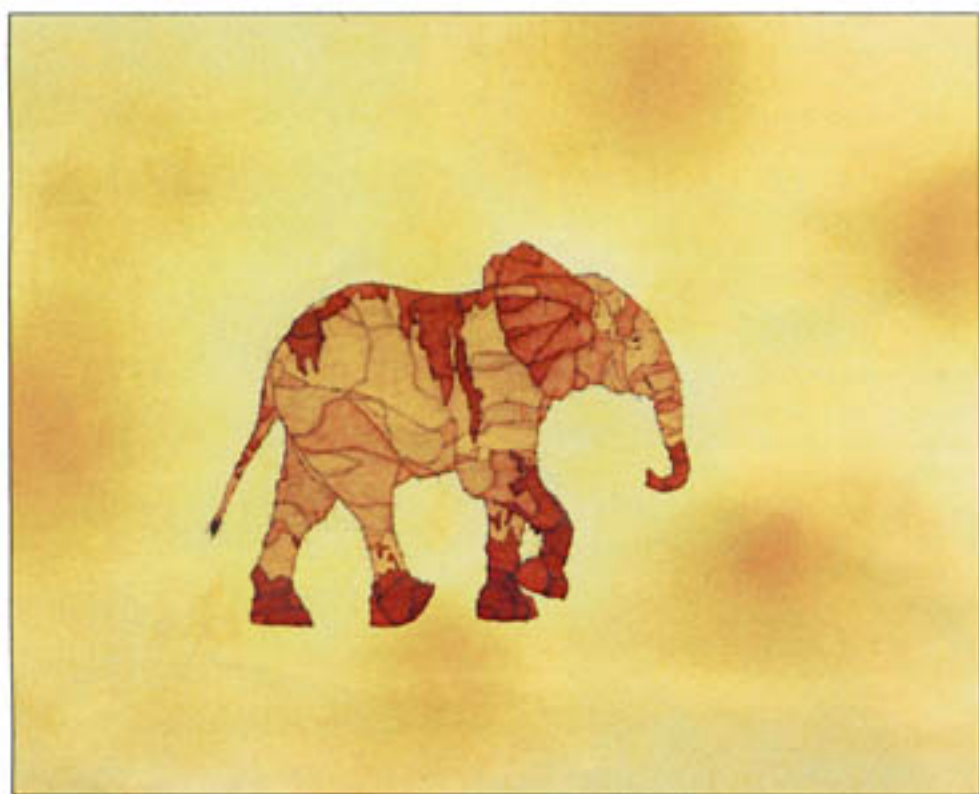


A blow for art

KEITH J FERNANDEZ chats up painter Austrian MICHAEL FERNER, who's blowing his way to artistic success



AN Austrian musician, actor and painter, Michael Ferner was a nurse before he started painting, bringing to his art a technique more commonly associated with the physically challenged: he blows ink around on delicate Milanese paper and then fills it in with water colours. "My topic is life. Impression, being fascinated with the Moment, is what counts. My pictures have comprised ordinary days, everyday routine life. Airplanes, vehicles, clowns, musicians, and sea animals. Colour is cast on paper as seen with the eye of a careful watcher, some stranger or alien person, or, a humorist," he says.

Ferner is merely one of a breed of artists looking at the Middle East as a doorway to the rest of Asia. To that end, he's participating at Ambiente Arabia, running at the Dubai International Exhibition Centre until Thursday, April 14. Previous exhibitions have been as far afield as Vermont, Birmingham and Munich. Excerpts from an interview with *gulfweekly*:

Why Dubai? What sort of market do you see here?

It's my first time here, Dubai is the door to the Middle and Far East – as my sales manager Isolde Kessler says. It is for us a completely new culture – with a young and expanding economy, new hotels, entrepreneurs. We are looking for galleries to work together with.

Who is your target audience?

Everybody with an open heart. Young and old, open for a smile with fun and positive feelings. Galleries, hotels, hospitals, new households....

What work are you bringing to Dubai?

A variety of my work including originals, fine art prints, licensing catalogues and a few samples of licensed products.

What single influence has shaped your work the most?

There is no single influence but every day's confrontation with art.

You've said painting has always been a means to achieve some goal. What goal? When did painting become important for itself?

Painting opens doors to conversing with people without learning all the different languages. My goal is artistically to make a statement on all the small and large themes in the world. Painting has become important in the last seven to 10 years as an emotional expression.

What philosophies do you seek to express with your work?

Through joy, humour and a smile we can open people's hearts to other issues.

Does not putting a painting and text onto the same canvas dilute the impact of both? Why do you do so?

No I don't think so. They can push each other into imbalance; they can multiply each other; they can deepen each other. I am a 'non-reader' but I skim passionately through books, literature and music. Often I find short but succinct sentences and thoughts which I want to give the viewer to take with him or her.

What plans for the future?

That we can understand everybody through art – it is the worldwide language without words. Through art I experience an openness – a discussion. I want to be open to all encounters.

Finally, what do you think art achieves?

Discussion – occupation (of your mind), new perspectives. It helps to understand and communicate without the need for different languages. *gwf*

(An original Michael Ferner sells between Euros 1000-20,000, while prints are Euros 130-250. Ambiente Arabia, DIEC, runs until April 14.)

