her at a time out of the regular schedule. Of course, unlike the linear narrative of a story, my work is seen as holistic, like so many of my drawings which you can enter at whatever point and meander around like following a Möbius strip.

Tell us something about VISIONARY ART NETWORK, whose founder you are?

In 2009 there was a scam going on luring artists of our genre to join an organization and website that promised fame and fortune, exhibitions worldwide. It turned out to be a scam, artists were prompted to pay for membership, and then designation as 'Master' etc. The scam evolved by scraping artwork of prominent members of our community and pretending they are members, sort of using them as bait. This happened across several different social media, particularly Facebook. As it turned out the much promised exposure and exhibition was a total flop. A number of us fought this, and I decided to fund a private network where invited artists could join and not pay anything for it. This was, however, private, and not accessible to the public. Later, I started a public website to display the best of each artist's work, and also a spin-off site where individual artworks are featured that then link to the respective artists page on the Visionary Art Gallery. These artist pages would also link to the artists own websites and their social sites.

Why is it important for artists to network and share their ideas?

Artists are very individual, but it is important to network and inspire one another. We never stop learning, and by networking we absorb the best the group can offer. We learn from the masters of the

past, and we learn from each other. I remember the most informative sessions at University were the group discussions and critiques that broadened our horizon.

You were one of the participants in the First Biennial of Fantasy Art in Serbia, what are your impressions and how do you intend to deepen that cooperation?

It was not my first exposure, I had exhibited a few times and also participated in an artists colony in Serbia before. What I have seen so far is very impressive. Several of the artists are personal friends of mine, some I had known personally for almost 10 years. As for cooperation, I would be delighted and proud to work with you again in future.

How did you like Belgrade and what is your strongest impression of it?

Unfortunately, circumstances prevented me from traveling in these peculiar times of the pandemic, but I had, as mentioned above, been to Serbia before, and also exhibited in Belgrade before. I spent most of my time in Novi Sad with my friends there. I am impressed with the Serbian Culture and rich history. I will certainly make it a point to visit again - I miss my friends and the interactions with such talented artists. Traditional skills, combined with a rich history and imagination are particularly strong among artists in Eastern Europe.