

OWN HOME & INTERIOR GALLERY

Human beings are tender and vulnerable creatures, according to Ina Kooper. 'It takes courage to pick up where you left off every single day'. She paints away all doubt on her laminated canvases. 'You need to face up to life, that's the only way to conquer your fears.'

Production: Winja Stappers Photography: Henni van Beek (paintings), Freek Esser (Studio) Text: Jack Meijers



No title 261, 2003, oil paint on linen, 80 x 110 cm

1 Ina Kooper at a work in the making:
'I painted portraits of individuals, but was
looking for a connection with the outside world.'

2 No title 262, 2003, oil paint on linen,
80 x 110 cm.

3 No title 273E, 2005, acryl, East Indian
ink and water colour on paper, 53 x 39 cm.



**'Sometimes a brush needs to be used as a dagger,
sometimes you need to work gently'**

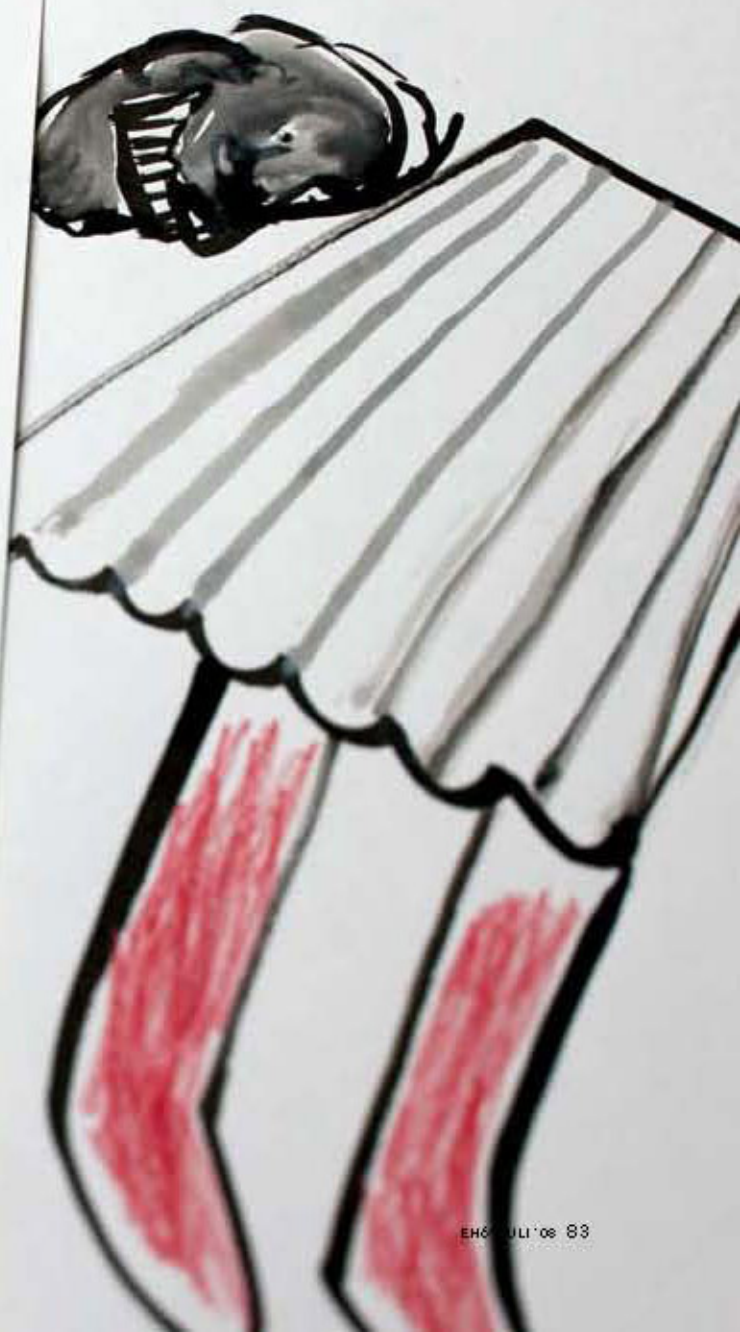
There wasn't a great deal of hesitation. When Minister Plasterk suggested doing away with the study grant some time ago, Ina Kooper wrote him a letter. 'I know from experience how important this grant is to help you on your way.' Ina Kooper was born into a working-class family in Dordrecht in 1945. She attended a reformed primary school, which attached a great deal of importance to tranquillity, purity and regularity. 'Purity was certainly there, but not tranquillity. Always noisy and things going on.' Kooper was familiar with stories from the Bible as a result of her religious upbringing. 'The children from our neighbourhood did not have a reformed background, so as an act of compassion my sister and I gave them Bible lessons, in order to protect them from hell and damnation. That would be their salvation.' It certainly wasn't the kind of social environment where children would spontaneously opt for secondary education and attend the art academy. Kooper: 'The head teacher made the rounds in the fifth year: 'Who is going to the hbs (higher education)?' Only the rich children would put their hands up. Kooper was allowed to attend the mulo (advanced primary education). 'That was already quite a big leap for my parents.' She started work in a shop after the mulo. 'Further education wasn't really on the cards for a girl with my background. When the study grant was introduced two years later, this really was like winning the lottery. I was able to attend the teacher training college. I wanted to achieve the teaching certificate here. This was my ticket into university, where you could register for psychology or pedagogics.'

Her false start left her with a desperate need for knowledge which never disappeared. With the occasional break in her studies for jobs in education, Kooper attended the teacher training college, secondary school for drawing and painting in Tilburg, she registered with the Willem de Kooning Academy in Rotterdam and studied psychology in Amsterdam and art history in Utrecht. Kooper discovered she didn't want to become a psychologist during her psychology studies. 'I wanted to go back to art. I stopped after my candidate examination.'

Ina Kooper

1945 Born in Dordrecht
1964-1969 Teacher training course, Dordrecht
1969-1973 Secondary school for drawing and painting, Tilburg
1976-1980 Psychology study UVA, Amsterdam
1992-1993 Willem de Kooning Academy Rotterdam.

Ina Kooper lives and works in Amsterdam. Her work can be purchased via the E.M. Gallery (Heideanjer 8b, Drachten, www.emgalerie.nl) and via Gallery Wit (Hamelakkerlaan 38, Wageningen, www.galeriewit.nl). Ina will be exhibiting her work at the E.M. Gallery in December 2008. See also www.inakooper.nl.







1 Kooper works with oil paint in layers. She also uses charcoal and pastel chalk for her drawings.

2 Top left: No title 257, 2003, oil paint on linen, 110 x 85 cm, below a study for a painting.



3 Studio overview with No title 263 on the left, No title 507 in the centre and No title 261, 2006, oil paint on linen, 110 x 125 cm on the right.

Left page Ina Kooper with a fragment of No title 264, 2003-2008, oil paint on linen, 135 x 185 cm.



'If my work is about myself, then it will also touch other people's sentiments'

Comfort

Elaborating about her youth in a working-class environment appears to be what eventually convinced Kooper to show off her work. 'For a long time I was ridden with great fear about showing the real me. This closely links into the hectic surroundings I grew up in. I could withdraw from all the goings on by making myself a little invisible. That was my survival strategy.'

Ina Kooper's paintings are all about vulnerability and people's embarrassment about baring all. 'You are born vulnerable and you die vulnerable. And in between people will just need to manage somehow. I do find it surprising that more people aren't confused and tormenting themselves with the question: what will tomorrow bring and what about next week? You really shouldn't stop to think too much about questions like these, you just need to carry on with life, otherwise you simply go off the rails. Even if you need courage to start afresh every single day.' Fortunately we have art. Art has the ability to offer comfort. Kooper talks about the television series 'Van de Schoonheid en de Troost' (Beauty and Comfort). Years ago VPRO's Wim Kayzer went looking for what makes life worth living, together with a group of writers, philosophers and visual artists. Kooper: 'Karel Appel talked about the colour green in Vermeer's Milkmaid. A tear trickled down his cheek. I instantly knew what he meant.'

Vulnerability, fear and their opposites - courage and empowerment: these are the themes which Ina Kooper finds intriguing. 'At the same time they are universal powers. If my work is about myself, then it will probably also touch other people's sentiments.' She has always felt the need to produce art. 'I felt like this was something I simply had to do. But I could also sit and think for hours about what I should really be painting. Once it was done, I hardly dared to show anyone. There was a teacher in Tilburg who fetched a few other people; that's how much my work charmed him. I found this quite extraordinary. I was really always waiting for the moment when someone would say: 'Sorry, Ina, we were wrong about you.' So when Kooper left for the Willem de Kooning Academy in 1992, she certainly wasn't one of the youngest students. Her teacher Theo Poel was someone who particularly motivated her. 'I am a late-bloomer. That's why you'll find me in the sports centre three times a week. I still want to be painting when I reach 95. I will still always be working.'



No title 602, 2007, oil paint on linen, 65 x 65 cm.



No title 609, 2007, oil paint on linen, 65 x 65 cm.



1 Various works on paper, from left to right: 273E, 15D, 79D, 232C. In the background: No title 507, 2005, oil paint on linen, 110 x 125 cm.

2 Kooper: 'My paintings are created whilst I am watching, feeling.'

Right page Heads, carnival masks and cuttings to serve as fuel for own work.



SPECIAL OFFER

Ina Kooper is producing a numbered and signed screen print of seventeen impressions, format 41 x 60 cm, with a 150 copy circulation, especially for OH&I readers. The price amounts to € 295. You can order the screen print by sending an email to ina@koopert.nl, mentioning 'OH&I screen print'.

'An animal like that represents your inner self.

It's about confronting everything you feel'

Fantasy Animals

Kooper remembers her first exhibition in a gallery. 'They had to carry me in. That's how scared I was. Especially for myself. I thought: this isn't happening fast enough. If I want to be an artist, then I need to do something about it. A therapist helped me with this. Slowly but surely the realisation hit me that I didn't need to crawl into a corner. You have to face life with all your might, that's the only way to conquer your fears.' She describes herself as a trial and error painter. 'I produce my work in layers. The drawings I produce are just ideas. My paintings are created whilst I am watching, feeling and working. I constantly reflect, continuously shift between feelings and common sense. I often carry on painting for long periods of time, I just keep on working and correcting. One day I decided I was going to produce ten drawings per day. Then I would put these away and look at them again at a later stage. I ended up with two hundred drawings after two weeks. I liked this speed. The paintings then started becoming looser. They became more airy, less serious than they had been.' The direction of the work also changed where content was concerned. 'I always used to paint portraits of individuals, but I was looking for a connection with the outside world.' Then the image of fantasy animals wandered into Kooper's mind. 'I initially thought the animal represented life. Until I realised it represents your inner self. You must face up to your own fears and unrest. That's why I chose that animal: that's me, that's you or that's the person looking.

It's all about confronting everything you feel inside: your deepest fears, needs and desires. How do you deal with those? Sometimes you can embrace and kiss them. But it's often also quite scary and something you want to run away from as fast as you can. Whatever you do: you always need to rise to the confrontation. When I daren't cross a certain threshold, then I know I still need to cross it regardless.'

Kooper wants to strengthen the connection between what has been painted and the person looking at it. These confrontations are rarely unequivocal. Kooper: 'When you look at one of my animals, you may see a dangerous mouth full of sharp teeth, a scary monster. Yet someone else might see a smiling dog. It's all projection: people view the paintings with their own emotions. A painting is created by the eyes of someone looking at it.'

Ina Kooper works with oil paint in layers. Sometimes the remnants of a previous layer of paint may still be visible. 'Then I'll start scratching through this layer again, which will make the old layer reappear. A paintbrush sometimes needs to be used as a dagger, sometimes you need to work very softly and gently. I just start and the rest will follow. All I know for sure when I first start is that I want to end up with a good painting.' She repeats that to her it's not about a literal meeting between a person and an animal. 'A painting lives within four frames. All sorts of things can happen within those frames. But I don't try to tell stories. I produce paintings.

