

Tea with...



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You give life to outstanding portraits of women by mastering an excellent pictorial technique. The first thing we note by watching at your artworks is the absolute balance in the choice of tones, that gives the sense of harmony which characterizes all of your works. In Hyperrealism, often, one uses the strong contrast to easier give the illusion of a photographic realism. You are able, instead, to reach an high level of realism by using soft tones. Tell us about your own technique.

When I paint I use a limited palette of around 10 colors that I use for all my paintings. In using a smaller selected color palette I find that it gives harmony and balance to my work. **I build up the painting slowly using a glazing technique**, carefully applying thin glazes of color and medium until I achieve the final result. I shape the paint on the canvas, moving it, stretching it, and sometimes removing almost as much as I just applied, just to get the right shape and depth. After it is dry I go over it again with a new layer. When the light falls through the all the layers it gives the painting a glowing quality, making it look luminous.

I remember the first time I saw a painting by **Mark Rothko**, I was young and at that time I wasn't familiar with his work. It was a large painting with rectangles on a background in shades of red and it completely took me by surprise how powerful it was. It seemed to vibrate there on the wall; it was so demanding and powerful, but also intimate, drawing me in. **It evoked so many feelings in me**, making me cry when I saw it, not knowing why. But it also left me with the feeling you have inside when you've just fallen in love. He mastered the way he could make a painting look luminous and have that 'lit from within' quality and I want to create that same feeling in my work. When I mix colors I like to keep them clean by not over-mixing and making the paint look muddy. Growing up I spent a lot of time with my grandfather who was an artist and he taught me **the importance of using the best quality paints when you work**. He would sometimes special order some particular colors from France and I thought that was so exciting. He also told me to stay away from certain brands that when mixed produce a grey tone in the paint that is not desirable. Mainly I work with Winsor&Newton artist oil colors, but also a few from Rembrandt and Old Holland. The texture, color payoff and permanence is very nice and they mix beautifully. Using only the best quality materials is very important.

Choosing the canvas (linen) is a process; I have tested many different textures and surfaces before finding the one that really works best for me. I have my linen ordered from Belgium and it is beautiful. It still needs some preparation before I can work on it and it can take a week or more to prepare the canvas, priming it with thin layers of gesso and carefully san-

ding in-between layers until the surface is just right. It can't be too smooth, then the paint will not move correctly on the surface, but with a little bit of texture and 'tooth' I can work the paint the best. When running my hand over the canvas I know when it is ready. The brushes are very important too; I almost exclusively work with synthetic brushes and some of my favorites are Escoda, Raphaël and DaVinci. Often I buy brushes just so I can wear them down and work with them at their best. My favorite brush is now 16 years old and it has been with me through every painting during that time. It will be a sad moment when it finally wears completely out and I will have to find a new one to replace it. Sometimes I cut down brushes and shape them so they will work properly for me. Often I cannot find the ones I need so I have to improvise, and whenever we travel I always visit art supply stores searching for new brushes.

When working I tend to lock myself away and just paint. I really don't want to leave the studio and feel annoyed at interruptions, becoming a bit of a recluse. In a perfect world I would just paint all day, eat, have a glass of wine, sleep, repeat.



"A Girl Can Dream (Hermès)", Oil on canvas, 56 x 38 in



When traveling I can see potential paintings in all kinds of places. When **Tom** and I were visiting London in June we went to the cafe below the *National Portrait Gallery* for lunch and there was this curved wall along one side where people were sitting and having lunch, and they were so beautifully lit from the windows above. I had to stop myself not to take my phone out and snap pictures of little old ladies sipping tea, just so I could remember that light and recreate that later in my paintings. Maybe next time I will be more brave.

When selecting the fabrics or flowers that the model will wear in a painting, I look at what will work with her colors and try to find ones that will balance with that, to create a color harmony in the painting.

The background is always grey and it beautifully compliments the color of the fabric, flowers and models skin. I find the color grey so elegant. It is one of my favorite colors.

When mixing the grey color for the background, I use a brown, a blue and white. These colors are also used in the rest of the painting to create an overall balance. The premixed grey color is then put into an empty paint tube. Sometimes the grey can take on an almost silvery quality and really lifts out the model, creating a depth and dimension to the painting. I want it to feel like she is breaking the surface of the canvas, like she is breathing.

For some paintings I make headpieces out of paper or other materials, shaped into flowers or butterflies that the model will wear. I really enjoy making these and using them as props. **It is also fun browsing old antique stores or flea markets** looking for interesting and unusual items that can later be used in a painting.

When you are looking into a camera and slowly turning the lens to get the image into focus, that is

how I think of it when I work. The image coming into focus to finally be sharp. That's when I know that the painting is finished, when all the details are there and the image 'pops'. **Usually I turn the painting upside down or sideways, or look at it through a mirror.** Then I will know what needs more work, as it forces me to look at the painting differently. But being somewhat of a perfectionist and always obsessing over details, Tom is usually the one who tells me: 'it's done'.

In most of your paintings, the first ones, we can't help but notice a permanent presence of fashion labels or accessories by famous fashion-houses. What's the meaning of that series and in which way this is different from your last one?

As a woman in modern society you are told by media and advertising how to look, what to wear, what to own, and **what kind of mold you should fit into to be accepted**. I was playing with the idea of that and **how easy it is to be affected by it and sucked into the belief that you are not ok if you do not fit into this mold**. It is fun to surround yourself with things that you find beautiful and to express yourself through fashion; we have done this for a very long time and I do enjoy this too. But sometimes I think it is healthy to take a step back and realize that you are ok even if you don't own drawers of makeup or the latest it-bag. **Personally I think it is better to buy less but buy well.**

The latest paintings featuring women wearing *Marimekko* fabrics are a return to my Scandinavian roots and are influenced by the colors and materials here and by the old European masters such as **Vermeer, Ingres** and **Van Eyck**. Looking at the way they draped fabric, painted the skin or caught the light in their paintings, I try to capture that in my own work.

Moving back to Sweden I was also inspired by the beauty of the nature here and that of the women.

Midsommar (Midsummer)
Oil on linen, 72 x 48 in



Röd Blomma
Oil on canvas, 72 x 48 in

Your artworks born from the creative collaboration with your husband, Tom Maule, who is a professional photographer: you take the photos together to use them as reference for your paintings. Recently, we've seen in October an exhibition at the Scott Richards Contemporary, San Francisco, who featured both of your artworks, photos and paintings. You also have a great family tradition in art since your grandfather, Bror Halldin, was a celebrated artist. How much important was this artistic influence and the possibility to share the passion for art for your life and artistic path?

Tom and I have a creative collaborative relationship where our lives pretty much always revolves around art. We work together with models to take the photographs I then use as a reference for my paintings. We have worked together for so long it is almost like we are one person divided into two. When working together there is usually an understanding of how the final image should look and we always discuss this before a shoot. Sometimes if there is a disagreement, the struggle can produce something new and different than we first set out to capture and the final result is usually better because of it.

The attention to detail is very important and the smallest change in the pose of the models hand or tilt of the head can make a huge difference. I am forever running back and forth to the model; positioning her fingers, folding the fabric so it falls just right and Tom directs the model and is making sure that the light is right before taking the picture.

When we travel together we always visit art museums in the cities we go to, and walk around for hours going from museum to museum; looking at paintings and photographs or items on display that will inspire us and later make its way into our work.

Meeting Tom in 2001 was like finding the missing puzzle piece in my life, and we have been living and working together ever since.

Growing up with my grandfather being an artist made me realize from an early age that this was exactly what I wanted to do. Visiting him in his studio was always so exciting; there were huge rolls of linen canvas leaned up in a corner, frames, stretched canvases in piles, tools and stuff everywhere, a cat sleeping on a shelf, the radio playing. I was always more interested in following him around asking questions about different kinds of paint and materials than I was eating cake with the family in the house, celebrating Christmas or a birthday. He would mentor me from an early age, giving me paints, canvases he had stretched for me and brushes, for birthdays and Christmas, encouraging me to explore the material and learn about color and composition.

I think I was about 7 or 8 years old when I first started using oil paints and I still remember the first wooden box he gave me, filled with small tubes of paint, a little bottle of turpentine, one of linseed oil and a few brushes. It smelled wonderful and I kept that box for a

long time.

We would sometimes go out into nature together, where he would snap polaroids that he would use for his own work, to help him remember the colors and composition of the scene he would paint later. He would point out certain things like; how would you mix the color of the dead grass in the fall or the particular shade the sky would take on a winter afternoon?

Seeing my grandfather live as an artist made me realize that it was ok to paint for a living, to be an artist.

You are today one of the most renowned women artists and you say about your artworks that "are meant to reflect and give an honest approach to the issues that women face in modern society". What's your opinion about the equality of the sexes in the art field?

I think that women often face challenges that can be difficult to manage in modern society; juggling work, motherhood and every day life, trying to live up to quite impossible expectations.

The art world has always been dominated by men and part of it I think has to do with that women often devote their lives to raising children, making it hard sometimes to have the kind of time it takes to fully pursue a career in the art world.

But look at women such as Marina Abramovic and Georgia O'Keeffe. These are some incredible women with what they accomplished in their lives. Yes, as women we might have to work a little harder to prove ourselves, but I still feel incredibly fortunate to get up every morning, doing what I really love and calling it work. I am very lucky.

It's a rite for us, any established artist who came through here ends the interview by launching a Never Give Up message for our audience of young aspiring artists.

My dad always used to say: "I think the purpose in life is to have fun". While that might seem a bit too uncomplicated, I think that there is a lot to that. If you truly love what you do and have fun doing it, it will show in your work.

If you are willing to try and fail, then you also have the chance to succeed. It is about 5% inspiration and 95% hard work and dedication, but if you truly love what you do it is so worth it.

If you feel like your path in life is to be creative and you are willing to put all you have into your work, sometimes foregoing things like a normal social life and a 9 - 5 existence, I say go for it.

You are here for a very short time, make the most of it.

www.halldinmaule.com



"Imitation of Life"
Oil on canvas, 56 x 38 in

