

*TRANSLATION:*

Berliner Zeitung, 03.12.2020, Ingeborg Ruthe:

### **Gemalte Botschaften aus einer inneren Welt (Painted messages from an inner world)**

Berlin's only gallery for outsider art is showing Sonja Halbfass' strangely gripping paintings during Advent.

"At the crossroads of life there are no signposts." The memorable quote comes from Charlie Chaplin. The painter Sonja Halbfass, whose paintings of acrylic paint and colored pencils are on display at Galerie ART CRU Berlin just now, has lived for many years in a world of her own which is not quite easy for outsiders to see through. The name of the gallery Art Cru (crude art) seems almost like a sign. It is based on the term Art Brut (raw art), which helped Jean Dubuffet gain recognition as an art form in the 1940s. Sonja Halbfass now sends coded messages from inside Art Cru, which she places with symbolic pictorial force on paper.

The titles seem surreal and at the same time strangely poetic: "Innerer Garten" (Inner Garden), "Tanzende Schlangen" (Dancing Snakes), "Blauer Frieden" (Blue Peace), "Warme Welle" (Warm Wave). They resonate with a longing to communicate. The color compositions pulsate, teem, float, swim. At times they merge into sketchy figurative, at others into impasto abstract scenes. Stylistically, everything that is classified by art historians as impression and expression, as op art, pop art, or comics is intertwined. But it escapes any of the respective categorizations and becomes a psychedelic mixture. Art that knows nothing of academic, scientific classification. It is a visual language that takes all liberties because it is deeply subjective and represents authenticity. Images of an insular talent that experiences all the complexities in its own world, the chaos of which she is fortunate enough to be able to tame with pen and brush into an order of her own. And so we are confronted with pictures as enigmatic as they are magical. One of them, entitled "Leben einer Frau" (Life of a Woman), becomes a search image, as it were, depicting everything from everyday housework to painting and drawing to erotic, sexual desires. Halbfass knows no taboos. In a next colorful hidden object of loud screens, she has inserted mirror-like portraits into them, self-portraits, heads of female friends and of men.

Born in 1968 in Hesse, she was admitted to a psychiatric clinic for the first time at the age of 18. The child of academics, she had by then lived in various places in America and India due to her parents' work. A model student in school, she began studying psychology after college. Her life path seemed poised for success. But irony would have it that her mental health was severely affected: Schizophrenia. A path of illness without a signpost. Since 1989/90 she has lived in Berlin, in therapeutic communities, alternately in clinics.

In the meantime, she has stabilized and is cared for by social associations such as KommRum e. V. and Die Brücke. Art gives her support, moments of happiness, self-esteem. She longs for a studio, the apartment in Schöneberg is too tiny. The non-profit gallery Art Cru, whose sponsor is the association PS art e. V., has been exhibiting art by people with mental health issues and mental disabilities since 2008. Gallerist Alexandra von Gersdorff-Bultmann says Sonja Halbfass is a discovery: "Something very special." True. In front of her paintings, one can only marvel at the vastness that art can attain despite limitations.