

*Sabine Moritz, painter:
'Having grown up in East Germany, I feel like a dinosaur'*

By Karen Wright (November 12, 2015)



Moritz's loft-like studio space in Cologne is filled with light Aubrey Wade

Painter Sabine Moritz lives and works in the middle of Cologne. Her studio is in a bright courtyard off a main street and I am grateful for her tip of looking for the blue door or otherwise I might still be searching for her.

She has been in this loft-like bright space for 10 years, sharing the floor with her husband and fellow artist Gerhard Richter who has his studio on the other side. "I like it very much. I had a time maybe 10 years where I worked alone – I was so isolated."

Her workspace faces the courtyard. "I am an old-fashioned person, I need light." The flats opposite feature in some of her recent drawings.

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Moritz was born in 1969 in Quedlinburg, East Germany; her father was a chemist and he died in an industrial accident. The family managed to move to Darmstadt in West Germany in 1984, and she recalls that they all shared a room, she and her twin brothers and the dachshund. The dog had accompanied her on her childhood rambles to get away from the problems of living in a place where life was boring, restrictive and "filled with pressure and fear". Her mother now lives near Moritz and Richter in Düsseldorf.

Moritz always knew that she wanted to be an artist, studying first at Gestaltung Offenbach before entering the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf. She started in Markus Lüpertz's class, but wanted to move to Richter's; he said "you will have to fight for your place", as he had promised his students that as it was his last class he would not take in any more. "I got a small space by the wash basin and I glued up my drawings to say: 'This is my space!'"

These drawings carry the spatter marks of students cleaning their brushes, the history of her not always easy life in Richter's class. Moving from art student to muse – and marriage and young children – it would not be surprising for an artist to pack it in and stop working, but this is not in Moritz's DNA.

Much of her work is about memory: losing her father, her country and resorting to speaking Russian in a strange world... She admits when she first moved to the West this was a problem: "Having grown up in East Germany, in a way I feel now like a dinosaur. When I came to West Germany and was in a normal class, no one was interested in my story. I was the strange girl in the knitted pullovers."

She admits that after dreaming for so long of life in the West, she was surprised by her reaction to her new freedom. "I had such homesickness. You went to school and you had the same language, but you could not understand."

She shows me her books of carefully clipped out newspaper pictures that are often the inspiration for her work. I ask if she will ever go back to her earlier drawings of the East and she says, somewhat sadly, "It is 'a naivety' that I lost".