

PHOTO: HELGE THUE



SMART ART: MUNCH MEETS THE RAMONES

Her paintings are full of strong and complex emotions like despair, transcendence and melancholy – feelings also expressed a hundred years earlier by her countryman Edvard Munch. But this artist is a cheerful and attractive, modern Norwegian woman who loves rock n' roll.

When we met her in March, painter Trude Semb was wearing a black T-shirt lauding The Ramones. One of her most affecting paintings is called "Children of the Revolution" (also the title of an old T-Rex rock song), showing a trio who seem to have lost hope and seen their ideals and dreams shattered by hard experience.

"I don't want to be an intellectual or academic artist. I want to say something important about what it means to be a human being," Semb said.

Semb's works have a timeless quality, as though she is on a voyage of discovery into the depths of the human soul. Not surprisingly, she is a great fan of the German

pre-war expressionists. But the Oslo-based artist is quick to observe that the German painters of the 1920s and 1930s were in their turn heavily indebted to the trailblazing work of Norwegian master Munch.

Many of Semb's works — including the Christ-like "Angel," which has some of the qualities of a Rouault -- seem to be portraits of Africans. Indeed, the artist has been inspired by extensive travel in the Middle East and Northern Africa, although she does not use models for the paintings," she said.

Semb said she is indebted to her longtime mentor and teacher Rados Dedic, an expatriate originally from Montenegro who taught at the State Academy of Art in Oslo. Dedic committed suicide in October 2000.

Trude Semb is well aware that her work stands out from the pop culture crowd as much more serious and more gloomy than most. But her paintings have found their way into the private homes of several major art collectors on both sides of the Atlantic. She has a studio in the SoHo district of

New York City, which she describes as "the most wonderful city in the world." In November, she will show some of her works at the well-known Nello restaurant on the Upper East Side.

"A lot of people are so scared by my work. They think it is too intense. But some Americans who know about my work seem to like it," she observed.

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For more info, see: www.sembart.com.