

ERWIN SCHATZMANN

Erwin Schatzmann is best known as the creator of large to monumental, colourfully painted wooden figures. He has been making a living from selling them for over 30 years. His lifestyle and thinking play a significant role in his art. Although his wooden sculptures stand on their own he says they are merely artefacts of a political, philosophical, and religious way of thinking and worldview.

“I didn’t want to become part of industrial society,” says Schatzmann, recalling his early days as an artist. His commercial training was followed by a three-year trip to Afghanistan, Nepal, and India. After that, he began making art. He had no role models, “except perhaps Beuys and Hundertwasser.” What he does cannot be explained by his background either: his parents were farmers who never went to museums.

He gained national recognition in 1996–1999 with his project “A Lake for Winterthur,” where he wanted to create an artificial lake in the landlocked city. The proposal was popular with the locals but nevertheless rejected at the ballot box at the time but that did not prevent him from launching a new edition in 2011 under the title “7 Lakes for Winterthur.”

He is well known in Winterthur and easily recognised by his extravagant, homemade clothes, which he sees as a form of communication and part of his work. His sculptures and benches stand in public places, including in the main church. He also paints and writes, and is himself a walking work of art. In Morgenland there is a room fully covered with short texts on the wall revealing his philosophical thinking and ideas. “I do not make art– one says– I live”.

The “Morgenland” (Land of Tomorrow) he has built in recent years is a kind of hut village settlement, a colourful and imaginary getaway to different world. We are most familiar with the term “Morgenland” from the Christmas

story, from the three wise men from the East who sought out the baby Jesus to worship him. He sure has a lot of Christmas baubles hanging up and Jesus and Mary are also revered here, appearing in pictures and sculptures everywhere.

But , as he explains, the Orient is simply the land in the east, where the sun rises, the light appears, and the morning dawns. The “Morgenland Off Space,” as it is called in full is located in the east of Winterthur. The “Morgenland” is inhabited by goddesses, soldiers, forest spirits, animals and bearded gatekeepers who appear at every turn. “Morgenland” easily evokes associations and images of the fairy-tale opulence of oriental architecture, of Schaherezada and Thousands and One Nights, of the splendor of Indian palaces and temples, undoubtedly influenced by his travels through Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, and Nepal.

However, the meaning of the name “Morgenland” is not least “the land of tomorrow,” the land of the future, referring to his resource-saving, recycling-based construction method and the comparatively modest ecological footprint of the sole inhabitant. Everything has a home here; nothing is out of place. Many items come from flea markets; he collects them. The basic building blocks of the complex are demolition materials from the former vinegar factory across the street.

“This is also a recycling project; I am an advocate of the zero waste living and anti-throwaway society,” says Schatzmann.

Morgenland in its colourful exuberance is undoubtedly a testament to unlimited human creativity. One has to co-habit the space with nature respectfully charting its own borders while protecting newly crafted and painted wooden creatures from storms, bad weather, leaves.



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Visiting Morgenland is a visually and intellectually stimulating experience both in summer, autumn, spring and winter and the weather and surrounding fields and woods add their own seasonal touch. Kids love this land of unrestricted fantasy and imagination.

Text: Maria Sorensen