

## FEATURED ARTIST

### HILARY IWANSKI



*Hilary Iwanski's true understanding of art came when she took a break from painting to study for a degree in English and Psychology. She realised that the colours, patterns, tones and atmospheres one tries to create in art are mirrored in literature, music as well as, surprisingly, in the approach to the sciences and psychology. This insight has helped shape her development as an artist and her career as a figurative painter.*

#### Below:

*Her love for classical music, and opera in particular inspire her work. She has painted portraits of people on the South African opera scene and used an Artscape Opera barmaid as the model for a painting after Manet's *Barmaid at the Folies Bergère*.*

*'Barmaid at the Artscape Theatre'*  
50 x 60 cm; oil on canvas



Although painting was not initially her first choice as a career, it seems that it was inevitable, given her intimate relationship with colour and form. Hilary has a rare condition called synaesthesia which is best described as a cross-over of senses. In her case she sees colour in everything, from words and text to peoples' names and even the days of the week. She perceives the order of the days and months of the year as specific shapes.

As a youngster she thought everyone saw these things, and it was only later in life that she realised she had this 'gift'. But as an artist it is a double-edged sword: "I have to continually question how I 'see' things, how much colour there is in reality and how to temper its intensity," she explains.

After a career in Medical Technology and a brief spell of uninterrupted motherhood, Hilary spent much of the 1980's developing her painting skills, studying watercolour techniques with Derric van Rensburg, which she went on to teach. At the Ruth Prowse in the 1990's she attended sculpture classes with Maureen Langley and studied oil and pastel techniques with Ryno Swart before he opened the Artists' Co-Operative studio where she continued to be tutored by Ryno for a number of years.

"Painting is not easy. It is far from the 'lovely hobby' that it is often referred to. It involves discipline, hard work and a fair amount of soul searching," says Hilary. "However, when I persevere, and am involved with a painting, and it works, it is the most wonderful, fulfilling feeling, allowing me to reach an emotional high that cannot be achieved by any other means."

For Hilary the reward is seeing a person emerge from the canvas in an unexpected, beautiful way.

Her attention to soft and hard edges, chiaroscuro and the interpretation of the emotional and atmospheric qualities of the portrait and figure set her paintings apart. She regularly switches media, working in watercolour, pastels and oils: "I enjoy a challenge," she says.

Her paintings always start with a visualisation of what she wants to portray. A compositional sketch follows and then a drawing of what is to be painted. "Along the way I decide on the medium and the size of the canvas or paper." Her working methods are mostly standard: For portraits and nudes in oils she primes the canvas with Raw Umber and white to approximate a mid-tone skin colour hue, before using transparent paints to further enhance the under painting. She blocks in darks and wipes out the light areas. "For watercolours the drawing is paramount. I do an intricate drawing of the light and shaded areas which is a guide when I begin to apply delicate washes of colour."

Always keen to learn she has recently discovered the colour shaper – a wedge shaped rubber 'paintbrush' with which you can take out colour or use it to blend and soften edges.





For Hilary art is a journey of exploration: "As T.S Eliot said: 'We shall not cease from exploration, and the end of all our exploring is to arrive where we started and to know the place for the first time,'" she quotes.

Hilary says she owes a lot to other artists, in particular those involved with the Artists Co-Operative in Observatory Cape Town. It was started by Ryno Swart in the early 1980's. "At the moment we have over 20 members and, aside from Christmas, we have not missed a drawing and painting session, with a model, in the last 20 years. The benefits are encouragement, constructive criticism and good times in the pub after the class!"



**CONTACT HILARY:**  
**Tel: 021 674 4393 / 083 320 1150**  
**e- mail: HILARY@IBOX.CO.ZA**  
**Website: HILARY-IWANSKI.CO.ZA**

*Left top: 'Desirè' (Detail) 30 x 40 cm; Watercolour on paper*

*Left middle: 'Thinking Pink' 40 x 50 cm; Pastel on paper*

*Left bottom: 'Bridesmaids Dressing' Commission (Mr and Mrs B Bintley) 50 x 50 cm; oil on canvas*



*Previous page top to bottom:  
 'Kensington Palace Dress' (Detail)  
 1.0 x 1.5m; oil on canvas*

*'Portrait of a Diva' soprano Lynelle Kenned  
 61 x 76 cm; oil on canvas*

*'Daydreaming' 45 x 60 cm; oil on canvas*

*'Lizianthus' 24 x 34 cm; oil on canvas*



*The Cape Gallery, 60 Church Street, Cape Town seeks to expose fine art that is rooted in the South African tradition, work which carries the unique cultural stamp of our continent.*

*featured artist: Hilary Iwański*



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 27 21 423 5309  
 cgallery@museb.co.za  
 www.capegallery.co.za