

# A Bridge Across The Tide

To meet Sarah Kofman is to understand that the horizon is not an end, but a beginning. A native of the windswept landscapes of Schleswig-Holstein (Germany), Sarah has spent a lifetime translating the dialogue between the vast Northern skies and the silent marshlands onto canvas.

From her earliest childhood sketches to her mature mastery of oils and watercolors, her work captures the 'marvelous in the everyday.' In this interview, we step inside her studio to listen between the lines of her process, exploring how she captures the fleeting emotions of the coast and why, for her, art is a lifejourney of coming home.

## 1. What inspired you to create the project **Silhouettes by the Sea**, and what does the sea symbolize for you personally?



My stepmother, the artist Ingrid Günther, loved the sea. It is the subject of countless paintings by her. After her death, my father and I prepared her last solo exhibition together. During the period of her passing, I drew a portrait of her, which was also shown at Ingrid's exhibition. It was the first work of mine that I presented publicly. This gave rise to the idea of organizing future exhibitions featuring both my work and Ingrid's. Landscapes play a rather minor role in my paintings; portraits are at the heart of my artistic work. The combination of Ingrid's love of the sea and the people depicted in my paintings gave rise to the Silhouettes by the Sea brand, which will also offer other artists a platform to showcase their work in the future.

## 2. How would you describe your artistic style, and how has it evolved over the years?

I have always painted predominantly in a realistic style. In recent years, however, my style has become increasingly reduced. The focus is now more on clear lines and, depending on the motif, a sometimes almost minimalist formal language. My goal is to capture moods, emotions, and atmosphere rather than reproduce details photographically.

## 3. You work with several techniques such as oil, watercolor, pastel, and charcoal? how do you decide which medium to use for a specific artwork?

Art is my constant companion, which is why the location and time frame often determine which medium I choose. When traveling, I usually reach for watercolors, pencils, colored pencils, or charcoal; here, the idea for the motif often arises only after choosing the technique.



*Shenmi*

However, my great passion is oil painting, which I mainly use for more elaborate works in my studio at home. I love the slow build-up in several layers. For me, it is precisely the large, meaningful paintings that come to life layer by layer. This reflects reality in a wonderful way: we often only perceive the top layer of a person or landscape, but it is only with each further glance that we recognize the depth. Every motif consists of many layers that are not immediately visible—I love it when my art reflects exactly that.

#### 4. Nature plays a central role in your work. What landscapes or moments in nature influence you the most?

I perceive the world with all my senses, not just my eyes. Often it is smells or sounds that trigger the actual inspiration – the sound of a voice often tells me more about a person's character than their mere appearance. The scent of a season also immediately awakens in me the urge to go out into nature.



*Celestial Escort*

There, I am particularly drawn to the water. As a sailor, I feel a deep connection to the sea and to my northern German homeland. In this flat landscape, home for me is defined by vastness: the endless view to the horizon and the fascinating spectacle of colors and shapes that the sky and clouds offer us every day.

#### 5. Is there a specific artist you particularly admire or find yourself returning to for inspiration, and how does their influence manifest in your work?

I am deeply impressed by the works of Niki de Saint Phalle. For me, her works are a true explosion of creativity, in which she simultaneously incorporates important social messages to encourage people to reflect.

Her diversity of materials in particular inspires me to become freer and more experimental in my own choices. By using modelling techniques, I want to give my pictures more depth in the literal sense, just like her.

## 6. How did your artistic journey begin, and what were the most important turning points in your development as an artist?

I have been drawing ever since I could hold a pencil. Early on, my envy of my older sister motivated me to practice continuously and improve my skills. Her head start in practice repeatedly reminded me of what I could achieve. Later, anime and manga sparked my interest in depicting the human body, laying the foundation for my passion for portrait painting. Over the years, my thirst for discovering new things has led me to explore various techniques and materials. A turning point was a course on landscape painting based on Bob Ross, which sparked my enthusiasm for oil painting.



*Tree Peony*

However, the most profound emotional turning point was the birth of my daughter. She fundamentally shifted my perspective: I realized that art must be more than just a craft for me; it is my means of taking responsibility. Today, my strongest motivation is to actively contribute to social change through my work. I want to highlight issues that encourage us to rethink our ways, so that I can help shape a liveable and just future for my daughter and all other children.

## **7. Continuing Ingrid Günther's artistic legacy is an important part of this project. What does it mean to you to carry her work forward in your own creations?**

The illness and loss of my stepmother Ingrid marked a decisive turning point in my work. During this time, art became an outlet for my grief, but also a bridge to her. Her passion continues to motivate me to keep going to this day.

I see the completion of her unfinished works as a continuation of her artistic legacy. For me, her works often radiate a sense of lightness and love of life. Combining these with my own signature style, new layers, and messages is an exciting process for me: her motifs give rise to something new with a depth all of its own.

## **8. How do you balance honoring Ingrid Günther's unfinished works while still maintaining your own artistic voice and style?**

We often used to sit together in front of her paintings, discussing and weighing up whether a work was coherent. Through this intensive exchange, I developed a deep understanding of her vision and the inner attitude with which she painted. When one of her unfinished works speaks to me today, I continue working in exactly this spirit—the message of the painting is then usually intuitively clear to me.

I proceed very cautiously: the composition and the underlying emotional mood, which is characterized, for example, by her choice of colors, remain preserved as her legacy. However, the work is completed in my style. It was our great wish to create something together during her lifetime, but unfortunately, we ran out of time. However, I am deeply convinced that this kind of collaboration is entirely in her spirit. For me, each of these pictures is a symbol of the love that will forever connect us.

## **9. Your portraits often seem to capture a specific psychological depth. When painting a person, are you seeking a literal likeness, or are you trying to reveal an "inner silhouette" of their character?**

In my work, the 'inner silhouette' is clearly the focus. Since I usually work without a photo template or model, I am not bound by physical resemblance to a real person. Instead, I let myself be guided by free lines: I begin intuitively, sometimes guided by a specific theme or feeling, and only during the painting process does a person emerge before me.

For me, it is always an exciting moment of discovery. At some point, the face begins to tell me its story—through a certain look, a posture, or a shadow. My task is then to make this emerging personality and its emotion visible. In the end, I often find myself looking at a person I didn't know before, but whom I could still meet somewhere on the street.

## 10. What emotions or messages do you hope viewers experience when they see your paintings?

For me, feeling comes first. I want my artworks to touch people intuitively and deliberately provoke them. Because provocation often arises when we touch on a sore point: topics that we would otherwise prefer to look away from. My images often address uncomfortable issues such as discrimination, social injustice, sexism, or climate change. These are issues we need to address, precisely because they often don't feel good.



*Morning in January*

The second step is reflection. Once the feeling is there, thoughts follow: the viewer compares what they see with their own experiences and inner attitudes. I am convinced that every individual can make a difference. If my art makes even one person think, the world will be a little bit better for our children. Finally, the third step is exchange. Those who may not yet have any connection to or firm opinion on a topic should be inspired by my art to engage in conversation. For me, broadening one's horizons and opening oneself up to the realities of others is the most important condition for sustainable change.

## 11. Can you describe your creative process; from the first idea to the finished artwork?

For me, every work begins with a feeling or a thought that demands expression. My constant companion is a sketchbook, in which I immediately record ideas and inspirations, no matter where I am. The material often determines how I proceed. When working with acrylics and oils, I value preparation: I sketch, test colors, and compose the image in my head and on paper before applying the first brushstroke to the canvas. The actual painting process, involving many fine glazes, is like meditation for me, allowing me to focus completely on the message of the image.



*Motherly Love | Oil*

It's completely different with my intuitive works: here I let myself drift. Colors and lines arise spontaneously from the moment. I simply follow the forms that appear and give them space to unfold until the picture appears coherent and finished.

## 12. What are your future goals for your art and for the Silhouettes by the Sea platform?

For me, art means taking responsibility. I see it as an opportunity to have an impact not only aesthetically, but also socially. In order to reach a wide audience, I am deliberately expanding my international presence; for example, by participating in competitions such as the Luxembourg Art Prize. It is important to me to appeal to both private collectors and public institutions in a sustainable way.

At the same time, I want my success to benefit others. As a mother, the future of our society is particularly close to my heart. That's why I will use part of the proceeds to support projects for disadvantaged people. In this way, my art becomes a direct driver of the positive change I desire. At the same time, I am building up the 'Silhouettes by the Sea' brand together with my father, Siegfried Günther. Our vision is to present high-quality art that also involves the artist: art should not be understood as an anonymous product, but as an investment with an individual story behind it that conveys emotions and feelings. The focus is on direct exchange between buyers and artists. In the long term, we also want to offer local talent a professional stage and help ensure that artistic work once again achieves prices that convey appreciation.

**Sarah Kofman**

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