

Interview

**Renée Phillips, Director of Manhattan Arts International New York
interviewed Elke Daemmrich, July 15, 2013**

Bold, Light-Filled Paintings and Engravings



Elke Daemmrich is one of the most accomplished artists I know. As an award-winning artist she has had more than 75 solo exhibitions, including several in museums in Europe and the United States. Her life as an artist seems to come right out of a romantic art history book. Born in Dresden, East Germany, she moved to the southwest of France, near Toulouse in 1994. She bought a medieval house, the birthplace of an archbishop of Albi, where she lives and works today.

She works tirelessly creating art and taking care of her professional responsibilities. In between traveling throughout Europe which preoccupies her busy exhibition schedule she found time to answer a few questions. I am delighted to share information about this fascinating and celebrated artist.

RP: Elke, when did you first become interested in art and why?

ED: Born in Dresden in East Germany the art museums in my hometown made a big impression on me. I think it was very good for me to see original art in my early years, since I remember painting and drawing as a child.



Self-Portrait with Pomegranate, oil on canvas, 51" x 43".

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RP: What event or experience has had the greatest impact on your artistic direction?

ED: In 1993 I was awarded a grant from the foundation Kulturfonds Berlin for my project "The Light of the South", which gave me the opportunity to work 6 months in Lacoste, Provence, in the south of France. That changed my art radically. I became fascinated with landscapes, light and energy. The conditions of life, nature and culture of the Mediterranean Region became and remain the most important subjects in my art.

RP: Elke, I'm fascinated by how you go back and forth between creating large oil paintings on canvas and engravings. Could you tell us what current art work or art project you are working on?

ED: At the moment I am preparing a solo exhibition for the Gallery of Contemporary Art in the Palais Bénédictine in Fecamp, in Normandie, from October 5th, 2013 to January 5th, 2014. I am painting a series of new botanical paintings for the exhibition. The goal is to use white like color. In the winter, when I will be in Germany, I will continue making new etchings. I have lots of ideas.



Sunflowers, oil on canvas, 45" x 41".

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RP: The upcoming solo exhibition sounds fantastic. And, I look forward to seeing your newest art work. You've had so many important exhibitions. Is there one or more in particular that stands out in your memory?

ED: My solo exhibition in the Goya Museum in Castres, a french National Museum, in 1999. And recently my solo show in the Museum Junge Kunst Frankfurt/Oder, Germany, from November 2012 to January 2013. I have never seen my artwork exhibited better. It was an excellent professional work with excellent co-operation from the Director, Dr. Brigitte Rieger-Jähner. We also had lots of fun working together.

RP: Who has been your greatest motivator and/or cheerleader for your career and why?

ED: There were many people who inspired me. First, I think of Jean-Louis Augé, Director of the Goya Museum in Castres, who asked me to do a series of etchings in 1996. That lead me to my first copper engravings. Second, I think about New York where I went in September, 1999. There I found the print version of *Manhattan Arts International* magazine (September-October 1999). I have it in my hands as I write this commentary. In it I found the announcement for your book "Success NOW! For Artists" and I bought it. Your advice helped me to accomplish my most important professional goal. I think also on my art collectors in Ottawa, Canada, Nicole and Charles Jeffrey, who pushed and motivated me all the time.



Invasion, etching on zinc, 16" x 20".

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RP: Elke, thank you. I am so honored to know that my book "Success NOW! For Artists" played a role in your career that way. I am very grateful that we have remained connected across the globe all these years. Your career has grown in leaps and bounds. May I ask, how do you define success for yourself as an artist?

ED: I'm very happy to do what I do. Success for me is when my art goes it's own way; when things happen for my art spontaneously without somebody playing a role which opens the door; when things happen like the following example: To become a member of the Fondation Taylor in Paris, usually you need to have two mentors. The committee accepted me and my art without this condition.

RP: Congratulations! Do you have any artist role models and if so, what have they taught you?

ED: Of course I am attracted by the work of Georgia O'Keefe, Frida Kahlo and Louise Bourgeois. But for a longtime I have been fascinated by the work of Max Ernst. The way he constructs/makes his art, his new technical skills, to learn his art from his life experiences, his thirst for installations in new environments. (I know Seillan in France very well). And last his charisma is extraordinary. He taught me that change can be very productive. Living in different places can have a big impact on creation.



The Swimmer, oil on canvas, 53" x 71".

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RP: Elke, please tell us about your upcoming exhibitions.

ED: I am very happy because I have 5 solo exhibitions scheduled during the next 12 months (the titles have yet to be determined), namely:

- 1.) October 5th to January 5th, 2014 in the Gallery of Contemporary Art in the Palais Bénédictine in Fecamp, in Normandie, France - a very nice exhibition space of more than 200 m²;
- 2.) January 24th to March 29th, 2014 in the Gallery am blauen Wunder, Dresden;
- 3.) February 5th to March 12th, 2014 in the Gallery 100 in Berlin;
- 4.) April 6th to July 13th, 2014, a solo exhibition showing my copper engravings in the Museum Otto Schäfer Schweinfurt combined with, at the same time;
- 5.) a solo exhibition showing my paintings in the Gallery of the Kunstverein Schweinfurt, Germany.



Bees, copper engraving, 12" x 16". This piece won an Award of Excellence Award and a Jill Conner's Critic's Choice Award in the 2013 Manhattan Arts International "Celebrate The Healing Power of ART" juried competition.

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RP: Looking at the rich movement and complexity of both your paintings and your engravings makes me wonder if you have any favorite music to listen to while you create?

ED: In my studio in France I often work with the window wide open. So while I'm working I can hear the cries of the swifts which live in the walls of my house and the songs of cicadas and crickets. When the window is closed colors also can be music. When I'm traveling in my car I listen to different kinds of music, very eclectic: from The Beatles to Frank Zappa and from Beethoven to Schostakovitsch.

RP: Now I understand what might have inspired the magnificent engraving titled "Bees" (shown above) which won two Manhattan Arts International awards. What advice can you offer a first time art buyer?

ED: I think that the important question is: "Can I live a long time with this artwork" ? Some of my collectors have my art in their bedrooms, waking each day with it. They tell me that with time they discover new things in it.....



RP: Why do you believe it is important to live with original art?

ED: It is important to buy original artwork because it is for the whole of your life. It isn't a car or a kitchen...that has a limited life. In original artwork the individual can find himself and grow with it during his/her lifetime.

RP: What is the greatest challenge you have overcome during your career?

ED: For 11 years I have lived only from selling my artwork and from the fees I receive from Galleries for exhibiting my work. That was my greatest challenge.

RP: Elke, how do you manage your time to be most productive and nourish your creativity?

ED: Normally there is always a time for creating art and after for making exhibitions or making contacts, which includes traveling. At times it's funny, like being in a big kitchen, mixing all things together: painting, responding to e-mails, writing contracts for the next projects, writing this interview...

About what nourishes my creativity...Going into nature is for me the most important thing. I like to go on the littorals on the Mediterranean coast. Or simply going into my garden in Tournecoupe to have a look at the plants and insects..... Sometimes political events have an impact on my paintings, like September 11th, 2001 or Fukushima and the accident of the Costa Concordia on my etchings.

RP: You have achieved so success in a competitive field. That can only be achieved as a result of your talent and efforts. What advice do you offer to an emerging artist ?

ED: I would like to answer with a citation from Laurie Notaro: "If you really believe in what you're doing, work hard, take nothing personally and if something blocks one route, find another. Never give up."