

THE CAPTIVATING ARTWORK OF IRENE HOFF

By Rachel Love

UP UNTIL A FEW YEARS AGO, ART WAS JUST A HOBBY FOR IRENE HOFF; THESE DAYS SHE CAN BARELY KEEP UP WITH THE COMMISSIONED ORDERS FOR HER INSPIRING PAINTINGS.

It all began eight years ago when Irene Hoff was working in product design and living in Vietnam. Inspired by the work by a Dutch artist, “I liked his style,” explains Irene, “but not his subject matter,” she decided to create an artwork of her own, transforming the painted collage pop art idea into a theme about her young daughter. “Then, two years later, when my next daughter was born, I created a second painting.” People saw and liked Irene’s paintings and started commissioning work about their own lives and the places in which they were living. She continues, “I was then asked to produce one with a Vietnam theme for an orphanage charity auction on the occasion of the Netherlands Queen’s Day, and to my amazement it reached a price that I could never have imagined anyone would pay for my art.”



The artist hangs one of her paintings.

Irene still had a full time job but she was experiencing a major shift in her life, which “motivated me to grab the moment of change,” and make the decision to work fulltime as an artist. “It was quite a risk,” she adds. Having lived and worked across Southeast Asia in Jakarta, Hong Kong and Ho Chi Minh City, she felt she was ready to move to Bali. “I’d been having a love affair with the island for a long time. Bali is so inspirational, creative and mystical, the perfect combination; for me it stands for freedom and now I was free to move there for the long-term.”



Above: This painting incorporates shifting energy to create its own awareness to bring about wishful change.

Left: How far do you have to travel from East to meet West? The answer is that you're already there.



These days Dutch-born Irene’s studio is a wooden joglo beside a fishpond in Bali’s rice fields, and her art is full of messages, each of which she maintains is just an opinion, “It doesn’t have to be wrong or right.” Yet although she’s not looking to incite a reaction, her work has an instant impact. Her bold urban style introduces nostalgic fun and futurism often inspired by comic books. Her vibrantly coloured paintings blend snippets, snaps, images and layers of modern and traditional cultures to reveal glimpses and vignettes of life. Visual elements include pictures, cartoons, symbols, signs and text; hand painted in a mixed media of acrylic and printed background paper similar to wallpaper. The artist loves to work with stencils, spray paint and pencils, together with subtle lace fabrics to create texture.

THE PAINTINGS MAKE US WONDER WHAT IS REAL AND WHAT ISN'T, WHILE CHALLENGING US TO PULL IT INTO OUR OWN EXISTENCE.

Right: 'Universe'
from the Heroic Pop
Art series.

Below: 'Sunny Rain'
from the World of
Weast series.

In each of the paintings in her three most recent series – 'The World of Weast (WoW)', 'Reformation', and 'Heroic' – Irene invites us to take a walk through a mystical world that often only exists in our imagination – a place where folks can escape from the ordinary. "It's about believing that you can achieve anything you desire," reveals Irene. "I want to inspire people to believe in their dreams, give them a happy moment, pull them into a fantasy world and improve the quality of their lives. I'd like viewers to use my art as a tool, a trigger, and have it manifest in their real lives." This is especially applicable to the 'World of Weast' series, which is all about integrating the best parts of all there is, seen and unseen, and turning it into a world that transcends reality and fiction. The paintings make us wonder what is real and what isn't, while challenging us to pull it into our own existence. 'Reformation', meanwhile incorporates shifting energy, creating self-awareness and being able to make wishful change. Finally, the 'Heroic' series challenges us to awaken our inner child and reconnect with the playfulness and creative energy that keeps us young. The signature



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vintage ‘Playmobil’ toy that appears in each of the paintings in this series is an invitation to revisit sentimental childhood memories of endless play within an imaginary world.

Other characters that appear and reappear in Irene’s paintings are a succession of little creatures or monsters, similar to what we might find in a video game. Irene explains, “These are the little voices in our heads that talk to us all day, representing other people’s opinions, views and input which, if we are not careful, can destroy our dreams.” In fact, there is a profusion of intricate detail in each picture including some ingenious surprises that often leave the viewer with a feeling of wonder, mystery or joy. “I’m self-taught,” says Irene, “it comes from my heart, I didn’t learn this at school, it keeps me close to who I am.”



Above: The Heroic series showcases the signature ‘Playmobil’.

Below: Irene’s Reformation series depicts women’s faces from West & East, past, present & future, reality & fantasy.

Since 2010, Irene’s work has been presented at various solo and group exhibitions in Indonesia, Vietnam, Malaysia, Singapore and Holland. In Bali, she has had a presence at Ku De Ta for the last year, and her work has also been shown as Metis, Taksu, and Vin+. A private collection of her work is on display at LUNA2 Studios, Bali –which she created by working closely with owner and friend Melanie Hall, while a forthcoming solo exhibition is targeted for March/April at Four Seasons, Jakarta. **FRV**

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