

The Paintbrush Artist[®] from Bamberg

Ralf Metzenmacher, ex-chief designer for Puma, takes the art world by storm with his Retro-Art

Creative fashion and music, new trends in art and lifestyle. We associate them with metropolises like London, New York, Paris or Berlin, but not the provinces – and certainly not Franconia. Or so you might think. However, it is widely known that every rule has an exception. And Ralf Metzenmacher is an exception to the rule in all kinds of ways. After over 12 years at Puma AG this independent artist from Bamberg/Germany has shaken up the art and lifestyle scene. Using his bright, provocative Retro-Art, the self-proclaimed Paintbrush Artist[®] is bringing still life painting technique a new momentum.

You have to be slightly crazy to come up with such a mad idea. After all, what normal person would put high heels onto sports shoes? As a designer, Ralf Metzenmacher gave full expression to his unbridled creativity and had a lot of fun at the same time. He unearthed old Puma products from the stockroom, jazzed them up and gave them a trendy bright coat of paint. And it was through this piquant “Retro-Design” that the very traditional business from Herzogenaurach/Germany transformed itself into a modern fashion and lifestyle enterprise. His small sporty handbags were another bestseller - an essential fashion accessory for any woman. It is hard to imagine any city picture without them. Already they have practically become a modern design classic.



Metzenmacher's successful creations resulted in a rapid rise through the ranks: he opened offices in Boston and London, presented new products around the world and eventually became part of Puma's inner planning circle. His job title took up 3 lines on his visitor's card: "Director of Footwear Europe & Accessories International".

So why did our director decide to tug the rip cord and bail out when he was at the peak of his career? This is a question that Ralf Metzenmacher is frequently asked: so frequently that he has even incorporated it on his homepage under the heading "FAQs". There you

will find his answer: “After 28 collections it gradually became boring and anyway I hate the idea of varying variations. Puma had reached the end of its invention-rich period and was simply carrying its success recipe over to other sports and reeling it out again. It was just about commerce. More profit. The people were hardly allowed to play a role anymore.”

Since 2004 he has been his own boss and no longer needs to concern himself with design obligations and marketing guidelines. As an independent freelance artist he does what he wants to do and what interests him personally. Originally from Aachen/Germany, he has now set up his headquarters in Bamberg/Germany on the attractive riverbank opposite little Venice. Here he wields his paintbrush in the style of the old masters, confronting art with design and combining tradition with lifestyle.

This Paintbrush Artist® from Bamberg who signs his paintings as “Ralli”, creates still-lives in a very modern form. He wants to revitalize the classical still-lives that today seem somewhat boring and respectable; to give them a contemporary feel whilst at the same time taking pop art one step further. At first glance his simple Retro-Art is cheeky, decorative and entertaining but above all it is a riot of colour.

On visiting Ralf Metzenmacher at work in his studio on the Regnitz river, one is immediately immersed in a unique strident world of the senses. A fragrant cloud of fresh paint and espresso assails the nasal passages, vibrant paintings blind the eyes and rock music penetrates the ear drums. Whilst Ralli does paint still-lives, silence and a lack of movement have nothing to do with his art. When he is painting, he selects appropriate background music according to the mood, subject and atmosphere, enjoying the audiovisual dialogue between the two complementary media. Alongside the inspiring music, the 43 year old gets much of his creativity from his own experiences; personal highs and lows. With his intricate painting technique he needs about 3 months to finish one painting, although he tends to work on several projects at the same time.

The frontier runner between art and design knows how to provoke with his painted stories. The picture cycle “The Crowning of Creation” consists of 22 paintings and focuses on the female gender. Metzenmacher comments: “My paintings with their beautiful colours and feminine forms offer my own view of feminine egoism and the presentation of women in our society.” And what do his women of today look like? He combines well-known, classic feminine attributes with new contemporary ideas: so snails with tattoos, mussels with piercing and plump melons with miniature ‘Batman’ are all presented. The picture titles are no less challenging, including “The Cherry Rose”, “The Melon Princess” and “Shame on You”.



In the “Lord of the Crown” cycle he considers the stronger sex. At the start he asked himself the question “How do I paint men without actually depicting men?” His answer concentrates on luxury sports cars and other masculine symbols. These indispensable status symbols of power and masculinity are embellished with tattoos or given an unusual snakeskin texture. However a souped-up 12-cylinder three-wheeler has also found its way onto canvas, symbolising the child in the man. Further motifs include a glowing cigar with penis ring and a hanging punch bag with protective air cushion.



Metzenmacher calls his hand-painted oil paintings “master tapes”, rather as musicians refer to their final studio recordings. These are not for sale because of their rarity. However as an appreciator of art and lifestyle it is still possible to hang a “Ralli” over your sofa. He has brought out his pictures in two different collections called the “rallipan®” and “edition” collections. High quality prints of the “Mastertapes” are available in different sizes and colour variations, complete with especially designed frames. He plans to take the art and lifestyle world by storm from quiet, contemplative Bamberg, up until now known mainly for its beer and its “butter-soft croissants”. In Autumn this energetic painter will bring out his first jewellery collection and he still has plans to dazzle the reticent Swiss with his luminous still-lifes before the year is out.

Is Metzenmacher a 21st century Warhol? Who knows? Perhaps he will also be able to revitalize sleepy Bamberg and transform it into a town that never sleeps: strident, lively and full of energy – just like his modern Retro-Art.

