



SOL KJØK

on travels and the human body



It feels like it's a couple of hundred degrees on the roof deck of The Mothership, Sol Kjøk's artists' collective in Greenpoint, New York.

The Norwegian-born painter has been on the move since she left the cold mountains of Eastern Norway. She traveled the world studying painting, languages and art history, before settling down in New York in the late 90s to attend Parsons School of Design, getting an MFA degree in painting. During her time in New York she has founded an artists' collective, run the NYC Marathon four times and opened the non-profit arts venue NOoSPHERE on the Lower East Side of Manhattan.

Sol (which means "sun" in Norwegian) is true to her name: full of energy, brightness and a catching laughter.



VIENNA

Drawing was her first and greatest love, but growing up in a small village in Eastern Norway, it was hard to find like-minded people.

– Isn't this roof deck amazing? You should have seen some of the parties and events we have had here!

She smiles and starts telling us about the building's history.

– Way back it was a chips and pickles factory, before Richard Serra used it as his art studio for a number of years. I got this place after a protracted battle with my Italian landlord, who tried to evict me from my previous live-work loft when he purchased the building to turn it into a film studio. After many twists and turns, confrontations in court and showdowns in the street, the Sicily-born owner turned into a collector of my work and a patron of Norwegian art in general. In the end, he also offered me the storefront in Manhattan that now serves as NOosphere Arts.

She smiles brightly.

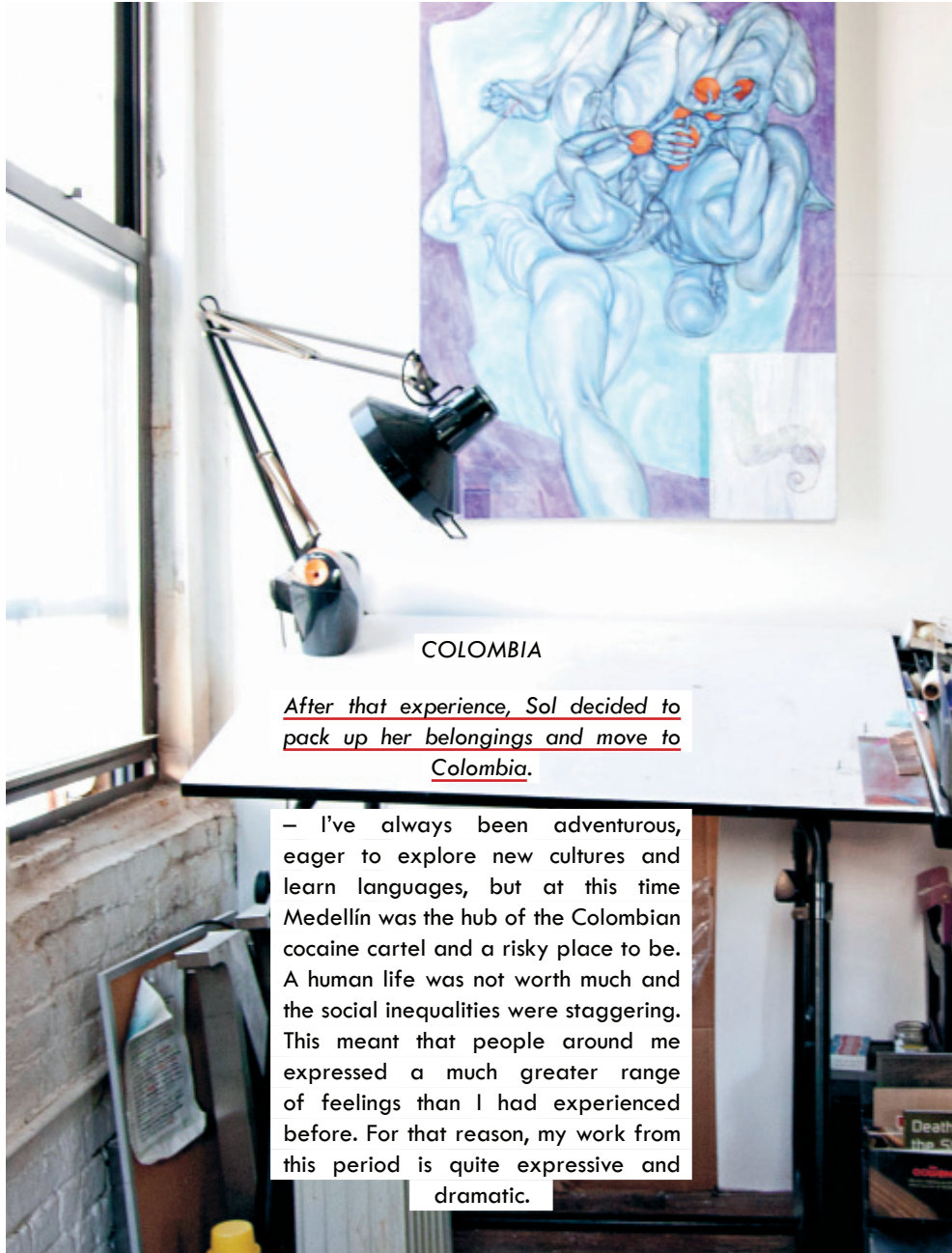
– I left as soon as I got the chance and traveled to Paris where I stayed for two years. Then I moved to Vienna thinking I was going to attend the Academy of Fine Arts and follow the footsteps of my biggest idol, the Austrian expressionist painter Egon Schiele.

– I was young and stupid and thought I could just show up at the Academy, but of course they had already had their entrance exams and there was no way for me to get admitted. Damn it, I thought, and decided to pretend that I was one of the students.

Her plan worked well for three months, until a professor sat down next to her and commented on the sketch in a life drawing class.

– He liked my work and had a lot of interesting things to say, but then he asked which class I belonged to and who my main professor was. I couldn't pull off another bluff, so I was summarily exposed and thrown out in the middle of class.

She laughs.



COLOMBIA

After that experience, Sol decided to pack up her belongings and move to Colombia.

– I've always been adventurous, eager to explore new cultures and learn languages, but at this time Medellín was the hub of the Colombian cocaine cartel and a risky place to be. A human life was not worth much and the social inequalities were staggering. This meant that people around me expressed a much greater range of feelings than I had experienced before. For that reason, my work from this period is quite expressive and dramatic.





HER WORK

The white brick wall in Sol's studio is covered with paintings ranging from a few inches to more than 13 foot high. Entire canvases filled with human bodies in odd positions, often interacting in a single, massive swirl.

– I've been drawing all my life, and as far back as I can remember, people were what I was most compelled to depict. This was a natural affinity: I'm just really interested in the human body, human relations and interactions. Moreover, the human figure is a continuous visual challenge. There are so many nooks and crannies to explore that I'm never going to master it fully, and therefore never get bored of it.

Sol's art is based on scenarios and performances she enacts with friends in her studio. Together they make pitiful attempts at acrobatic exercises trying to push themselves into challenging positions.

– We walk the tight rope, climb wires suspended from the ceiling, balance on balls and twist our bodies into a myriad of uncomfortable poses. It is important that this initial physical experience resonates in the finished image, as I strive to convey a bodily awareness of the paradox of strength and vulnerability that is the human condition. I'm looking to explore the physical limits and potential of our bodies. That's why I love endurance tests like running the marathon and creating wall paintings in larger-than-life format.





What is the fin-est thing you know?

– To sail around Manhattan Island in a small boat together with good friends. Bobbing on the waves where the sunlight is reflected, brings forth the peace and bliss that one gets from being in nature. The contrast to the urban and chaotic backdrop of the Manhattan Skyline is just priceless. I also love to dance with a bunch of good people on a rooftop in Brooklyn to live gypsy music, with a crackling bonfire in a metal barrel and all the lights of Manhattan sparkling against the night sky on the other side of the water.