

Elsa von Arnim

artist / painter

* May 5th, 1888 in Züsedom, † April 3rd, 1980 in Darmstadt.

Elsa Maria Erna Blanka Louise von Arnim was born May 5th, 1888 in Züsedom. She was the seventh and youngest child of her parents, Carl v. Arnim (1846 – 1913), lord of the manor Züsedom and his wife Sophie neé Countess of Schwerin (1861 – 1933). Züsedom lies on the northern border of the Uckermark, about 8 kilometres south-east of Pasewalk. Her grandfather Hans v. Arnim (1789 – 1861) had bought the estate 46 years before. It remained in the family's possession until 1945 and offered Elsa a close and intimate family abode up to that time.



Front view of the manor house in Züsedom



Elsa von Arnim, 1931

At an early age Elsa discovered her extraordinary talent which she strived to promote enthusiastically and with great determination by taking up intensive lessons, studying and occupying herself with her own artistic activities. All through her life she painted everything her eyes and her heart could catch hold of, mostly oil paintings.

After she had married Bruno Schwarze her name was Elsa Schwarze-von Arnim. But she always continued signing her works of art with her maiden name and was largely known as Elsa von Arnim in the world of art.

“I paint everything with my heart's hand”, she said of herself. She painted people, landscapes, flowers, still lifes, interiors, street scenes, harbours – preferably under southern sunlight but also elsewhere. Wherever she stayed she captured the colours, the forms, the light and the atmosphere. Her oeuvre comprises hundreds of paintings whose number could not yet be fully registered. About 200 paintings got lost during World War II. Up to her old age she was busy working with her brush, palette and canvas surrounded by her pictures. Numerous exhibitions paid tribute to her works of a life time.



Bunch of flowers
from a cottage garden



Chioggia 1966



Still life with newspapers and birdcage
Paris 1930

Biography

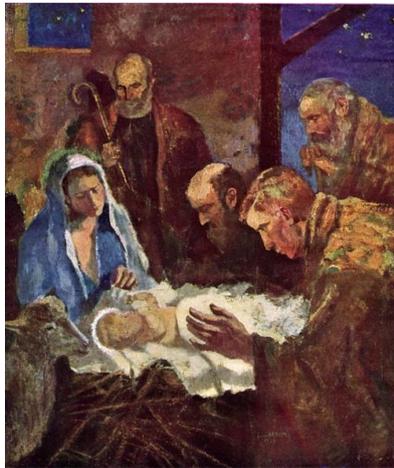
- 1888 She is born in Züsedom, Uckermark.
- 1895 – 1904 She has private tuition by female tutors.
- 1904 – 1905 She takes drawing lessons in Dresden.
- 1905 She begins her studies in Berlin.
- 1906 – 1914 She takes up her education in master studios in Berlin:
(Skarbin's, Linde-Walter's, Elisabeth Fischer's, Karl Wendel's
Kayser-Eichberg's, Mossow's, Anni Löwenstein's, Levin Fun-
ke's, Wilhelm Blanke's).
- 1914 The first exhibition of her works in Leipzig
and Munich;
- 1914 – 1915 She works as an assistant nurse at the
St Elisabeth hospital in Berlin.
- 1915 She resumes her artistic occupation.
- 1921 She spends a number of months in Rome.
- 1921 – 1925 She undertakes many study trips
painting in oil, water colours and
doing etchings.
- 1925 She spends several months in Venice
and Positano.
- 1926 – 1929 She has her own studios in Ascona and
Travemünde.
- 1929 – 1931 She has her own studio in Paris.
- 1932 She has her own large exhibition in Berlin in
the Landhaus of the Province of Brandenburg
- 1934 She marries Dr. of Engineering Bruno Schwarze.
- 1935 – 1936 She stays on the island Lussin on the Adriatic Sea, in Santa
Margarita near Rapallo.
- 1937 – 1938 She stays in Arenshop, Polzin and Kolberg.
- 1940 – 1942 She visits Treviso near Venice, Padua and Florence.
- 1943 – 1944 She spends time in Norway; among other places in Oslo,
Balestrand on the Sognefjord.
On her return to Germany a number of her pictures were
destroyed, robbed or were missing.
- 1945 – 1946 She escapes to Bielefeld via various stop overs.
- 1951 She takes up residence in Darmstadt.
- 1960 Her husband Dr. of Engineering, Dr. h.c. Bruno Schwarze dies.
- 1980 Elsa dies in Darmstadt.



Elsa von Arnim

This biography is basically taken from an essay by D.S. titled “Elsa Schwarze-von Arnim”. It was published on the occasion of her 60th birthday May 5th, 1948.

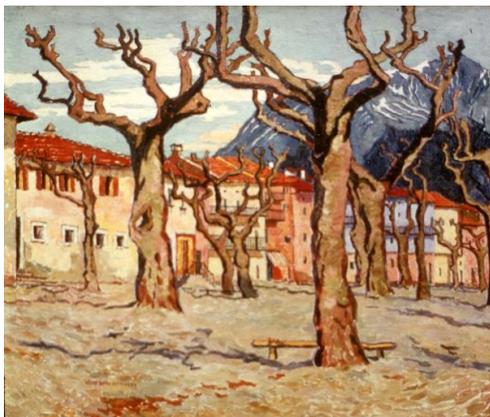
The following appreciation of Elsa’s work is taken from a brochure which was published for the exhibition called “Kunstmarkt Darmstadt 1972” and comprised exhibitions from a number of galleries and art organisers. Among these was a jubilee exhibition of Elsa von Arnim, too. The essay is not signed and undated.



Holy night, 1914

“Born May 5th, 1888 in the castle of Züsedom Elsa von Arnim still belongs to the generation of women who had to fight for the right of going to university and especially for the precondition of being able to work in an artistic profession. Only after long imploring requests the youngest daughter Elsa, seventh child of the lord of the manor von Arnim-Züsedom and his wife, neé Countess of Schwerin, was allowed to start her education in drawing. In the winter of 1905/06 was finally given permission to start her education in Berlin. There she came into contact with Impressionism and Elsa von Arnim’s works of art begins in this style, but she soon exceeds this manner and develops her own mature visual language.

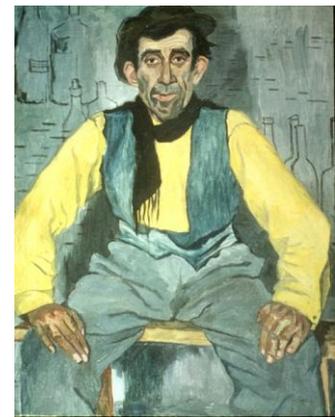
Up to 1914 she is a student in different studios in Berlin, among others. Professor Skarbina’s, Professor Linde-Walter’s, Elisabeth Fischer’s and students of the Bracht followers, Karl Wendel and Kayser-Eichberg, of Prof. Mossen’s, with the etcher Anni Löwenstein’s and in Levin Funke’s studio. Elsa’s first own etchings were included in the international book trade exhibition in Leipzig in 1914. And in the same year some of her etchings were included in an exhibition in the Glaspalast (glass palace) in Munich.



Piazza in Ascona, 1928



Fishermen in Veere, 1930



Portuguese man, 1930

Then World War I interrupted her work. She takes up residence in Salzburg, then works in Rome, undertakes educational trips through Italy, spends a number of months in Venice, later in Positano and Ascona.

After working for quite some time in her own studios in Ascona and on the Lago Maggiore she goes to Paris in 1929 after a short return to Germany. After her marriage to privy councillor, later president Dr. h.c. Bruno Schwarze in Berlin in 1934 her circle of art friends expands by many new friends. The Schwarze-



The little porcelain castle in Darmstadt, 1951 - 1958

von Arnim's house became the specific centre of their meetings. In the years 1943 / 1944 she took up residence in Norway.

In 1946 the artist Elsa hikes to Bielefeld with her painter's belongings in a rucksack and an indestructible will to go on working.



Sirmione on the Lago di Garda, 1957

When in 1951 the removal to Darmstadt is accomplished her paintings take up the greatest part of her not so very large possessions.

She soon gained views of the expanse of this city with its landscape intruding from all sides.

She was able to paint and express this in her paintings like she had done in so many towns and landscapes in other regions before.

In August 1955 Elsa Schwarze-von Arnim was able to show a large part of her own works of art in a collective exhibition in Darmstadt.



Elsa von Arnim, date unknown

The masters that Elsa Schwarze-von Arnim names as crucial encounters in her own artistic development are Vincent van Gogh, Cezanne, the early Utrillo and Vlaminck. Of these she feels closest to van Gogh, because he, too, felt the ardour of nature and painted surrounded by nature. "Very often, though," she once said, "I catch myself wandering outside observing nature with Cezanne's eyes and then like Matisse's when I gaze at a melon in front of an open window. At the end you find your own way and paint your own pictures the way you experience life." With great adoration she speaks of Käthe Kollwitz, who she met in Berlin and Ascona. A rich number of works were displayed to the alert eyes of the observer at that time, from decades of creative activities of a 70-year long period of travelling through the world with open eyes. It was a copious work diminished by about 200 paintings that had been destroyed in 1945.

"If you don't have any children and live in this world only to paint, you mourn a lot about such a loss," the artist said in her first conversation in Darmstadt.

"I paint everything with my heart's hand..." This sentence about herself can be found in an essay the artist Elsa Schwarze-von Arnim wrote herself. It is the declaration of a woman who did not feel her artistic genius to be so much a claim on her intellectual capacity but as a vocation for her service to the world of colours and forms, to the phenomenon of light and the



A bunch of zinnia, presumably 1965

independent existence of the objects human beings handle and that have something to tell them.”

In 1959 Margarete Dierks summed up the artistic development of the painter at the end of a newspaper article written on the occasion of an exhibition displaying Elsa's life work in the Kunsthalle Darmstadt in the following words, "In all her manifold variety that the artist's lifework displays to us a discontinuity or a drastic change is nowhere to be found. She followed her own way consistently and after she was induced by the French Modernists at the turn of the century she remained uninfluenced by the coming and going styles of the decades.

The work of her later years stands out clearer, sharper in its contrasts, more intense in its manner and its colouring. With all her artistic craftsmanship nothing is mere routine, with all the intensification of her characteristics nothing has become mere style.

The perceptible and visible genuineness in experience and artistic rendering make up the atmosphere of Elsa von Arnim's paintings, an appealing, bright, positive atmosphere surrounded by so much negation by the Modernists.”



Elsa von Arnim, 1953