



## The Artist Making Paintings That Are Part Fairy Tale, Part Propaganda

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Rosa Loy was one of the few female members of post-reunification Germany's New Leipzig School, but her paintings are 100 percent woman. We talked to the artist about working with history, what it's like to be part of a "movement," and why she only paints the feminine.

Rosa Loy is one of the few female artists associated with the New Leipzig School. Rooted in traditional, technical skills, the East German style of painting surged onto the international art scene in the mid-90s, after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. Loy's work shares the narrative—the former East and the fall of communism—and the formal concerns of the movement, but she uses them to tell a different story—one in which women are the principal actors in a world shaped by their own efforts.

The artist's imagery seems part fairy tale, part communist propaganda. We're not sure if her figures are the maidens of Romantic myth or the daughters of communism, laboring to realize an agrarian ideal. The enigma is part of the allure. Loy's powerful, female dream world, rich with symbols of sexuality and cultivation, invites Freud right in. Her paintings often feature two female doppelgängers—twins or lovers—whose ambiguous relationship hints at the erotic. Often these women wield tools for horticulture or harvest, their shared generative efforts highlighting the general absence of men. Rich, however, with trees, flowers, and water, Loy's intimate and surreal canvases feel like a garden offering respite from the machismo valorized by too many male-dominated schools of painting.



*"Tide," 2014. All images courtesy of Kohn Gallery Los Angeles.*

**BROADLY: What made you want to paint?**

**Rosa Loy:** It comes out of my inner desire to create beauty. The process of allowing my thoughts to become colors and shapes soothes me and brings me satisfaction.

**What draws you to the feminine as a subject?**

Women are beautiful, strong, intelligent, brave, and sexy. They account for half the world's population. They are mothers, friends, lovers, daughters, enemies, and grandmothers. There are as many women as there are reasons to paint them. The feminine, the female, is a particular enigma that has been treated somewhat shabbily over the last century. I'm in a position to revise that.







*"Herzdame," 2015*

**Your characters inhabit dreamlike settings, full of natural forms. How do you understand this world?**

I have a fairly pantheistic worldview, and I tap into that. Nature, the earth, plants, give me strength, comfort and nurture me. My studio is full of flowers. Who doesn't know the feeling of walking through nature and sensing strange creatures—life moving—in the corner of one's eye? I let myself give in to these visions.

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**Read more: The Artist Painting History's Complicated Relationship to the Female Body ([https://broadly.vice.com/en\\_us/article/the-artist-painting-historys-complicated-relationship-to-the-female-body](https://broadly.vice.com/en_us/article/the-artist-painting-historys-complicated-relationship-to-the-female-body))**

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**You're one of the few women associated with the New Leipzig School of painting. Were you aware of forming a "movement" at the time?**

The New Leipzig School is more of a regional phenomenon than a coherent group of artists. It wasn't foreseeable that such a term would come about and how it would get personalized and attached to people. At the beginning my colleagues and I found this quite difficult, but since then we've marshaled it quite well.





**Your husband, Neo Rauch (<http://www.davidzwirner.com/artists/neo-rauch/>), is one of the biggest names in German painting. How do the two of you influence each other?**

If you live as a couple for over 30 years, share a bed, eat at one table, it's logical that you influence one another. This shared life can condense in the paintings in various and contrary ways. In some things we are quite different, but we correspond in others. This changes over time and keeps the relationship alive.









*"Süße Last," 2015*

**Do you work from visual source material—photographs, books, etc.—or purely from imagination?**

Throughout my life I've become more and more visually influenced—this makes sense, considering what I do. Images burn themselves into my eye and my mind. I use these impressions—conscious and unconscious—in my paintings. Often I'll do a sketch before bringing an idea to the canvas. Photos can only be a shackle. The photograph as a template closes my imagination and suppresses more personal inspiration. It can only be a subordinated tool in my work. I benefit more from one sketch than from one hundred photographs.





*"Korsage," 2012*

**You work with casein, a traditional, though seldom used, water-based paint.**

**What do you like about the material?**

Casein is slightly transparent and delicate. I mix the color myself. It's difficult to work with—it can become brittle—but you achieve a quite different surface quality. I love the alchemy of it.

**What is the role of history, and particularly German history, in your work?**

I was born and raised in central Germany and have spent my life here very consciously. There are four seasons, a certain light, specific smells, and a very special landscape. My home is culturally an incredibly fertile soil. Time and again it astonishes and delights me. Saxons are receptive, tough, inventive, and culturally vital. Many great artists come from here. This place is mine.



*"Buch," 2015*

**What kinds of narratives are you trying to evoke? Do you have a sense of a narrative or story behind each piece as you are working on it?**

Of course there is an initial cause for each painting, be it a color relationship, an experience, or the idea for a composition. But usually this visual and emotional quality comes first. As I am constantly surrounded by stories; they eventually find their way directly into the work, combined or transformed when they enter the canvas. Time and again I feel that the canvas develops an idea on its own and just uses me to paint it. I'm always touched when viewers explain my paintings to me by telling their own stories. That's just great. Mission accomplished.





*"Mutmaßung," 2013*

**What has been most essential to you in your life as an artist?**

I am very grateful to my mother—she encouraged and strengthened my love of visual arts. The choice to start a masters at the Academy for Visual Arts after five years of working as a graphic designer was important. I was coming from a different occupation; it felt momentous but right to start with something new. Everything else went like stringing beads. With every new bead I had to decide: Should I add it or not? Some I had to look for, others just fell into place. I am still looking for beads.

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