

Do what you want: The freedom of art beyond all pigeonholes

“Do what you want.” That is the message from Iven Orx & Aaron Vinn, a hip artist duo with their own artist-run space in Cologne. Their art is simply different, each of their artworks is unique, doesn't fit into any pigeonhole. And that's a good thing, in the opinion of the two lateral entrants. Their art, which simply does not fit any label, has meanwhile inspired customers from all over the world. “If you submit to a style, then you limit yourself.” In the interview, they talk about their unusual entry into the world of art and what their way of working and creating has to do with freedom.



business-on.de: How did you two meet?

Iven Orx: We met in a bar here in Cologne. At that time, neither of us knew that we were artists. We got to talking, liked each other and that's how the contact came about. That was about 15 years ago now.

business-on.de: How did you then get into art?

Iven Orx: At some point we decided to move into a flat share together in Cologne. One evening we were sitting together and we noticed that both our fathers used to paint. They were not professional artists, but simply creative people who used to do that. We talked about that and wondered what it would be like if we painted too. That was the beginning of it all. We were about 20 years old.

That same evening, we bought painting utensils, small canvases and paints and got started. To our own amazement, people were enthusiastic about what we painted. Then we put our first paintings on eBay in America and after a few days they were all sold. So we told ourselves that there must be some magic and we should keep doing this. Besides, we enjoyed it so much that within no time we had turned our flat into a studio. There were colours everywhere and canvases in every corner. It just became more and more frequent. A few months later we had to sell our furniture to make room. When we couldn't go on any longer, we started looking for a studio. At Neumarkt in Cologne, in a former marzipan factory, we found exactly what we were looking for. We liked it so much that we said: Ok, we'll give it a try. We'll jump in at the deep end and set up here with an artist-run space. That was 12 years ago now.

business-on.de: Did you do vocational training or study beforehand?

Iven Orx: Yes, we both learned commercial trades at first, but that wasn't the right thing for us. We were always looking for fulfilment. It so happened that we both had jobs first.

business-on.de: You started to paint. In the meantime you have also created birds and other imaginative works. How did you come to realise such projects as well?

Iven Orx: Yes, that came with time. We started with the normal works of art, then we travelled the world and visited many museums. In the process, we often found the art a bit sad and boring. We saw a lot of black artworks, dark paintings and that's when we realised that that's exactly what we don't want. We want our art to be cheerful, to give people a lot of enjoyment. So we developed little by little and at some point we also tried to work with other materials. With gold, glitter and bright colours. In the process, we realised that we didn't like the existing colours. That's why we started to make our own colours. So that they are brighter, have more strength and power. And so our works have become more and more colourful and cheerful.

business-on.de: What was your very first work?

Iven Orx: These are two smaller watercolours and they hang in our artist-run space. Above is Wotan and below is the Valkyrie, which is also the name of the work. They are not for sale. We would like to keep them, they bring us luck. It's like Scrooge McDuck with his first penny.

business-on.de: What fascinates you about art?

Aaron Vinn: The freedom. We can do what we want, we can take what we want, we can put together what we want. Actually, it's just that something gets spirit, and that's the challenge at the same time.

Iven Orx: And that we can realise ourselves. We have discovered, and we have also been told by others, that we are gifted with our creativity. We would like to pass this gift on to humanity. We want to bring people a piece of heaven to earth with our art. And everyone can delight with this piece. That is what fascinates us when customers or interested parties come to us: how they then enthuse and we look into their sparkling eyes. No matter whether they are children or adults. That is our praise and that gives us the strength to continue and to create more and more new works of art.

business-on.de: Where do your customers come from?

Iven Orx: Nowadays they come from all over the world. From Belgium, Denmark, the Netherlands and also from Sweden. We always talk to them in Swedish-German. But most of them actually come from the region by word of mouth, because we have become something of an insider tip among the artists.

business-on.de: Where do your ideas come from?

Iven Orx: Well, we have probably a hundred different ideas every day. Meanwhile, we write some of them down. Yes, the ideas are just there all at once. So we don't have a problem with creative ideas. We have a problem with time. That's why we work a lot at night, because it's much quieter.

Aaron Vinn: But it's also often the case that some artworks are born as an idea and we say to ourselves that we want to depict, for example, the Queen in a different way. Then something develops out of it over time. Some things start very small and then suddenly become very big. Like our Marilyn Monroe. At the very beginning she was still without a hat, just painted. Then she got real hair and more and more things were added. So it is a work in progress.

Iven Orx: And Marilyn Monroe is still not finished. I'm sure she'll get some light too.

business-on.de: How would you describe your own style?

Iven Orx: Hm. (thinks about it) Actually, we don't have a style. We don't want to have a style either. We think that if you submit to a style, then you limit yourself. If you only paint abstract, expressionist paintings, then in the eyes of the world you are in a kind of a pigeonhole. And we don't want that. We just want to work in a free-spirited way and do what we feel like doing. So if we want to do a bird, we just do it. Or we paint a tree or a rocket or a skull with wings or hair or whatever. Probably the art historians will be racking their brains after us about where we actually belong.

Aaron Vinn: If you always have the same style, you always copy yourself. And that's why we didn't want to be classified from the beginning.

business-on.de: Is that the message you want to convey with your art? Be free and don't let yourself be pigeonholed?

Iven Orx: Exactly! The message is simple: Do what you want!

business-on.de: You said earlier that you want to bring heaven to earth. What do you believe in?

Iven Orx: Well, we believe in many gods, although we are not religious. For us, our art is our religion. But we believe in gods who are with us. We also try to represent some of the gods who guard and visit us here with some of our artworks. But basically our art is not religion-related.

business-on.de: You are very successful. What does that mean to you?

Iven Orx: For us it means freedom again. The financial success allows us to keep doing new projects. The intangible success for us is the satisfaction in the eyes of other people who see our art and interact with it. Not everyone has to love our art, but just the fact that people engage with our art and say that this is something they have never seen before gives us the drive to do what we do.

business-on.de: Both your fathers also painted. Did that make it easier for you to tell your parents that you are artists now, or did they think you should do something more financially secure?

Aaron Vinn: With our fathers it wasn't a job, it was just a hobby. But it gave us the incentive to try it. Also because there was a certain creativity in us before. But as a young person, you try to do justice to everyone, and you've been taught that you should learn something useful. But it's no use if it doesn't make you cheerful.

Iven Orx: Our parents were not enthusiastic at first, but we prevailed. We just did it. And when they saw that we had already sold our first artworks to America for about 300 dollars, they said

that what we were doing couldn't be that bad. This general belief that art is breadless is not quite so true. I think if you do something with all your heart, no matter what it is, whether it's art or cooking, you always succeed. If you do what you love. That is also our message: Do what you love.

business-on.de: What has been your greatest success so far?

Iven Orx: Our own artist-run space is our greatest success. That we can do what we want to do, without any restrictions.

Aaron Vinn: But there was also a bit of luck involved, because we actually wanted something nicer and bigger and looked at about 20-30 studios. And this one was the very last one we looked at. We came and thought beforehand: Oh, that's not going to work anyway. It was offered as a warehouse. But destiny wanted it that way. It is also wonderfully big, you almost get lost here. And that's exactly what we desired. We listened to our heart, not our mind, and that's why we're here now and everything has turned out fine. Back then, things looked completely different here because everything was designed for marzipan production.

business-on.de: Do you have idols? And if so, who are they?

Iven Orx: Well, we don't have any direct role models, because what we do is something different and something fresh. Of course we know personalities in the art world whom we admire, such as Marcel Duchamp or Mary Bauermeister, with whom we studied art avant-garde for a few years. She is a good friend and mentor.

Aaron Vinn: But someone who we say we want to be like..., we don't have someone that way.



Iven Orx & Aaron Vinn© Iven Orx & Aaron Vinn

business-on.de: During our tour through your artist-run space, I saw a wall with the title “The Time of Rebellion”. What were you rebelling against?

Iven Orx: Against dark art. That was the time when we visited all the museums and made up our minds about art. That’s when we realised that almost everything is black and white and decided that our art should be different. Different from everything that was known before. Since then we started making colourful art, joyful art. After that came the ‘Time of the gods’, the time of resurgence.

business-on.de: You also work with wooden undergrounds like in the Middle Ages. How did you come up with that?

Iven Orx: The objects give us the freedom to determine the form ourselves. In other words, to realise what we have in mind. You are not forced to always paint a rectangle. You can choose any shape. We buy the wood in large sheets and cut them out the way we want

them. With Andy Warhol, for example, you can cut out three-dimensional hair. And also the face as seen here is difficult to get on a canvas. You could paint it, yes. But we wanted other dimensions and more depth.

business-on.de: Did you read about it or how did you discover it?

Iven Orx: No, we just did it one day.

Aaron Vinn: It always comes out with a: "Let's just try it out." There are so many rules and constraints that are imposed on us or that we're told, "You can't do that." Or, "You shouldn't do that." But we like to have the experience ourselves.

business-on.de: Do you remember the first work of yours that you sold?

Iven Orx: It was an abstract painting and it was sold on eBay in America. At that time we didn't have a studio but painted in our flat. We didn't stretch our paintings on frames at that time like we do now. We sold them rolled up in a plastic tube and shipped them that way.

business-on.de: Do you get each other's opinions and ask each other what the other thinks?

Iven Orx: Oh yes, yes, we reflect each other. I think that's also very important, that we can support each other. That one can give the other his honest opinion.

Aaron Vinn: Yes, it's an eternal exchange. Some ideas are not so well received by the other. Then there's a bit of discussion, but basically we're always on the same level. Only if the idea is good, it usually involves effort. First we have to discuss whether we really want it.

business-on.de: Does everyone create their own work or do you work together on each piece?

Iven Orx: We do everything together. Everything you see here, whether it's the painting or the installation, we do it together.

business-on.de: Does it ever happen that the other person rejects something and doesn't feel like coming up with an idea?

Iven Orx: No, we share the work.

Aaron Vinn: There are processes that we both work on at the same time. Usually it's like this: we have an idea, one of us draws it, the other thinks it's terrible, then at some point it's finished and everyone thinks it's great. It was the same with our artwork of the cloud. At the beginning, it wasn't supposed to be so big, not so oversized and not with such big rays. It was supposed to be a bit minimalistic. But when it was finished, we liked it.

Iven Orx: Yes, but it took over a year to finish it.

business-on.de: How long does it take for a work of art to be finished? From the first idea to publication?

Iven Orx: For paintings it takes about two to two and a half months. Until everything has dried, etc. We also build the canvases ourselves, they are not bought. We use special wood from Italy, which we order there and which corresponds to our ideas. And the fabrics will be mounted as well. None of these are standard products that you buy from us. Everything is cut to size in our studio, the fabrics are mounted and then the canvas is painted. The whole process can take up to three months. With the other works of art, it sometimes takes longer, like with the Queen. We worked on that for over a year until it was finished. Or the cloud we were just talking about ... These are more time-consuming pieces of work that take a long time. After all, they are all with Swarovski crystals, they are all gold leaf, and you have to do all that by hand.

business-on.de: Are there phases when you are uncreative or when nothing works for three days?

Iven Orx: Well, not for three days, but sometimes we don't have time and we have enough other things to do. Then we don't do art, but maybe office stuff. Or we just go to a museum or an exhibition. We also like to do that very much. We always have something to do. We are not bored and we don't have time to rest.

business-on.de: That brings us to the next topic: What do you do in your free time?

(Both laugh) **Iven Orx:** Yes, when we're not making art, we visit museums and exhibitions. Or art fairs. Cologne is famous for the Art Cologne. And then there's also the Cologne Fina Art in autumn. That's when we go to the art fairs and see the whole world of art, because we don't have time to travel so far, like to America or Japan for example. Then art comes to Cologne and we look at what's new in the art world here on the spot.

business-on.de: So you are always surrounded by art and you don't, for example, have a cooking evening to switch off?

Iven Orx: Oh yes, we cook ourselves, yes. That's what we do. We have a big kitchen here where we cook ourselves. But those are just breaks in between. Then one of us, Aaron or I, cooks and then we take a break for half an hour or an hour. There's delicious food, we talk and exchange ideas. But everything happens here in our studio. So no time for holidays or hobbies or other pleasures. (Both laugh)

business-on.de: Do you have a vision? And if so, what is it?

Iven Orx: Yes, our vision is to make the world a little more colourful and cheerful. That people have their own piece of heaven on earth through our art.

business-on.de: Do you have a favourite work of art? Either by you or by another artist?

Iven asks Aaron: Do you have one?

Aaron Vinn: Hm, that's a good question. It's like with your own children. You love them all.

Iven Orx: So I think the Queen is our favourite artwork. Because it's one of the first installations we did. And of course we associate a lot of memories with it. There was an investor recently who was interested in this Queen and wanted to have it for his collection. But we are still struggling with whether we really want that. Because if

our Queen is no longer there, what do we do then? There is only one Queen. (Both laugh)

business-on.de: What is it like for you to give away one of your works of art?

Aaron Vinn: Yes, it always hurts a bit, but it ... always depends. We then have room for something new again. It's really a lot that we have here.

Iven Orx: But for example, works that we've been working on for a whole year hurt a bit more.

business-on.de: Do you stay in touch with the buyers even after a sale?

Iven Orx: Yes. People usually accompany us for many years and we always get emails and phone calls. Many of them already have a lot of paintings from us, and also other works of art. They collect our art. And yes, we have our fan base that always keeps up with us and supports us. Who also say, "Man, this is so great what you're doing here." And, "Keep up the good work." And that gives us a lot of strength.

More information about the artists at orx-vinn.de