



Dr. Anna Katharina Schnell
Mixed-Media Artist & Painter

TS: Anna, where and how did your passion for mixed-media art begin?

AKS: My passion for art began very early. As a child, I was always painting, cutting paper, collecting beautiful materials, and making things. I also remember a certain frustration: the images in my imagination were often far more ambitious than what my hands could create at the time. Even my paper Easter rabbits never quite looked the way I had envisioned them. In a way, my artistic dreams developed before my technical abilities did.

What I discovered quite naturally, though, was that I had a strong eye for composition. This first became obvious through photography, where people often commented on my sense of framing and visual balance. I have also always loved arranging rooms and bringing individual objects together so that they create a coherent whole.

For years, I kept boxes filled with papers, patterns, and fragments that I found beautiful. Today, many of those materials can become part of my collages. That is one of the things I love most about mixed media: it allows separate visual memories and textures to enter into a new relationship.

Color has always been central to me. I am especially drawn to pink, red, magenta, combinations of pink and orange, or pink and green. I love luminous, joyful colors. At the same time, I am currently challenging myself to bring more darkness and contrast into my paintings, because contrast is often what gives an image its vitality. I see my work as an ongoing process, and I'm curious to see where it will take me next.





TS: What does your preparation look like before starting a new piece?

AKS: My process usually begins with inspiration. I surround myself with images, colors, details, and artworks that move me until something begins to connect and a new idea appears. Sometimes I prepare a loose composition; at other times, I want to work very freely. I am still refining that balance, although perhaps the combination of structure and freedom is simply my natural process.

A very important part of my routine is making small studies. I paint, observe, and then ask myself which parts feel especially alive. Was it a certain brushstroke, a color relationship, a transition, or the way one shape met another? I try to understand why something worked so I can carry that knowledge into the next piece. There is a great deal of thoughtfulness behind what may later look spontaneous.

Curiosity is essential. I often begin with the thought, “What happens if I try this?” and then allow the painting to answer. At the moment, I am exploring how to combine bright, almost pop-like colors with a more abstract-realistic language and the subtlety of oil paint. I am also experimenting with darker tones without losing the clarity and lightness that are so characteristic of my work.

My studio matters as well. I have created a space that feels beautiful and ordered, where my materials are visible and inviting. It gives me the space for both careful, focused work and playful curiosity.



TS: A piece of advice that has stayed with you over the years?

AKS : The advice that stays with me most is very simple: stay curious.

I love studying composition and I have collected many principles that I find useful: the rule of thirds, divine proportion, focal points, triangular movement, resting spaces, and the importance of avoiding awkward tangencies. I enjoy understanding why an image works. But rules only become meaningful when they are tested through practice.

My tendency is sometimes to think for a long time before acting. Art keeps teaching me to reverse that sequence: become inspired, begin, observe what succeeds, and develop it further. When something does not work, I can study it and make a different choice next time.

Perhaps the fuller version of the advice is: learn the rules carefully, then remain free enough to break them like an artist. Knowledge gives me orientation, but discovery only happens when I actually make the work.

TS: What did your training as an artist look like?

AKS: My path to art was not a straight one. I first studied education and later completed a doctorate in linguistics, graduating summa cum laude, with a strong focus on the intersection between language and cognitive psychology. People often experience me as both highly empathetic and very logical. Art gives me access to another form of knowledge: one that is communicated through color, movement, rhythm, and composition rather than through words alone.

I later completed a two-year fine-art program at the Milan Art Institute, where I deepened my artistic training, particularly in oil painting. That training gave me a stronger technical foundation, but my academic background still shapes the way I work. I am fascinated by how the eye travels through an image, how focal points are created, and how colors, lines, and spaces affect the viewer psychologically.

I have filled an entire notebook with observations about composition. I study how an image can draw someone in while still offering places where the eye and nervous system can rest. I also completed two years of training in Somatic Experiencing, the trauma-resolution approach developed by Peter Levine. That deepened my understanding of regulation, attention, and the human need for both stimulation and safety.

In my paintings, I try to bring together qualities that are sometimes treated as opposites: strength and softness, movement and calm, confidence and warmth, expressive energy and feminine joy. Alongside my art, I currently work in education and mentoring. My long-term goal is to build a career centered around my art and to create work that people genuinely connect with.



TS: What has influenced you and your art — Hamburg included, or otherwise?

My influences are both visual and deeply personal. One early visual influence was Oilily, the Dutch fashion brand known for its exuberant colors and playful patterns. I loved those combinations as a child, and I still feel connected to clear pinks, deep blues, vivid greens, and unexpected color relationships.

There may also be a more emotional reason for my love of pink. I remember being sad as a child and both of my parents coming into my room and wrapping me in a pink-and-white blanket. I felt completely seen, protected, and cared for. I was also wrapped in a pink blanket as a baby. Perhaps pink became connected in me with warmth, tenderness, and safety. Today, pink and magenta are not merely decorative colors in my work; they carry emotional memory.

Artistic ability also runs through my family. My mother was remarkably gifted, as are my father and my great-aunt. They could draw, paint, arrange interiors, and create beauty, although all of them chose other professions. I sometimes feel that I am bringing this artistic family line more visibly into the world.

Hamburg contributes another kind of energy. For me, it represents freedom, cultural openness, connection, and the possibilities of a major city. Its very different neighborhoods each have their own atmosphere, yet together they form a cosmopolitan whole. I am grateful to live in a place where people with very different backgrounds, ideas, and ways of life can find one another. I hope some of that sense of openness and urban freedom is reflected in my paintings as well.



TS: If you could make one thing appear or disappear with a snap of your fingers?

AKS: I would make power struggles disappear - from the largest conflicts between nations to the small, often unspoken battles between individuals.

I would replace them with a greater ability to notice one another's needs, to communicate honestly, and to set clear boundaries without destroying connection. To me, peace does not mean avoiding conflict, becoming passive, or agreeing with everything. It means being able to say what is true and necessary without humiliation, manipulation, or cruelty.

That wish is closely connected to what I seek in my art. I want strength without hardness, softness without weakness, and clarity without coldness. A painting can hold contrast without forcing one side to defeat the other. I wish human relationships could do that more often, too.

TS: Thank you, Anna, for taking the time to share your journey and the meaning behind your work.

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