

# WETTERLING GALLERY

## *Painting in Parallel*

By Daniel Kehlmann

I was lucky to discover the work of Isca and Sebastian simultaneously. It struck me immediately how much they talk to each other in their work, one centering nature and the other human beings.

When I look at the paintings of Isca Greenfield-Sanders I often see beautiful, expansive landscapes, sometimes inhabited by tiny human silhouettes. But rather than being lost, overwhelmed, or threatened by the powers of nature, they seem protected and at home. Nature isn't hostile to them, and they are not hostile towards nature. Rather, nature comes to the fore as the majestic healing entity, quite literally, as well as spiritually.

Isca's work seems a reminder of the old idea that we have to *inhabit* the world, have to be in it, a part of it, because we are of the world, even though we don't entirely belong there. There is a deep contemplative power to Isca's work, which makes us forget how perfectly every single one of these canvasses is structured, planned, and composed. A lot of effort must have gone into them to make it all seem so effortless.

Isca often paints beaches or lakesides, but these are not anything like the beaches of our nightmarish holiday resorts where bored people sweat in dirty sand together and stare at their phones or so-called 'beach reads,' desperately trying to tan and pass the time until they can get back to work to tell their colleagues about their marvelous vacation. In contrast, the beaches, and shores in Isca's paintings look like those we may have had before there was mass tourism - the shores of old tales on which you could encounter ghosts, as they were zones of transition where water and earth touch. Hamlet gets to talk to his dead father on a tower overlooking such a beach at dawn - between earth and sky, between land and sea, between night and day; it's the zones of transition where the fabric of reality becomes thin and we get to meet our fate.

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There is something metaphysical in Isca's depiction of nature, which we meet as a creative and creating force. Spinoza distinguishes between *natura naturata* - nature as a product, as something that exists - and *natura naturans*: nature as something that creates, that constantly propels itself and therefore sends new beings into existence. On Isca's paintings we see both: Nature as grand and calm, which we can inhabit because we ourselves are nature, and nature as something wide and powerful and mysterious, something that made all human beings and will, one day, destroy them.

In Sebastian's paintings, the setting seems similar, we are back in nature. Only the eye is focused on human beings and their reactions to their natural environments.

When I look at Sebastian Blanck's paintings I am reminded of precious things lost. Before technology - before the cars, the airplanes, the ads on the walls, the screens in our living rooms and our pockets - there must have been a world in which we were living with nature and each other. If there ever was such a life, I imagine it looking like the paintings of Sebastian. A world that seems to consist of a large garden with a lake, woods, and a few family members.

Unlike Isca, who works from found photography - Sebastian takes photographs of people close to him and transforms them into drawings and paintings. The immediate first impression is beauty. The second is calm. Those who follow Sebastian's Instagram account - and it is worth getting on Instagram just for his account, like I did - the effect is cumulative. It becomes part of the beautiful side of our life. The part that makes you sit still for a moment, looking forward to the scent of a time gone - a time that, if you were so fortunate, you experienced because you grew up without a television. With parents whose idea of a vacation was to spend a month in a small house in the countryside or with a grandmother whose idea of relaxing was to take long walks in nature.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, the postings have become more frequent. You can see how productive Sebastian is. He started to post the process itself as well, beginning with a few lines of drawings of a flower or a tree - like a sophisticated coloring book which then slowly gets filled in with color. Sebastian's pandemic works remind us that we are surrounded by only

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a few people, and the same few people all the time. After a while, the cumulative effect is to reveal the lived truth of our time, our collective loneliness.

When you look at the people on "Silhouette Lake," one of Isca's most astonishing works, you cannot help wondering - who are those people? There seem to be old people and people in the middle of life and small children, all of them connected to each other, everyone on his or her own. They seem like a large family - but it is hard to say why; something in their posture that speaks of closeness and intimacy. And somehow, it's easy to imagine the two boys on Sebastian's painting "Purple Frozen Lake" marching along the same shore, in the snow, on a bright icy winter day, happy to play, to engage, to move around in their contained but rich world, on their way to a warm and safe room which we don't see, but which we somehow feel is waiting for them.

Which brings me to the mesmerizing aspect of how much Isca's and Sebastian's paintings are in dialogue with each other. No, that might be the wrong word. There is something more profound going on: Isca and Sebastian each have their distinctive style, you would not mistake his work for her's or the other way round, but they seem connected on a deep level. They both use colors in a hyperbolic way, there is a hint of the exuberance of pop-art which counteracts the semblance of realism. And of course, as they share a life, their paintings are two different ways of looking at similar experiences, which in itself constitutes a compelling and unusual artistic long-term experiment. This is not just artistic collaboration but something more complex and interesting: It's a life-long collaboration leading to two distinct artistic viewpoints on the same reality. So, exhibiting their works is also a celebration of two great painters walking through the thing called life together, leading a constant conversation, influencing each other, moving onward at the same pace with their eyes wide open.

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