

# EACH MODERN

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## Interview: Hell Gette

By Jürgen Dehm, artfridge, January 13, 2020

Hell Gette manages to perform the balancing act between analogue and digital media effortlessly: while travelling, she works on plein air watercolours, paints on the iPhone or iPad and creates abstracts from depictions of nature with Photoshop. She paints the resulting images in oil, photographs them and inserts emojis via mobile apps. Finally, these pictures are transferred back to the canvas in oil paint. Hell calls the results "#Landscape 3.0". At the age of five, she arrived in Germany from Kazakhstan. She studied painting with Markus Oehlen at the Academy of Fine Arts Munich from 2012 to 2017. At the end of her studies, she was awarded the debutante prize of the Bavarian Ministry of Culture.

Jürgen Dehm: Hell, have you discovered any new Netflix series over the holidays that you can recommend?

Hell Gette: I liked "Great News" because it matches my very fine sense of humour. And I also really liked "The End of the F\*\*\*ing World". It is about two weirdos who cannot deal with the world. They both have basically a good heart, only they cannot deal with things no one should be able to deal with. The people around them, however, prefer to delude each other and leave the two to themselves, which leads to disturbing behaviour. Blood and carnage, with a touch of dark humour, disturbing, and profoundly romantic with an excellent sound-track - especially in the second season. Be sure to watch it in the original language.

JD: Will you incorporate references to these series in your paintings?

HG: No, I have finished using references to Netflix series in my pictures now. These were paintings I really wanted to make, basically as a rebellious act in response to a previous exhibition, in which I had occasionally incorporated art-historical quotations in the works. I wanted the complete opposite for the next exhibition – something trivial. Before that, I had already painted three pictures from Netflix series and was curious to see if I could turn this into a whole exhibition. That's virtually how the exhibition "An Original Netflix Series" came about, based on the Netflix series I liked.

JD: Where was this exhibition?

HG: At Hubert Burda Media, curated by Mon Muellerschoen. There was also an artist talk moderated by Prof. Dr. Thomas Girst, head of the BMW Group Cultural Engagement. I was pretty nervous because we had only spoken on the phone before. Surprisingly, we harmonized very well. It ended up almost being stand-up comedy and was a lot of fun.

JD: In the works in which you refer to the Netflix series, allusions to "Stranger Things" or "Better Call Saul" appear. Are you referring to specific scenes?

HG: Not really. I think I'm more interested in transforming a certain feeling onto the canvas.

JD: You depict the worlds you've created in a kind of lo-fi aesthetic in oil, reminiscent of early console games. Which consoles and games were important to you during your childhood and adolescence?

HG: Nintendo Super Mario, then a kind of Gameboy from the Soviet Union, with very simple graphics, that had once belonged to my father. I also played Tetris a lot. I had a Tamagotchi as an electronic pet. But I was never a gamer, rather a wild child, who spent much time outdoors in nature to experience "adventures".

JD: Do you still go to Kazakhstan often, the country of your birth?

HG: Unfortunately, I haven't been there since I went to Germany. My father thought it was too dangerous. However, I would very much like to do a backpacking trip there soon. The landscapes in Kazakhstan are breathtaking.

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JD: What memories do you have of your childhood there?

HG: I really liked the property we lived on. It was bizarre, colourful and wild. In the front garden stood a large lilac tree. Watermelons and strawberries also grew there, and wild flowers, but we planted some as well. A turquoise worktable with every imaginable tool stood outside, next to two swings. In the back of the garden was a free-standing bathtub, a construction with vines provided privacy. We could pick the grapes directly into our mouths while taking a bath. The „Banya“, where we played „to the sun / to the moon“ with hot and cold water, was directly opposite. We also had animals: small chicks, hence chickens and roosters, and dogs. Occasionally, wild turtles were running around. In my grandma's village lived a wild camel lady. The climate in Kazakhstan is continental that means there were very hot summers and very cold winters, which I also liked a lot. One day I want to build my garden in a similar way.

JD: What was it like for you to cope with moving to Germany?

HG: As a child, it was very difficult... It was a major change from the free life in nature to the cramped life in an emigrant camp, which was situated between two American bases. The four of us lived in a 10sqm room. There were two more rooms with two families each. The kitchen and bathroom had to be shared. All the buildings were full of such „cells“. Then there was the right-wing insults. It was horrible. As teenagers, we were fully integrated, as an emigrant you are rather seen as the „cool one“. And growing up next to the Americans also had its advantages, because we were right at the source of good music. We did many stupid things... You could make a very good movie out of it. In hindsight, however, I have to say that we were very lucky that nothing ever happened to us. It was pretty marginal, but also quite funny.

JD: Why did you decide to do art, especially painting?

HG: I don't think painting or art is something you decide to do. It is more about having a very strong need or a strong urge for it. It wouldn't work without it.

JD: There are recurring elements in your paintings. Are these stories that you are telling via multiple images?

HG: My paintings are virtually linked to each other, as if you were Super Mario, for example, approaching a castle: The castle is already visible from afar, then you run into it and a new world pops up. Sometimes you walk past the first place once more and see an earlier element again. If these are "subjects", for me, they have a life of their own and can also "run" into the next picture, where they experience something new. I do not know now whether this is comprehensible, but, believe me, it makes perfect sense.

JD: What does the genre landscape painting mean to you?

HG: Freedom.

JD: And which artists inspired you?

HG: „Die Neuen Wilden“, Philip Guston, Andy Warhol, Van Gogh, David Hockney, Dana Schutz, Nicole Eisenman, Maria Lassnig, Giotto...

JD: Do you see your painting as „Bad Painting“ – in the sense of the art-historical label?

HG: I'm a big fan of „Bad Painting“, it was my school, too, if you want to call it that. There are strong similarities, such as the preferences for a certain kind of aesthetic and a specific sense of humour. Art historically, I would definitely classify my art along these lines. Maybe it is post digital „Bad Painting“, „Bad Painting 3.0.“

JD: And how do your ceramics relate to the paintings and prints?

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HG: The ceramics are basically three-dimensional images, at least a large part of them. I want to know what the paintings would look like in 3D, and then I make the ceramics from it.

JD: What are you going to show in the exhibition „To Paint is to Love Again“ curated by Olivier Zahm at Nino Mier in Los Angeles, which begins on January 18?

HG: Dolphins with laser eyes.

JD: Any New Year's resolutions?

HG: I am at peace with myself.