

Moje Menhardt

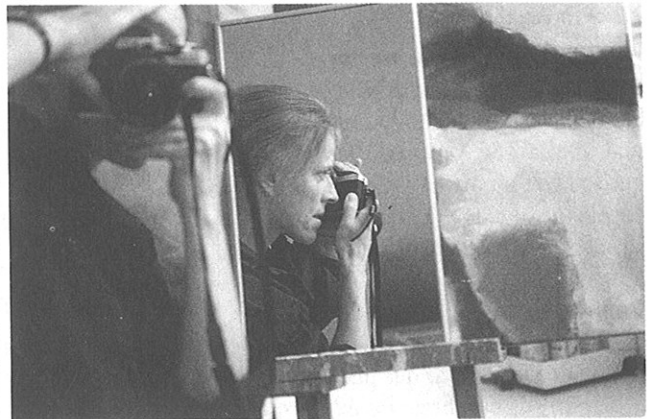
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VRL: When did you start painting?

MM: As a child, doing watercolours guided by my Mother. When I was eleven, some of my fairytale paintings were chosen for an exhibition of grown-up painters in Zams/Landeck, Tyrol. That was very important for me. When I was thirteen, I won a first prize with my painting.....it was a bicycle.

VRL: You studied law - what motivated you to become an artist?

MM: I studied law because I was working at an Austrian Embassy and I wanted to improve my career possibilities in the Diplomatic Service. Later on, I found law rather interesting, especially history of law: Roman and Old German Law were nowhere as dry as I had originally thought. Drawing and painting were always important in my life, but not as a profession, they were more of a pleasure. Maybe I thought, drawing was fun, not work, and did not dare to hope for work that could be fun.....



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VRL: Who or what most influenced you?

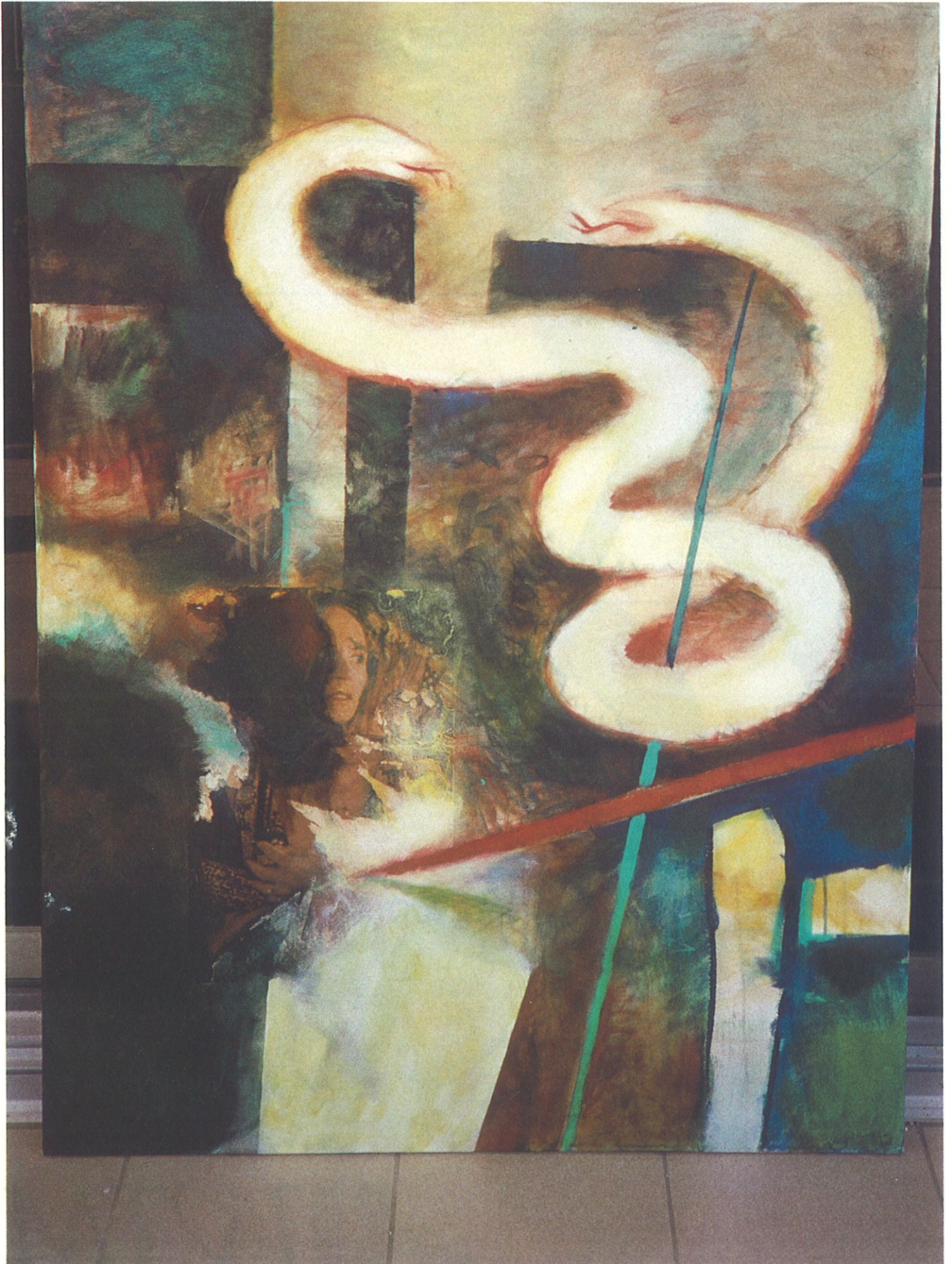
MM: There are such a lot of influences, so many things I see, so many paintings and buildings and landscapes and people.....I think that my subconscious stores it all and some of it turns up in my paintings.

VRL: You are a very well-read and articulate woman - I know you speak six languages - has literature influenced your art at all?

MM: Yes, a lot. During a time of figurative painting I remember trying to represent Holderlin's Diotima and Karl Musil's Diotima in one. (It cannot be done: for me, they are totally different...)

My new project is *Seres Imaginarios* by Jorge Luis Borges, the doctus poeta with a playful mind. I started with *A Bao A Qu*, *Abtu y Anet*, *La Anfisbena*, *Un Animal Sonado Por Kafka*, *El Ave Fenix*, *El Cancerbero* etc., but I am sure that Borges has included some animal of his own invention and maybe when I am really involved in painting them all, some very new animal will emerge on my canvas...

Another project is *Identidade*, inspired by Fernando Pessoa, a Portuguese author who also wrote in English. However, he would publish using eight different names, one pseudonym sometimes writing the introduction for "this new and interesting writer."





MOJE MENHARD

By VICTORIA RYAN LOBO

Moje Menhardt, who frequently visits her sister in Key Biscayne, is a renowned Austrian painter currently living and working in Vienna after years of living abroad in such diverse cities as Buenos Aires, Rio de Janeiro, Munich, Hamburg, Cologne and Eindhoven, Holland.

The daughter and grand-daughter of artists, Moje literally grew up with a "pencil" in her hand, even though she studied law in Vienna after college, getting married before completing her studies. Her urge to draw or paint may not have been very strong in that period of her life, but when her four children were at school, she began studying at the Koninklijke Akademie voor Kunst en Vormgeving in s'Hertogenbosch, Holland, finishing with a Diploma at the Akademie der Bildenden Künste in Vienna. A series of exhibitions in Spain launched her career, quickly followed by others in different countries.

"Apparently it is not enough to paint for yourself in your study. The paintings must be hung, at an exhibition, in an office or in a collector's home. Then suddenly, they look different, acquiring a new life in those other surroundings and stimulating the artist to go back into her study to answer with new paintings."

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VRL: To what do you attribute your fascination with Latin American literature and culture?

MM: When I was living in Buenos Aires and Rio de Janeiro, I had a wonderful time. I went back to Europe via Peru, Columbia, Mexico City and Cuba (I am reading Alejo Carpentier right now, finished Cabrera Infante and from time to time take up *Paradiso* by Lezama Lima again) and saw a lot I found beautiful and very interesting and full of a life that sometimes makes Europe look pale and quiet. So I started reading Latin American literature to try to understand and, sometimes, travel there in my mind. Every time I went to Spain for exhibitions I bought books, and every time I go to Brazil I buy Brazilian or Portuguese books.

VRL: Your style seems to have become less abstract, more figurative in recent years, any comment?

MM: Maybe because the projects seem to ask for a more figurative approach. But even when I did more abstract paintings, I continued doing figurative drawings of the flamenco, Brazilian or Buto dancers, as well as the portraits of Sir Charles Popper. I do not feel that there is a conscious decision to paint in the figurative or abstract manner. I try to compose, whether it is figurative or abstract is not so important to me.

VRL: Why do you think that you have become one of the better known Austrian Artists internationally?

MM: Have I? I do not really know, but I did have a lot of exhibitions in a number of countries: Spain, Brazil, Holland, France, Belgium, Germany, Japan, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Switzerland, Austria and New York City. It was wonderful: discussions, interviews, meeting a lot of interesting and interested people. Every time I returned to my studio with new ideas.

VRL: I understand that you have a great affinity for music and that you paint inspired by music.

MM: When I went to school, I used to go to the Opera in Vienna very ofte. When my mother thought it was too much, she refused to give me money for the tramway. So I walked an hour to the Opera. The music for *Pictures at an Exhibition* by Modest Mussorgsky was inspired by paintings of Viktor Hartmann, a German-Russian painter. I decided to do new paintings, listening to the music without having seen Hartmann's work.

The young Austrian composer Michael Hennig saw my paintings and wrote something new: *Music for an Exhibition*. The exhibition with this new music opened in Vienna in 1990, was shown in

Sta. Catarina, Brazil, Prague, Pecs and Budapest and will go to Istanbul and other places in Turkey next year. The dance drawings evoke music and rhythm.

VRL: Is there anything you would especially like to do now?

MM: There are a few projects...

