

S L O W

THE MAGAZINE FOR EXTREMELY BUSY PEOPLE

YOUR OWN COPY | EDITION 27





Forbidden Fruits, oil on canvas, 190 x 250 cm, 2015.

Abstract Expressionism, by nature, has the potential to rouse and stimulate viewers with its use of courageous colours, excitable brushstrokes and non-concrete nuances. Artist, Natasha Barnes, embodies this in her work and her paintings, which are rich in texture, vibrant colour and lavish design to create bright, bold and fun art with a burst of pure energy. Capturing the essence of imagination and emotion, her canvases are a direct reflection of her passion for art – something she realised very early on in life and which has resulted in this self-taught painter's considerable success.

One of Africa's most published artists, Barnes is taking the art world by storm and her exquisite work, available all over the globe in book and print form, is, without a doubt, a testament to her incredible success.

Born in 1969 in the small town of Parys in the Free State, Barnes had what she

describes as an "idyllic childhood". Growing up on a farm, living a rural lifestyle, Barnes found that her natural creativity was able to flow of its own accord. "My early years really shaped the person I became. You have such freedom of expression in small towns, as well as the room to become who you need to be – not shaped by any expectations of larger peer pressures of city life," she says.

At the tender age of four, while playing in her grandfather's study, Barnes realised that art would come to totally consume her life. "In those days the local pharmacy always gave away calendars at Christmas and this particular one was of a Kudu bull walking across a dam wall, painted beautifully in oils. I saw the picture on the wall and a bolt of lightning went through me. I knew instantly that this is what I wanted to do with my time," she recalls. "Instinctively I knew when I saw that painting that I was to become an artist – don't ask me how." At six years old, her mother enrolled Barnes in her first art class and her love for art was ignited.

At school, however, Barnes chose a slightly different creative path, knowing that art would be a big part of it regardless. "I chose to do a Cordon Bleu Grande Diploma at the prestigious Silwood School of cookery in Rondebosch, Cape Town. I worked for many years at one of the country's leading cookery magazines at the time as a cookery editor before opening my own cookery school. But you know what they say, 'life is what happens while you are planning other things', and soon my hobby [art] became my profession and my profession became my hobby. Art is not something you can subdue," she explains.

And so it began. Settling herself in Umhlali, on the beautiful KZN North Coast, in a studio where she could paint to her heart's desire, Barnes began living her destiny, while still living close enough to an airport so that she could continue to feed her other passion – travel. "The single biggest influence driving my creativity is my travels. I take so much inspiration from the extraordinary. Constantly absorbing moments, conversations and



Buddha in the Love Garden, oil on canvas, 170 x 170 cm, 2015.

feelings, and transforming my canvas with a flood of excitable brushstrokes and expressionism," she explains. "I love Kenya for some reason and it was also the very first place I travelled to on my own after school. However, so much of my inspiration comes from the simple lotus flower and all the places that serve as its home, like Thailand, Bali, India and Mauritius. I have been painting my lotus pond series for about 24 months now and it's still continuing to evolve. I love that such beauty can grow in mud."

Describing her art as "a flood of abstract expressionism – pure energy, like an invisible current, constantly flowing and changing", the ethereal nature of her work takes shape slowly over the hours she spends in her studio. "I usually paint about four to six canvases at the same time, moving between them for several hours until a composition starts to emerge. Then I take my time to follow the abstract nature of what has emerged from the sitting, slowly working towards completion of a work. I finish about

one or two large paintings a week if I have no interruptions," she explains. "Afterwards I live with the work for a while, and on a day I may look at it and change the direction or composition or add to the final piece. Only then are they ready to leave the studio."

Over the last 20 years, Barnes' work has been published in both catalogue and book form by more than 16 international art publishers. Her bright, bold canvases are available worldwide and can be found in hotels from the Great Barrier Reef to Israel and beyond. Her love for all things culinary has in no way subsided and her book, *The Culinary Adventures of a Travelling Cook*, published in 2014, is available countrywide, and is a combination of her love for travel and all the interesting recipes she has collected while working at art fairs around the world.

So what's on the cards for the rest of this year? "Well, it's back to the drawing board. I have only just returned from Hong Kong to an empty studio, so the whole cycle starts all over again," says Barnes. "I have several

commissions to do, but I don't enjoy that as much as when I have the freedom to express what I feel and what I want. Thereafter I will start my new series, "Neon Lotus", for the second half of the year which includes exhibitions in Santa Fe, Hamburg, London, Kuala Lumpur, New York and Singapore."

A true creative genius, Natasha Barnes' vibrant work, with its splashes of bold colour and textural depth, reveals that passion is paramount for success. Proudly South African, this revered artist is making waves in the art world, both locally and internationally, and is definitely someone to keep an eye on.

Natasha Barnes is represented by Eclectica Art & Design in Cape Town and Imbizo Gallery in Ballito, KwaZulu-Natal. For more information, visit www.natashabarnes.co.za.

Text: Julie Graham
 Images © Natasha Barnes | Eclectica Design & Art