



The fine **LINE**

Don't draw on the walls! It's one of the lines most **budding artists** hear at the start of their creative journey - somewhere between the ages of three and five. In *ANNE MEI POPPE'S* case, throwing all caution - and concern for freshly painted walls- to the wind sparked an **unexpected**, successful career.

Text Isabelle Vander Heyde - Photography Ara Schrijvers

It all started when the Dutch painter decided to pimp the walls of her new house with an artwork in 2018. The result sparked her friends' enthusiasm, encouraging her to bring her art out into the open, which stirred strangers' interest, and the rest was history. It's not uncommon to spot the artist carrying one of her enormous canvasses over the canals of her hometown Amsterdam, trailed by a toddler and a ragged brown dog. We caught up with her colourful trail and managed to get a little glimpse into her universe:

MOMENTS: *You are known for your sensual depictions, mostly of women. Is there a central theme to your work?*

ANNE MEI POPPE: Certainly: my paintings are all about mirroring how we connect with and depend on everything surrounding us. I have always loved drawing, but I really started getting into it when I was pregnant for the first time. Having kids made me feel a love I had never known before; I became aware of this crazy, unbreakable link between people and wanted to research it more profoundly. So far for my own vision; in time I've realised that everyone interprets my work in their own way. The other day, a client said one of my paintings looked like a giant orgy, whereas I had made it with the dynamics of a large group of friends in mind. People see works of art through the lens of their own lives and feelings, which is okay. It is what makes art so very universal and recognisable.

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MO: *How does it look and sound like when you're painting?*

AMP: I like listening to podcasts and music while I work, so my mind is occupied, and my feelings can take over the creative part. Until recently, I combined my art career with a daytime job. Hence, I painted after office hours, still in formal wear: I would always think I'll only work for a minute or two, not worth changing into other clothes for, and that I would not get dirty. The truth is, I ruined a lot of good clothes in my life... haha. There's paint on everything I own! Now that it's my full-time job, I'm more careful to wear painting clothes: loose jeans and bare feet to avoid ruining my shoes and socks. But still: I can't help but paint in cute outfits. You'll also spot the dog and kids in my studio more oft than not. They're part of the furniture and sometimes even of my creative process. When they were newborns, I could paint for hours with them nestled against my chest in a baby carrier. We visited the Picasso Museum in Paris recently and saw the little paper dolls Picasso used to make to keep his daughter Maia. My Lucy, four, loved it and does the same now: as I paint, she sits next to me, crafting figurines of herself and the dog.

"We're not restricted by THE FACT that we have kids but create a new dynamic with them instead."

MO: *And despite all these distractions, do you find the right state of mind to make your art?*

AMP: For sure! Being creative means being fully aware of yourself and the feelings you experience in one particular moment. It needs a high level of awareness, and I experience art as a strong channel to achieve that. Art is like a snapshot of your inner state; you shouldn't shy away from it. I never know beforehand which colours or shapes I will use. Usually, I start working with a rough idea of the composition. It's an intuitive process, and it takes time and trust. You'd be surprised by what comes up when your subconscious takes the lead. Unbeknownst, I make a lot of autobiographical stuff. I painted two intertwined women once, one red and one blue, and called it Roots. They were like two sisters. When my mother saw it, she was flabbergasted and told me she's always associated me with blue and my little sister with red. I truly believe in the channelling power of art and how it communicates what goes on in someone's heart.

MO: *You have an interesting theory on boredom too.*

AMP: *Haha*, I do. My mother is an art historian and used to drag me to various museums. She could stare for a long time at one painting, to the point where I got so bored I had to find my own distractions. That's why I always carried around a sketchbook and pencils. We were at MOMA in New York when I was ten, and I wandered into a nude exhibition. After an hour or so, I surprised my mom with a detailed



drawing of that exhibition room; only I had drawn the visitors in their birthday suits too! She laughed so hard at that. It proves that boredom creates space for creativity, even if we're all so absurdly afraid of it. I try to do the same things with my children. I'm not the kind of mother who spends all her time at playgrounds. Instead, I involve my kids in the stuff I enjoy doing. They accompany me to the museum; my daughter loves it, spending half an hour on her belly, drawing whatever tickles her imagination. When she starts drawing, she is very focused and only wants to leave when she considers her artwork done. It's a funny sight. We took a little family trip to Paris a few months ago, strolling around and visiting places like Centre Pompidou. It typifies my husband and I: we're not restricted by the fact that we have kids but create a new dynamic with them instead.

MO: *You mentioned the children sometimes become part of the creative process?*

AMP: Up until now, I have worked at home; my son is two years old, and my daughter is four. Lucy mimics me, it is daily fare for her to paint alongside me. I encourage her in whatever she does, but also open my world to her: she's allowed to paint some of my sublayers occasionally, or I help her find the right composition for her painting. She's at that age where we can create something together: a melting pot of our respective fantasy worlds and inspirations. Sometimes, she inspires me: the other day, she drew an exaggerated, long vase holding two flowers. I thought it looked cool and did the same in my painting. It's inspiring that she's boundless and can effortlessly tap into her imagination, coming up with some surprising things. My son just points at paintings and says "Mommie". For now...

MO: *I have to ask: don't you ever get bored with your work, especially since you keep using the same theme?*

AMP: Good question, but no: I keep reinventing myself within the same theme through different techniques. As an artist, the feeling of 'I can do this now; let's move on to the next thing' is always looming around the corner. And it's time to switch to a new practice whenever it comes knocking. I had this phase where I drew one line only for different figures. Everything kind of flowed into the next thing, making it unclear which body part belonged to whom anymore -turning all my connected characters into one being. But then I realised I had to let go of this thing. It was hard, as I had to figure out how to keep it abstract whilst changing techniques altogether. In the end, I called it quits. For a while, I made way more realistic paintings, with everybody's body parts neatly in place, which allowed me to disconnect from my work and consider it with a fresh pair of eyes. And just like with boredom, this made room for new ideas to grow, such as the overlapping of my characters. So there you have it: same old theme, new style. I find this whole reinvention exercise fascinating. And now, I am letting go of that theme again, creating space for the new.

To be continued!