

My Story: Life as a Professional Artist

After I'd finished my studies, art contacts and exhibitions gradually built up in Berlin and in the UK. Getting to know a Berlin woman artist/gallerist, Inge Husemann, in the early days was a breakthrough as we teamed up with an Italian artist, Carla Fioravanti, which led to a European collaboration. Between 1988 and 1990 we had exhibitions in the European Culture Capitals of West Berlin, Florence and Glasgow. The West Berlin exhibition took place in the renowned gallery *Haus am Lützowplatz* and received significant press reviews. It was a successful exhibition for me personally because I met someone who became a major, long term collector of my artwork.

In 1989 -1990 in Scotland, an important exhibition in which I was included was *Scottish Art since 1900* shown at the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, Edinburgh and also at the Barbican Art Gallery, London.

However it was a group exhibition *New Talent/Four Person Show* in 1988, in the then well-known 369 Gallery in Edinburgh, Scotland, that afforded me a valuable contact and a stepping stone to a London gallery. The art critic Mary Rose Beaumont wrote a newspaper review at the time and singled me out for a very positive mention. Lady Mary Rose Beaumont, Baroness Beaumont of Whitley (to give her her formal title), was one of the leading art critics of the time in London.

I knew how important it was to show my work in London and on the basis of her article I contacted her. I asked if she could give me some guidance about which galleries I might approach when I visited London. She immediately agreed to meet me and we had a long chat. She saw similarities in my work with the Italian artist Mimmo Paladino whom I admired and she suggested several galleries to which I could introduce my work.

Her advice was invaluable: when I mentioned her recommendation on visits to prospective galleries I was not immediately shown the door! However in general most galleries do not need new artists and cold calling is often fruitless. But when I came to her third suggestion, a relatively new gallery, the Vanessa Devereux Gallery (Vanessa Branson), I felt immediately well. I was taken into Vanessa's office where she had a small baby on one knee and was holding a phone as she finished a conversation.

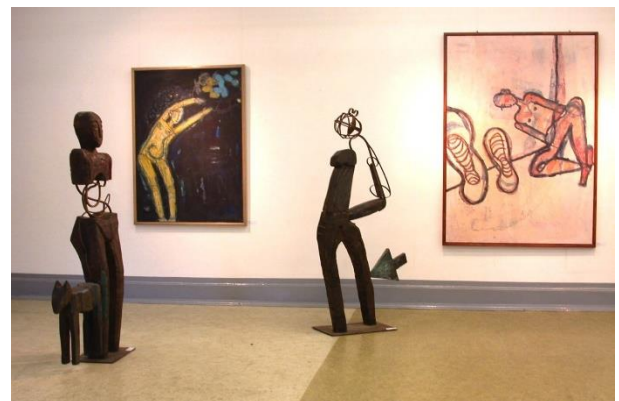


I explained who I was, that Lady Mary Rose Beaumont had suggested her gallery to me and that I'd just returned from study with Georg Baselitz in Berlin. 'Well' she retorted 'You got your two names out; you'd better sit down and show me photos of your work!' I immediately liked her directness and that was the start of a successful 5 year gallery relationship in

London and a friendship which endures to this day.

When Vanessa closed her gallery I then had the opportunity to show my work with Art First and became one of their artists. At that time it was in Cork Street, the most important gallery street in London. Subsequently the gallery moved and I still have a good rapport with the Art First director.

Working and living time fell into a routine split between Berlin, exhibitions in London and family in Scotland, with my two children regularly in Berlin. Together with my German husband who helped with the technical side of art work we travelled together to exhibitions around Europe. I enjoyed these trips, different places, languages and people, meeting other artists and subsequently coming together with some of them in art projects.



Soon after the Fall of the Wall as the two Germanies were coming together, I was one of the first West artists to exhibit in the former GDR. I was very curious but many west Berliners were apprehensive, harbouring the fear that the Wall might just as quickly go up again! I had exhibitions in Halberstadt, Dresden and Görlitz in East Germany and still have contact with friends whom I met there. I was warmly welcomed as a Scot and people

wanted to tell me stories about their life. I believe I was made more welcome than what might have been extended to West German artists. There was still distrust and a feeling that *Wessies* (as the West Germans were called) tended to be arrogant towards the *Ossies* (East Germans). It was said that the Wall still existed in the minds of many.

In Berlin from 1993-1995 I was offered a Stipend from the Karl Hofer Society, affiliated to the Hochschule der Künste. It involved an Atelier for two years and support on the way to being a professional artist including a final exhibition. The Society was an invaluable contact and led, in 1997, to their invitation to a working residency for three months in a Finnish art school in the Swedish speaking minority part of the country near Vaasa. Together with two other ex-Hofer-Stipendiaten we were provided with Ateliers and apart from making our own artwork we organised a project with the final year Finnish students culminating in an exhibition. It was very successful with the public and covered by the media. At the end of the residency we had a three person exhibition in the Museum of Modern Art, Vaasa, as well as in the Goethe Institute in Helsinki.

In Berlin I lived in the area of Charlottenburg where I could participate in exhibitions organized by the Charlottenburg Art Association including in Villa Oppenheim and in the 'Orangery' at Schloss Charlottenburg. In Europe I certainly had the feeling that the professional artist was taken seriously, had a status, more so than in the United Kingdom.

I joined the major artist union, the BBK, Bundesverband Bildender Künstlern (Federal Association of Visual Artists). As time went on there were private gallery exhibitions, solo shows, inclusion in group exhibitions and collaborative projects with other artists.

During the nineties my studio was in the newly opened East, near Potsdam. It was a former military camp built by the Nazis, subsequently used by the Russians and then the DDR (East German) National People's Army. In 1990 after the Fall of the Wall it was abandoned by the military.



My studio in the Panzerhalle

Initially several artists I knew discovered and used the huge Panzerhalle (where military tanks had been repaired) to hang and photograph their artworks with use of a moving roof crane. I joined the group in 1995 and the artists, painters, sculptors, and installation artists each had a studio leading off the huge Panzerhalle. We organised regular annual exhibitions financially supported by the Potsdam government, positive that we regularly invited visiting artists from other countries. In 1998 I organised one such exhibition, part of an exchange project with a group of Scottish artists to stay and work with a German host artist to share experiences. It was called *Footsteps*, a way of finding what art life was like in another country, in another person's shoes.



Although I spoke German and my life had integrated with Berlin, in this way I kept links with my Scottish roots.

Similarly in another Panzerhalle exhibition celebrating its use for artists, I made two very large works on paper using a photo that suggested time past, it included two boys of my family, my Scottish grandson Stephen and my German nephew Kieran. My thoughts were that they could never have been together in the Panzerhalle during World War II. I'd researched the early developments of Panzer design, and used some of the images together with the boys. I called the artwork *Boys Toys*. The work was shown in the Panzerhalle exhibition (with catalogue) *Sektor Panzerhalle* and subsequently in the Universität der Künste, Berlin.

The atmosphere of the Panzerhalle, an impressive military building was a challenging yet productive studio workspace for artists and it gained a reputation through regular international exhibitions as a centre for art. However during the extensive ongoing development of the suburbs of Berlin, in 2007 the whole building was demolished to make way for luxury villas.

Often a touring exhibition, showing in different spaces can completely change the appearance of a body of work which can be surprising and interesting for the artist. In 2017 a major exhibition entitled *Duality* was shown in Listros Art Gallery, Berlin. Then in 2018 it travelled to Scotland - and was shown in several spacious rooms of the Maclaurin Art Gallery, in Ayrshire on the west coast of Scotland. When I started out as a professional artist I had an exhibition there in the eighties. So it was like bringing my artwork home and the exhibition attracted considerable media attention, through newspapers and a television interview.

My regular gallery in Berlin that has represented me since 2011, is aquabitArt situated in one of the main gallery streets of Berlin. The gallerist has innovative ideas of presentation and I have enjoyed interesting group and comprehensive solo shows in the gallery.

In recent years the *East Side Gallery* (where I have a painting and which I write about elsewhere on this website) has come under the auspices of the Berlin Wall Foundation, ensuring the safety of this important listed monument. Its position on prime building land has made it an object of speculation surrounded by an area of intensive urban development. I have been involved in meetings about the design of a park, a leisure and conservation area and a buffer zone behind the East Side Gallery for local people and visitors alike,

My professional life has been – and still is – varied and exciting and I have taken part in very many different kinds of exhibitions, projects and residencies. Some were experimental opportunities to try something different, occasionally learning new art skills, (for example a Raku course in Mallorca) mainly in Germany and the UK but also occasionally in other countries and with different artists.

Exhibitions with established galleries for which I have to plan and work intensively producing a body of new paintings have always stimulated my art. I am fortunate to have extensive documentation of my work through solo and group catalogues as well as regular positive press in the UK and other European countries.

I am still active as an artist working mainly in my Charlottenburg, Berlin home where I now have a studio.

Margaret Hunter

www.margaret-hunter.com