



Art & the Human Condition

Maritha van Amerom

Refined recently sat down with Maritha to discuss her artwork, inspirations and what she perceives as the true beauty of art.

In 2009, Maritha van Amerom made a dramatic career change. After years of practising as a psychologist, she started working as a full-time artist. Since then, she has participated in numerous international exhibitions, and her work forms part of art collections worldwide. Maritha lives to create, and has a hunger to make her mark and capture the essence of the human condition.

Please tell us a bit about yourself?

Maritha van Amerom: I was born in Johannesburg and studied psychology through the University of Pretoria and Unisa. After being registered as a psychologist, I completed a three-year art course. Today I live with my family – including two Great Danes – and work from my studio in Somerset West [near Cape Town].

What prompted you to pursue art as a career?

I was born into an artistic family who saturated me with art and music for as long as I can remember. Being a psychologist, I learned about the psychological benefits of art. It's a way of exploring, expressing, discovering and communicating. I soon realised that I had the innate need to explore and express myself through art as a career.

In terms of aesthetics, how would you describe your work to somebody who was blindfolded and could not see it?

Bold and honest. The human body and condition are my main themes. I enjoy line, shape and colour, but also just plain black ink lines – some people say black is not a colour, but it's by far my favourite colour. My preferred medium is ink. I love the versatility of it, but also the permanence of it. When a mark is made, you have to work with it. I love the interplay between the controlled and the uncontrolled. I link these uncontrolled marks to life. A lot of the things in our lives happen whether we plan for them or not. Like

some of these ink marks, life happens, and I have to work with it – incorporate this mark into the work.

When starting a new piece, do you follow a specific process?

The creation of a work or body of work takes shape in my mind. Sometimes the idea is born in a moment, sometimes over time. I often draw from real-life experience and happenings around us. A big part of the work I did in 2019 was based on the vulnerability but also the strength and resilience of women, especially due to all the gender violence we experience in South Africa. However, regular drawing from life is essential for me as an artist – I need to train my eye continuously.

You work in many different mediums and create art in many different ways, including making jewellery. What is your medium of choice?

I strongly identify with Marc Chagall, who said: "I work in whatever medium likes me at the moment." I enjoy variety and like to experiment with different mediums. Even when I focus on painting for a while, I often work on two or three canvases at the same time, or two pieces of jewellery at the same time. I recently also started with sculpting in clay, a medium I am still exploring but already enjoy.

Your sketches perfectly capture the essence of the female form. How do you do this?

The female form has been portrayed and seen from various points of view. Being a woman, a sister, a mother, a daughter, and a wife, I understand something of this journey. I can identify with this form – both from what is seen and what is unseen. Apart from being such a beautiful form on the outside, this "form" houses so much strength, dignity, resilience, wisdom, tenderness, courage, fire and passion.



What is the most noteworthy lesson that art has taught you?

Firstly, to make your mark and make it boldly. Secondly, but just as noteworthy, art communicates with and through the soul. It transcends language.

What inspires you to create?

For me, to create is the pinnacle of existence. To be able to capture the beauty or emotion of the human condition and to try to portray and express it in visual form – that is what inspires me.

Who inspires you, and why?

Authentic people, open minds, and kind hearts inspire me. Marc Chagall and Vincent van Gogh, both for their authentic mark, bold colour and love for people. Carl Jung for his work on the human psyche. The unsung heroes from our daily lives, who do things nobody knows of, to make the lives of others better. I salute these men and women; their stories and their lives inspire me.

If you could only paint or draw one subject for the rest of your career, what would it be?

It will most definitely include a human element: the human condition. It has been the source of inspiration for art for millennia and will continue to be.

What mantra do you live by?

Live authentically, have passion, see the beauty, cherish loved ones.

For more info on Maritha van Amerom's artworks, visit www.maritha.net.

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