

Now Metzenmacher is only designing himself.

After deciding to end his employment at Puma, the ex-chief designer from Aachen now works as an artist in Bamberg. He produces lifestyle pictures using the technique of the old masters.

By Stephan Kaussen

BAMBERG: In a time in which it seems that everybody is looking for a secure job, this man does the exact opposite: Ralf Metzenmacher (41) has left the world renowned Puma brand. Of his own free will. Despite the fact that the sport and lifestyle products manufacturer is still super successful - thanks in part to Metzenmacher's ideas. "But to remain in business it seems to me that we only need to pledge one thing," says the risk-taker. "To repeat successes that we have had before." Now the ex-chief designer is his own product - Ralf Metzenmacher, the artist.

As the Aachen-born artist begins his presentation, some of the 80 art lovers and experts are ill at ease. What is taking place here is no classic vernissage, it is a contemporary show. Paintings in the technique of the old masters are combined with power point elements and designer pieces from the world of fashion. - the presentation is a crossover, like the artist himself. A stroll through different spheres of life using different media and products.

The "Rallipan" products should be contemporary - this is something of central importance to Ralf ("Ralli") Metzenmacher. And he has the rhythm of the times in his blood. For over a decade the 41 year old designed successful products for Puma - ranging from sport shoes to handbags. For a year his studio has been on the idyllic Leintritt in Bamberg, 50 kilometres away. Right next to the Regnitz. "For me there is something of the Mediterranean here. I've come to rest here quite simply because life here is good." And Ralf Metzenmacher hopes that through his contributions he will be able to add something to the lives of as many people as possible. And you can see that he has already made a positive contribution when you walk through "his" town with him. Every now and then he says things like "Ah, take a look at that guy's shoes. What do you think? We designed those two years ago and manufactured them in Vietnam. The material's great. Pretty cool, hey?!"

By "we" he means Puma. Now Metzenmacher designs, produces and markets only Metzenmacher. Now his life revolves around his art and his painting. Painting which when you take a look at the new "products" does have something of design about it. Design for everybody. His pictures are stylish and yet also trendy. Metzenmacher says himself with an amazing certainty: "I already know the customers for my art, that's the great thing." The (life) artist laughs over the confluence of his two differing journeys through life. "I've taken the ideas from my classical training in art and design a step further. Everything is based on quality coupled with modernity and a feel for the way people of today are living their lives."

And he has developed this feel for life styles through the countless journeys and presentations he undertook whilst working for Puma. He once met Sven-Goren Eriksson, the then Lazio coach and now coach for the English football team, in Rome and persuaded him to buy a new Puma football. "I know how modern people in Berlin, Los Angeles or Singapore live their lives. There is a demand for my products, I know that." Whether the people themselves already know this is not of great importance to Metzenmacher.

His first cycle of paintings is on the subject of femininity. Portrayed very differently to that which one might expect. "Of course, because what I paint is a unique different world.

There is no point in painting things that already exist. Photography is far better suited for pure reproduction as it can be so exact. I take things further and create new connections.”

But Metzenmacher doesn't make these remarks out of ignorance of his fellow artists. It is just that he is certain that it makes sense to paint still lifes in precisely the way that he paints them. “Before, when photographs didn't exist, the old masters painted as close to reality as possible in order to show and depict something that didn't exist in any other picture. I have studied the old masters and use their technique but I use that technique to achieve entirely different results.”

Three product categories

And they can all be viewed – as the 80 art experts at the Bamberg presentation are about to find out. Metzenmacher delivers his art with energy and enthusiasm and has conceived his business in such a way that there really is something for every one of his described customers. The originals have their price – comparable to the original trainers of Lothar Matthaus or Michael Schumacher. An original Metzenmacher belongs in a museum or a gallery “because the painting presents an insight. The first-rate duplicate prints from my Edition series compliment the originals as a second category in a variety of colours and complete the artistic statement.” And then there are also the “Rallipan” versions that “portray a lifestyle born out of art and offer a fundamental difference to the usual decorative pictures. It is like the little brother of the insight. Everybody ought to be able to buy these and have them on their wall as a democratisation of art,” explains the trend maker to the astonished art public.

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