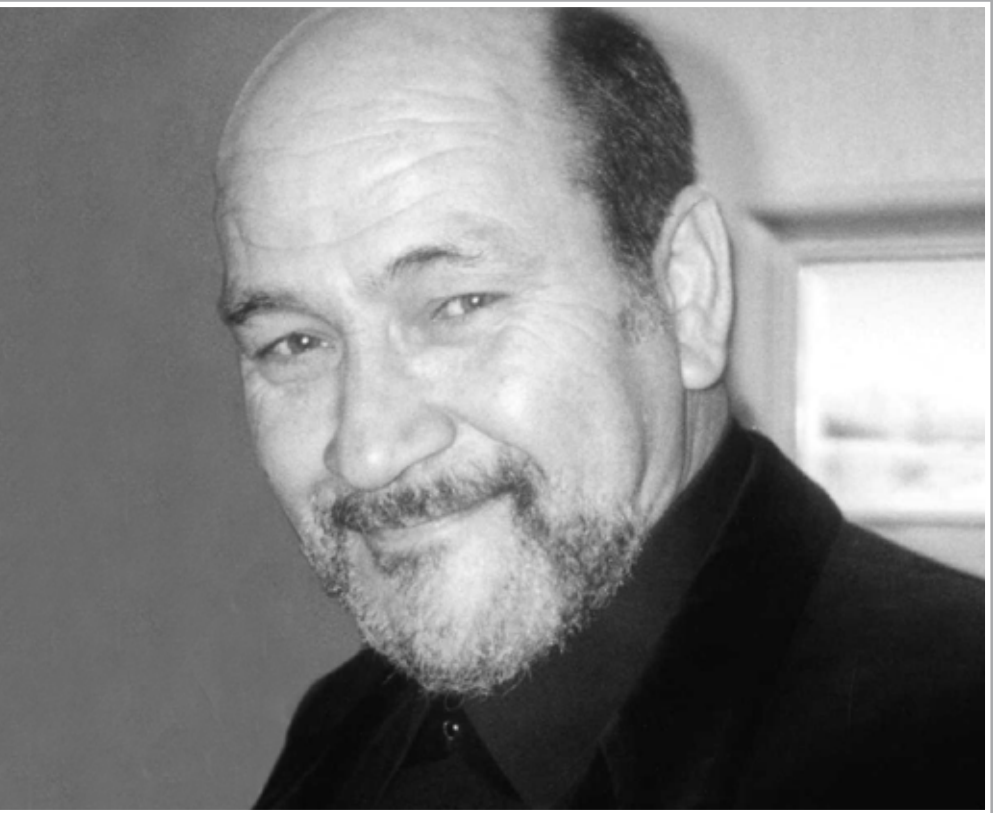


**Ernst Redl –
An exceptional life**
The Vita of a painter



REDL.

An exceptional life

It is a life with many twists and turns; one that cannot be quickly summarised. Redl's spirit is too restless, too bold, the travels and experiences that inspire his art too exceptional. Redl is a rare human spirit which experienced the joy and inner turmoil of several lives. At the core of his legacy is the art of painting.

Redl was born to Viennese working class parents at the height of the Second World War in 1943. His mother was a seamstress, his father, during peacetime, a waiter, in wartime, a soldier. Already at the age of three Redl's unrestricted childhood ends. His father returns having lived all the horrors of being a prisoner of war. Abrupt reprimands, prohibitions and restrictions now determine the boy's life. A critical cornerstone in Redl's life trajectory has been laid.

His father is steadfast in his desire to educate his son on the basics of survival. His young life is marred by rebukes and draconian punishments. He is hardly praised and then only for extraordinary achievements. As a result, Redl develops unparalleled motivation. Success for him means love and recognition. The artist is able to read and write before he begins formal schooling. Drawing and painting become his favorite pastimes. He is so good at these that his drawing teacher excuses him from class, enabling him to freely cultivate his creativity.

Escape into the extraordinary

Already during his schooling Redl has a longing to break free. His passions for painting and for increasingly extreme travel are constants throughout his entire life. He wants to venture out, perhaps to escape the parental confines and restraints of his childhood home. Free of limitations, conformity, traditions and constraints, he dreams of faraway countries, different cultures, unknown landscapes. He makes these dreams his reality. He embarks on longer and longer bicycle journeys, which lead him each passing year farther from home.

At age 14 he begins an apprenticeship as a lithographer at a print shop in Vienna, while working weekends at a restaurant to save money for his travels. He first goes to Italy, then Switzerland, then to Paris and London. Spain and North Africa follow. Redl always travels alone. The money is barely enough for food, he sleeps mostly outdoors, which is new, exciting and fascinating to him.

These long journeys, the loneliness and direct contact with nature associated with them are essential aspects of Redl's paintings. Only a person who has experienced nature in deserts, in tropical jungles, on pristine islands in the South Pacific or in the majestic glaciers of the Himalayas is able to recreate these with such intensity. His resilience and his tenacity in achieving any goal he set forth for himself are clearly reflected in his works. He uncompromisingly takes up difficult themes and artistic challenges with the same fervor and determination as he does in his travels and masters these often only after years of experimentation.

Redl embarks the last, most dangerous and longest bicycle trip of his lifetime at age seventeen towards the North Cape. He pedals a 9,000 kilometers round trip by himself. With several stops along the way, he reaches his destination in six weeks and wins a bet that nets him a meager 500 Schillings (about € 35). He again achieves a self-imposed goal.

With his schooling successfully behind him and a diploma under his belt, Redl leaves Vienna for good, just before his eighteenth birthday. He moves to Zurich, works as a graphic designer, and seeks new challenges in nature in the surrounding mountains. Here his adventures become longer and more risky. During a planned solo winter tour to the North face of the Matterhorn he falls, barely escaping death. Redl is, however, only interested in the superlative. It is the extraordinary which matters most and which defines him. The same holds true in his painting. His works reflect the experiences of his youth, the tremendous patience these experiences demanded of him and his striving determination for perfection.

The enormous difficulties involved in naturalistic and representational painting provide Redl the artistic challenge he seeks. It is here where he can compete with the greatest painters in the history of art. Redl is keenly aware at the onset just how great the distance between them is. He performs hundreds of colourisation experiments, researches the secrets of the Old Masters and is able to recreate these more than anyone thought possible. The most enticing motifs for him are the ones that cannot even be painted: garish orange clouds, glowing lava, glistening light or one of the many fine details of an elaborate

carpet. Redl finds his greatest satisfaction in painting the seemingly impossible. This is not art for art sake, but rather art driven to the outermost realm of the artistically possible.

Setting out to “conquer” the entire world

Redl remains in Zurich for five years. Looking for new challenges, he plans a journey to India with his first wife who he met in 1965. Redl ends the second of so many different chapters of his life in 1966 in a VW bus he restores himself. Instead of India, the couple continually lengthens their trip. After five and a half months and numerous adventures and dangerous encounters, Redl and his wife make their way to Australia, which would become the focal point of his artistic creations in the future. The rich country with its booming economy in the 1960's enabled him to find work easily. In Sydney, with the ocean omnipresent in its idyllic beaches, its hundreds of bays and its jagged cliffs, Redl increasingly turns towards seascapes.

Redl's search for new compositions and unusual colors intensifies in Australia. To paint water is a new challenge for him, the problems of naturalistic representations are enormous. He captures flowing structures in large waves and attempts to recreate dancing light over the water. He does not paint much though, and instead works in a print shop to earn money for his next journey. Redl sells his works to friends and acquaintances and for the first time to a small gallery. Encouraged by his success, he increasingly dedicates himself to his painting. He experiments, makes and studies color schemes and tries

out different primers and paint mixtures. As with everything in his life, he is critical to the very last detail and becomes dissatisfied with himself. He is also disillusioned by the flat effect of the acrylic paints he had used up until that time. Now he attempts to use oil paints which are increasingly difficult to master.

However, his life is not yet defined by painting. Redl's objective is to again embark on a great journey that is longer, more exotic and more adventurous. He travels to New Guinea, Indonesia, Borneo, the Philippines and Malaysia in 1970. Some of these are life threatening adventures driven by his urge for great experiences. Redl and his wife do not return to Europe for another six years.

If Redl's seascapes exude a virtually tangible realism, it is the intent of the painter for the observer to virtually "feel" the cold from the mountainscapes he paints, just as Redl experiences all of these things himself. He "feels" with his works. Just as life experiences fade into memory, varied natural themes flow together to create a landscape of imagery: tropical towers of clouds over pastoral meadows, peaceful hillsides in a desert-like twilight; rivers meandering through dry landscapes, glaciers cover walls of ice surrounded by a turquoise blue sea. There is always a unique element of tangible reality that is made possible only by intensely experiencing it. As a result, Redl continually succeeds in capturing nature in its purest form.

Upon his return to Europe and subsequent move to Munich, he begins his ascent in the art world. He devotes his time entirely to painting and continues to study the painting techniques of the Old Mas-

ters. He experiments further with colour and in a few years rises from an unknown hobby painter to an artist who gives new insights into landscape painting. He again embarks on journeys, only this time, as a painter. He seeks landscapes, whose representations on canvas create new challenges. These are moods that inspire. He also collects thousands of photographs of nature motifs from which numerous works ensue.

Redl holds close his ideas in rough sketches which have handwritten notes scrawled all over them. These include large arrows that point to the direction of the sunlight, shadings that separate darkness and light, comments such as “keep reddishness”, “not too dark” or “note back-light”. These are not particularly interesting drawings artistically. These notes become reminders of the most important aspects, which, in and of themselves, are reminders of his original idea several years later.

Redl returns to Australia. Inspired by the eerie emptiness of the fifth continent, the artist sketches preliminary ideas for the triptych “Erdzeitkrümmung” (“earthtime warp”). This completely “different” work builds a bridge that connects Redl’s painting to the world of Fantastic Realism.

Caught between two worlds

Redl's second stay in Australia forged an additional transformation: Torn between his roots embedded in European culture and his fascination for Australia, he decides to commute back and forth. He cannot and does not want to live in just one place. He and his wife consequently buy a house in Sydney. When his marriage falls apart shortly thereafter, he completely dissolves his household in Munich and rents a studio in Italy, and thus commutes back and forth between Europe and Australia alone. In this creative phase he paints specifically smaller formats, harmonious, almost monochromatic paintings, which nonetheless exude a color effect rarely achieved.

In 1984, Redl buys a remote piece of property on the East coast of Australia. It is set in a valley surrounded by mountains through which a crystal clear river flows. The hill with its spectacular panoramic view is the ideal location to build a house with a studio and to transform the immediate surroundings from a rampant wilderness into a picturesque landscape. He is completely alone in nature here, alone with his great experiences and sensibilities.

Redl spends a few months a year on his farm for five years. He meets his second wife in Munich in 1988. He is able to harmoniously maintain and enjoy life with her in all its many facets on two continents. They move their European home base from Munich to Nuremberg in 1990 and travel back and forth together. Their lives are full of contrasts: from working late at night in his studio to doing heavy physical work on the farm.

Between stays in their two worlds, Redl and his wife squeeze in journeys where they can find new ideas, landscapes and motifs. They take trips to Hawaii, Thailand, the Philippines, Canada and the Pacific Northwest (USA), travel to St Petersburg and Rome, Scotland, New Zealand and a 9,000 km trek into central Australia. Here the grandiose monolith Uluru, Ayers Rock, is more than a tourist destination for him. His inspired work “Uluru” is finished only two years thereafter.

As with almost all of his other works, the motif is not recreated in real surroundings. The perspective the painting shows does not exist. There is only a remnant of the feeling of a landscape, the vibrancy of its characteristic essence, which, like a kaleidoscope, includes all reminders of similar landscapes. It is a reality that is only apparent, which, like a dream, is real and authentically sensed.

When Redl dies after a short illness in Nuremberg in 2010, additional journeys and a variety of new paintings were planned. From the sketches and draft designs he leaves behind in his studio, one can only surmise what he wanted to bring to fruition as an artist. Indeed the sketches and paintings remain incomplete. Redl the artist will not be forgotten and will live on for all those who admire and collect his works and for those who honour his life. He will live on even more so in the hearts of those who treasure the spirit of Ernst Redl, of those who love the man far beyond his paintings.

REDL.