



FRANZ PETTO

Austria's Leading Art-Brut Artist

By W. A. MULLER

Tell us how you got into art.

In my early twenties, due to a personal crisis, I became interested in art, not only painting, but also writing and music—especially classical music. I was diving into the world of Beethoven, and also Bruckner. I wanted to create something big. However, in those days I was also taking writing workshops and I realized that I have a comedic talent and that bombastic work is not very fashionable.

Where did you study?

I did not really study painting in school. All I did was take a variety of courses with different

teachers. The most famous teacher was Emilio Vedova, an Italian artist of the Informel and Arte Povera movements. I stayed with him one summer in 1988, at a very nice fortress in Salzburg. I was selected over many international applicants. Previously, I had exhibitions in the center of Vienna. I was very happy. I remember Vedova writing “Ironia” (irony) in large letters about a picture I created, and that was informative for me. Additionally, I had been involved with writing; I held readings in literary coffee shops, and also took writing courses. But, in reality, I am actually a mechanical engineer who dreams of art.

What are your inspirations?

Crises and conflicts. Life never moves in a straight line. It would be nice if everything ran in a predictable way, as though calculated by an engineer. But sometimes life squeaks along and sometimes it breaks... You observe nature and everything is so well arranged, for example. No, I am painting everything, as real painters do. I have no fear. I paint landscapes and interiors, even though they are just the expression of my inner conflict.

What form of painting would you say your art is?

That's difficult and easy at the same time to

describe, because everything has been done before in art. So it is simple to place my paintings in a category, and me as well. Once I was admitted to a psychiatric hospital, I wasn't myself and was lost. In those days I thought of myself as an artist. Of course, the doctors did everything to make me whole, to keep me as an engineer. I would say they have not really succeeded. As far as I am concerned, artists who are damaged belong to the Art-Brut movement in Europe, to the Street Art movement or to the Outsider Art movement in the US. My paintings are never quite abstract, at least for me. They all have titles, and represent the world around me. Some are reduced to rectangles, others remain chaotic. When I work with figures, they are painted very quickly; it's like automatic writing to me. I often have no idea how I've accomplished this.

Who are your clients? Have you done many art shows?

Not really, I was surprised when I was accepted to an exhibition in the first district as a young man. Art is boundless, this is what I want to say and you must be able to afford it. A machine is much more useful than a picture. So I continued to work hard as an engineer and painted in secret, I also continued to write, with essentially no prospect of an actual performance. In 2010, when I saw a psychiatrist, I left engineering for a time. I have had exhibitions

again. But my main clients are the internet, as well as Saatchi Art—I was featured by them.

What is your next series? Which series are you the most proud of?

What does the future hold? I am not sure. You can find yourself in analysis or something else. A lot of my creations end up in my dust bin. I may start a painting on the top left only to finish right below. It's a terrible struggle, of course. I am not really a painter, even though I've painted hundreds of paintings. I earned my money as an engineer. So everything continues to be chaos and order at the same time. I still consider myself a beginner, of that there's no doubt.

Which artists inspire you the most?

When I was a young man, it was Soutine who impressed me, the way he threw the paint, expressive and wonderfully ironic at the same time. But even Klee has left his mark; his childlike approach. Dubuffet as the founder of Art Brut, and of course must be mentioned, and also De Kooning, and in his last years, Basquiat. I would like to finish by quoting Karl Valentin, a German cabaret artist: “Art is very nice, but also makes a lot of work...”

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