

Meet Isabelle Du Toit



We're excited to introduce you to the always interesting and insightful Isabelle Du Toit. We hope you'll enjoy our conversation with Isabelle below.

Isabelle, thanks for taking the time to share your stories with us today We'd love to hear about a project that you've worked on that's meant a lot to you.

My latest and most meaningful project is Requiem series of paintings Requiem is a lament for the dead.

An elegy, a poem for the suffering of the dead.

The idea of Requiem derives from my grief for the world around us. The outrageous amount of death from Covid, the wars, gun violence, the displacement of refugees, the loss of biodiversity, extinction of species and climate change. It is an elegy for the

dead, suffering, and the passage of time, along with all its hardships for humanity and the natural world. I aim to create a body of work that encompasses the pains of our fleeting and evolutionary existence on the planet. The common denominator for all: death.

I view trees as gentle beings silently observing, vessels witnessing our failings. Therefore, it feels natural to use them as an extension or hybrid of ourselves. I use branches and tree trunks as a vessel to explore our cruelty through flesh, decay, natural science, and biology. I incorporate elements such as blood, wounds, scars, bones, fungi, mummies, fossils, botanical drawings, and insect pinnings in great detail to create an intimate connection with each piece.

The exposed fresh flesh and wounds in the paintings are a metaphor for death, and suffering in the present.

The natural history elements are a metaphor for the past.

Together, they are meant to mobilize us for a future. To make us reflect on how we value life and the sacrifices needed to inhabit our planet. My signature dark backgrounds, present in all my works, are well suited for Requiem as they symbolize loneliness and the idea of looking into the abyss of infinity.





Great, appreciate you sharing that with us. Before we ask you to share more of your insights, can you take a moment to introduce yourself and how you got to where you are today to our readers.

I was born in Strasbourg, France. My parents emigrated to South Africa when I was in my early teens. I studied Art at Nelson Mandela University for three years. I then started working as a graphic designer in Cape Town. I married my husband and immigrated to the USA.

I went back to doing what I truly love the most: painting. I was lucky enough to find galleries interested in representing me. I now have representation in Dallas, Seattle, Palm Desert, Santa Fe, and Cincinnati. I have shown in Art Fairs in the USA and overseas, won awards, and participated in the London Art Biennale.

I am very proud and honored to say I was invited to exhibit five pieces from my Requiem series at NordArt in Germany from June 1 to October 6 this year for their 25th anniversary. NordArt is one of the largest annual contemporary art exhibitions in Europe. This is even more meaningful to me because even though I was born in France, I mostly spent the first 5-6 years of my life in Germany.

Most of my other series of works are about wildlife conservation. My latest series is called Refuge, where I stage animals in branches to open a discussion about the hardship of migration and the beauty of diversity. The idea with this series is to spark kindness towards “the other” and hopefully foster open-mindedness so that we can all get along with each other.

Requiem, shown here, is my newest series that I am the most proud of. I feel it is my most meaningful and personal work to date. It is also much more emotionally demanding on the viewer as it is asking us to look at our own existence and what it means to us. Even though some people may shy away from the subject matter, I feel the challenge is very much needed right now. We are in existential peril and need to take a hard look at ourselves and take action. Even though these works are emotionally hard to paint, I hope they will comfort/encourage people in whatever direction they need to search, make change, or just feel heard. My greatest hope is to show these pieces in Museums.





Can you share a story from your journey that illustrates your resilience?

I have been an immigrant from birth, moving from France to Germany to South Africa to the USA. As much as this has given me a colorful and interesting life, it is not without its hardships of never feeling like you belong anywhere. Always feeling like a tree without roots, searching for soil that is not there.

But I am also very grateful for this lifestyle. It has made me find “home” in nature. I’ve learned to find beauty wherever I am, and much joy in discovering and exploring. I think being a foreigner keeps my curiosity and empathy alive. It also helps me reflect on my own biases to try to be a better person.

Climate change is now displacing me as hurricane Ian has made it impossible to stay in my home.

This too is teaching me to listen to nature above all else. She is loud and clear. I hope to honor her in my work.





Are there any books, videos, essays or other resources that have significantly impacted your management and entrepreneurial thinking and philosophy?

My preferred way to feel impacted is to sit quietly outside and watch and listen for the natural world to reveal itself. If you are still long enough the stories simply come to you! I would highly recommend these books.

“The Hidden Life of Trees” and the inner Life of Animals” by Peter Wohlleben

“The Overstory” by Richard Powers

“The Tree” by Colin Tudge

“The Genius of Birds” by Carl Safina

“Animal Wise” by Virginia Morell

and any of Frans de Waal’s books