

I got interested in painting when I was a teenager, but I knew little about contemporary art and I was eager to discover as many contemporary artists as possible. In Ennepetal, the town where I grew up, artists were considered hobbyists and in school we mainly focused on the Renaissance and Pop Art. There was one established artist, the well-known Informel painter Emil Schumacher, who hailed from Hagen, a nearby town. I wrote Schumacher a letter with high hopes of meeting him, but I didn't get a reply.

One day our high school art class took a trip to Museum Ludwig in Cologne where I saw two colorful paintings with bold brushwork and lots of painted figures. There was a theatre and an audience, but the viewpoint was from behind the stage. You could see the action as if you'd been given a backstage pass and further back you saw the audience too. It was a full house. The paintings were titled "Lehmbruck Saga" and "Lehmbruck Saga II" (both executed in 1987). The signature on both canvasses read "Immendorff." That was an unfamiliar name to me at the time.

A few months later, I came upon a copy of the late fashion and lifestyle magazine, Max. To my surprise, the magazine featured a full-page reproduction of a watercolor by Immendorff. The watercolor was a sketch for Immendorff's stage and costume design for Stravinsky's play, "The Rake's Progress" (Salzburger Festspiele 1994). The protagonist, Tom Rakewell, is a rich kid who moves to London and befriends the devil. He ends up losing everything including his mind. Of course, I was delighted!

My grandaunt gave me a catalogue of Immendorff's work ("Immendorff - Malerei 1993-1990," Galerie der Stadt Esslingen and Museum Moderner Kunst Wien, 1991) for my 18th birthday. Both "Lehmbruck Saga" paintings were featured in the book. In 1995, I enrolled as a student at Kunstakademie Düsseldorf. By then, I'd learned more about Immendorff and I knew he was a professor at Städelschule in Frankfurt. Halfway through my first year, word got around that Immendorff would soon be teaching at Kunstakademie Düsseldorf.

At the time, I was trying to figure out the basics of oil painting. I was also making lots of self-portrait drawings in sketchbooks. One day Immendorff came to take a look at the work of potential future students. He ignored my paintings and mumbled something about the drawings that I couldn't catch. I do remember that he said he liked the sketchbooks and he urged me to continue working.

Despite Immendorff's "encouragement," he didn't ask me to be in his class. He only said "Geh mal davon aus, dass das klappt (Just assume it's going to work out)." I feared I was not talented enough, but I'd see him around and I kept on pressing to be in his class. He said he wanted to see more of

my work before making a decision. In my frustration, I made a quick painting of a solitary figure in a landscape with two empty bottles circling around the head. Across the canvas, I wrote with white paint, “Kein Arsch Weidet Mich Auf Grüner Aue (Not One Asshole Makes Me Lie Down In Pastures Green)”. A few months later, Immendorff came to my studio. The face of this particular painting was turned to the wall so he wouldn’t notice it, but, of course, he asked to see it. We both looked on in silence and then he said, “I can’t make out the writing.” I read the text aloud. Immendorff smirked and then he said, “You’re in.”

In 1997, I got promoted to be Immendorff’s “tutor.” This is an official position at German art schools. It comes with a small salary and it means that the student is an assistant to the professor. It was my job to handle the communications between Immendorff and his class. This involved giving him a call at his studio to find out the date and time for each tutorial. Because Immendorff was a famous artist, there was no shortage of students wanting to meet him. Almost on a daily basis, there would be a knock on the studio door followed by a student poking their head in asking, “When’s Immendorff coming?”

I grew tired of answering the same question over and over again so I decided to simplify the process. Immendorff let me know when he was coming and then I’d paint the date and time on a small canvas and then I’d hang it right above the main studio door for all to see. Every painting featured a little box so Immendorff could tick them off after each tutorial. When I told Immendorff that I wanted him to tick a painting, he would ask me to hand him a brush and some paint and he would tick each painted box. Then he asked for a pencil so he could sign

each painting on the back. At the time, I didn’t understand why he felt like he should sign them. Later, I realized that he saw these paintings as collaborative works. We created nine paintings together. I told Immendorff that we could end the project with the end of the term, but he said no and suggested we continue. So, I prepared a painting for the beginning of the next term, but when class started up, he forgot to tick it. And so, I decided it was meant to be the last one.

In 2000, Albert Oehlen started teaching in Düsseldorf and I decided that I wanted to study with him. Oehlen agreed to accept me, but he said I must visit Immendorff and break the news to him myself. With classes headed by one famous artist, the idea of a student switching to another mentor was seen by some as an act of disloyalty. I admired Immendorff as an artist and I was also fond of him on a personal level, but I also felt it was time to move on. Knowing Immendorff was in town, I decided to cycle over to his studio straight away. He seemed pleased to see me and tried engaging me in a conversation about future plans with the class, but I just blurted out, “I will study with

Albert Oehlen from now on, I'm not coming back." He looked at me and told me that Albert was a good friend and that he was sure I would learn some new tricks. I left feeling sad and confused.

During the next two years, Immendorff and I would occasionally pass one another at school, but I never found a good moment to talk to him. When I heard he was seriously ill (Immendorff was diagnosed with ALS in 1998), I called him a couple of times asking to visit, but he refused. In 2007, he passed away at the age of 61.

I am still a great fan of Immendorff's work, especially the LIDL paintings and performances from the sixties and seventies. In 2017, some of these paintings were on display at Michael Werner Gallery in New York. Works that I had only ever known as black and white reproductions in books like the turtle paintings "Botschafter über Gras" (1968) and the cutout dog. There is an amazing energy in his work, an innocence and recklessness at the same time that I am in awe of. Studying with Immendorff was an exceptional experience. As an artist, it's important to re-access the past, taking a look at old ideas and older works that might inspire new work. For this show at Freddy, I pulled out the little collaborative paintings from storage and had them documented properly for the first time. Looking at them, I remember just how much I was struggling with painting, but I know I was also happy as a clam at high tide. I'm so grateful that Immendorff showed sympathy for my struggles. This exhibition is a tribute to our time together.

*–Cornelius Quabeck, 2019*

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