

**Steph Marx is a self-taught painter, whose oil- and acrylic paintings are influenced by the Expressionists of her native country, Germany, and the Surrealists of her home of choice, France.**

**How did I come to painting?** My moment of inspiration came from a school art project in which we could paint with a professional artist. I knew: this is for me, I want to paint, this is how I can express my inner world! I was always told “that is not something for people like us. It’s a hobby.” And so it remained for years. I studied politics and history, nourished my interests in reading and learning languages. Growing up as the eldest of nine children to a single-mother, there was no space for individuality. To survive in a permanently unsteady environment in a dysfunctional family, I kept everything inside. All changed in 2011 when I left for an Erasmus-year in France. There, I was no longer pushed into any roles and I restarted painting and never stopped since. It grew with the years, until I had to admit: I am an artist, I paint.

**What inspires me?** My artistic work is a psychological journey through the human soul. I work in series and create abstract acrylic and oil paintings that become more figurative as I progress in exploring the different forms that mental development can take.

I am inspired by the nature that surrounds me, extensive reading in the field of psychotherapy and my own experiences. In my works nature symbolises the unknown. The fragmented body parts and seemingly lost abstract shapes and figures on the other hand, deal with the repressed parts of the soul. I explore emotions such as fear, shame and resentment, as well as the theme of domestic violence against women and the structural inequality in the power structure between the sexes. Key words are: desire, obedience, abuse, unexpressed potential and transgenerational transmission of trauma. Colors are key to understanding my work. For me, red is the color of pain, blue is associated with sadness and depression, yellow is linked with new beginnings. Green, the newest color in my palette, represents the unknown that includes change. My very personal art has an universal character, because my aim is to show that understanding, for example through art, can be a path towards oneself. And those who know themselves can help shape the world around us, in a conscious and respectful way,