

Rubica von Streng



Rubica von Streng graduated from Berlin's University of Arts UdK as a masterclass student in 2018. Her works, such as the paintings of the monumental "PortLand" cycle, have found a place in highly recognized art collections in Germany and abroad. They often deal with the beauty of nature, biodiversity, and the future of civilization.

Abstract portrait and landscape painting enter an exciting liaison in her oeuvre. Her multilayered, oil paintings on canvas and paper appear watercolor-like and radiate an unexpected lightness, however heavy

and complex the subjects. The artist achieves this balancing act by means of her self-developed so-called arpeggio painting technique: wafer-thin layers of highly diluted oil paint are applied one after the other, creating a powerful ensemble of overlapping color spaces and forms that interact with fragments of varying shapes.

"Rubica von Streng's works provide viewers with a continuous and moving visual experience," says Kerstin Bitar, chief art historian at Museum Rosengart Collection, Lucerne. "In an interplay with initially recognized motifs, they will constantly discover new figures, plants and landscapes. It is a continual process. This unfolding of very different visual elements in her pictures is extremely fascinating. Her PortLand works open up many different perspectives – into the depths, into the distance, into the future."



Rubica von Streng by Efacts Photography



Beyond PortLand
Beyond the Face
Oil on paper, 32x24cm each, 2023



How did your journey into art begin, and what originally drew you to painting?

For as long as I can remember, I have expressed myself through painting. As a small child, I started drawing and painting on the walls of my room one day because there was no paper available. After about a month, the walls had to be re-painted because there was no more space. After that, however, I was never allowed to use them as a painting area again; my parents had forbidden it. Art is an important part of my life. However, it wasn't a given that I would choose a professional career as an artist, especially as my family didn't react very enthusiastically when I told them about it. But I always knew that this was my future and I didn't let myself be dissuaded. To finance my studies and make ends meet afterward, I had a few part-time jobs. Meanwhile, I can devote myself completely to art. Growing up in Berlin in the 2000s also impacted my choice of career. The diversity of people in the city, and the various cultural influences – all inspired me immensely and I felt the desire to capture and process those influences artistically. As I am a hypersensitive person, I sometimes seem withdrawn to others. It wasn't until I started studying art that I occasionally was able to talk about topics that were relevant to my artistic work, as I had finally found some like-minded people at university. Another influential factor was my father's library, which I had access to at all times. It contained books on Rembrandt, Goya, Kokoschka, and Degas – to name just a few.

Which historical or contemporary artists do you feel most connected to, and how have they impacted your creative approach?

There are quite a few. Ultimately, every artist is significant in their own time. I feel most connected to those artists whose works I recognize as being strong and true and nothing about them can be questioned. These are the outstanding works that keep me going for weeks after visiting an exhibition. I felt this way for the first time when I saw Pablo Picasso's "The Yellow Sweater". Later I noticed this with one of Claude Monet's water lily paintings: That was in 2004 in an exhibition of works from New York's Museum of Modern Art at Neue Nationalgalerie in Berlin. But contemporary art also has this effect from time to time; most recently it was a work by the Polish painter Andrzej Fogt that fascinated me.

Your work has been compared to that of artists like Cy Twombly and Francis Bacon. Do you find these comparisons meaningful, or do they sometimes restrict interpretation?

As the German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer once said: "What the heart resists, the head does not accept." I think many works by the two mentioned artists are outstanding. When art critics compare my oeuvre with that of Bacon and Twombly, I'm elated, of course.

Your work is known for being conceptually layered and visually complex. How do you balance these elements to engage and challenge viewers?

That's a tough question, and I've spent several years finding an answer to it. One day, I had the idea to write it on the backsides of my paintings. The thing is, however, that I couldn't reveal it all at once. Thus, on each of the backsides, I only wrote three words and one number. So, to solve the enigma, viewers would have to see as many as possible of my paintings, turn them around, and combine all the fragments. — But seriously, it's a secret recipe. Streng geheim!

The arpeggio painting technique you developed is unique in its layering of diluted oil paints. Could you elaborate on this process and its effect on your compositions?

Imagine an arpeggio chord: The notes sound immediately after the other, so they can be heard individually, but they still form a harmony. By using the arpeggio painting technique, in which the paint is applied in wafer-thin layers, one on top of the other, I can relate all colors and shapes of the painting to each other. As a result, they sound together – but each layer also has its own sound. The technique requires a high degree of precision and takes a lot of time. I sometimes spend several months on one painting. What's more, if I notice during the process that the layers of paint don't sound together as planned, I have to determine whether I can rework them so that I still obtain the desired result. However, this doesn't always succeed because overpainting might ruin the transparency.

How do you see the role of art in addressing urgent environmental and social concerns today?

Art offers one of the last remaining spaces for open, constructive dialog; almost all other areas of discourse - whether politics or the global economy - have so far failed to produce any viable solutions to urgent social and environmental problems. One of the reasons for this is the ever-increasing polarization and the power constellations cemented by it. In this respect, art opens a window in the wall beyond which our future lies. Those who look at works of art may therefore find a way to prepare themselves for what awaits us - or even take the initiative to shape the future in a positive way. It is important to note however that art does not have to do any of this; it does not have to fulfill a social mission per se. It can simply exist without being bound to a specific purpose.

You've exhibited in both physical and virtual spaces. How does audience interaction differ in these environments?

The physical space is still best, as there is less distance to the artwork. The exchange is more direct. However, I have found that more people can be reached online and the barrier to viewing an exhibition is less significant. I think a combination of both is ideal.

Do you think an artist's personal experiences should be central to their work, or should art transcend individual perspectives?

Great art goes beyond the individual state of mind of an artist. However, there may be aspects that are personal in nature. Nonetheless, a good artist should have the freedom not to reduce themselves to that. At least that's how I feel.

In recent years, you've received awards and exhibited internationally. How have these experiences influenced your artistic direction?

They empower me. Despite all the adversity in current events, I remain steadfast and always try to evolve, no matter what happens. I couldn't bear to fall into a rut. Cultural diversity is so enriching and I really enjoy making discoveries. In big and small ways.

Looking forward, what are your aspirations for the PortLand series, and are there other themes you're interested in exploring?

Currently, I am working on the fourth part of the PortLand cycle: "Seasons of PortLand". I think that the seasons can show how humankind and nature belong together. Many questions and observations from the present and the past contribute to it. Among other things, it is about recognizing contradictions and about something particularly important to me: reconciliation and consistency.

How do you view your art's impact on viewers? Do you hope to inspire reflection, action, or something entirely different?

First and foremost, I want viewers to be able to engage with the work openly and with curiosity. This is not a certainty from the outset, since, especially when it comes to abstract art, many details are not immediately visible. It's like a good sonata: it has a playing time, so you have to listen from beginning to end to understand the meaning of the piece. It works the same way with paintings: the experience is not complete at first glance; pictures are like stories that you first have to decipher. Ultimately, however, I have no control over what the viewers make of them.



Happiness Remains Included
Oil on canvas,
75x50cm, 2021



Stay Put With Happiness
Oil on canvas,
75x50cm, 2021