



And love is so weightless in the magical woods...



It was strange—the leeks tried to grow upside down...

Creation & Inspiration

The photographic mindset of Karin Hillmer

by Tim Anderson

Karin Hillmer has a degree in Art History, from State University at New York, along with formal training in drawing, painting, and photography. But it was her experimentation with collages that led her to photography as a mainstay of her creative aspirations.

“At the time I bought a used Nikon F2 SLR, which became my first serious camera,” Hillmer said in a recent interview. “I worked in black and white. My first group of photographs exhibited at the college was a series of still lifes dealing with aspects of commodity trading. Commodities such as coffee beans were used together with other objects and cut-outs to create a small environment which I then photographed.”

With her creative spirit already taking control of her life, the photographer continued on this road of discovery. Nothing was *verboden*, and she

absorbed everything, from assembling fragments and constructing scenery, to painting and drawing.

“Thanks to my natural curiosity, I continued to experiment with this process and mastered the technique of using fragmented images. I began using glass plates and mirrors to create unexpected reflections and multiple layers of surfaces. To create the small environments which I then photographed, I painted with watercolor on glass and combined that with cut-out words, figures and forms,” she said.

Diagnosed in 1989 with leukemia, Hillmer went through a bone marrow transplant and came out of that experience with a new perspective, one that she couldn’t foresee. Instead of experiencing life as a “survivor,” she saw things with new eyes. Everywhere she looked there was

text continued on page 16



And you must cover your face in white cloth...

Each one dreamed its own lonely dream...





When she danced she became an Angel from Samothrace...



Perhaps a faulty taste gene caused its gargantuan appetite...

Birds flocked to the feeding place by word of beak...



color, richer and more vibrant than she had ever imagined. From that experience she also found the “key” to her creativity: poetry. Many of her images contain a reference, whether subtle or profound, to either of those elements. Reflecting her poetic sensibilities, Hillmer cites German poet, Joseph von Eichendorff (1788-1857) as an inspiration.

With her new “eyes,” she began to grasp things differently, bringing unique concepts into play in the creation of her pictures.

“Perhaps due to my illness, I developed a keen interest in the fields of technology and biotechnology,” she said. “I brought new concepts and developments into my work, which are combined in a unique way with historic elements. I am a painter, a photographer and above all a storyteller. My pictures represent a new reality, maybe a ‘surreality.’”

A scan of the pages of this article will require you to slow down, and look closer. Take your time. Relax. These photographs can speak to you, if you let them, for each image is a story in itself. Hillmer gives a hint at the whole story through her evocative titles. One of her favorites is “There was joyous laughter when she entered the orb again.” (page 15, top). In this image where the female figure reminds the photographer of her mother, there is reference to a moment when the light of knowledge draws humanity away from the Dark Ages. “But, then, knowledge in and of itself may be useless unless we discover its true meaning.”

Hillmer describes her complicated process, which involves using the digital darkroom as a staging area for a finished piece. She uses

memory as a basis for her journey into the world and into her mind. With each piece she is drawn, at once, back and forth between present and past, places of familiarity and places of family. With strong ties to the place of her birth, Germany, Hillmer utilizes that connection in much of her work, marrying contemporary themes with many other times of historical relevance. At times reminding one of the works of Botticelli, the images mine the deep well of history as well as science and the Renaissance, one of the most romantic of times, which is evidenced in much of her work.

“A song sleeps in all things which are dreaming forth and the whole world starts to sing if only you find the magic word.”

Joseph von Eichendorff

“I explore opposite forces through reality and illusion, light and shade, pictorial depth and flat surfaces, an inter-play of complementary and opposing colors, the painterly aspect versus photography,” the photogra-

pher noted. “These opposing forces dramatize the energy streaming forth from the image and it becomes a much deeper experience.”

Hillmer is quick to add that motivation has no end as far as material is concerned. Daily news events, scientific breakthroughs, social milestones, and just about anything else will set her mind “spinning” into the realms of curiosity and experimentation, with no boundaries as far as subject matter is concerned.

“My images have several layers of meaning, some obvious, others only revealing themselves over time. I invite the viewers to engage in a dialogue with my photographs, to explore this journey and to find their own personal experience along the way.”

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Tech Notes:

After using a Nikon F2 SLR and a Rollicflex in her early days, Hillmer has switched to the camera she uses today, a Nikon D100. For printing, she uses two Epson printers, a Stylus Photo 2200 and a Stylus Pro 7800. Two lenses (both Nikon), a AF Nikkor 28-70mm and an AF Micro Nikkor 60mm, a tripod and a few lights round out her kit. You can view an extended portfolio of her work at www.cameraarts.com. Hillmer is represented by Galerie d'Art, in Siegen, Germany.