

True to nature

Are the pebbles, sand and sawdust in Jochen Schmidt's vivid landscapes real or painted? Ann Warnock reaches out

PHOTOGRAPHS:
PAUL MCCREDIE

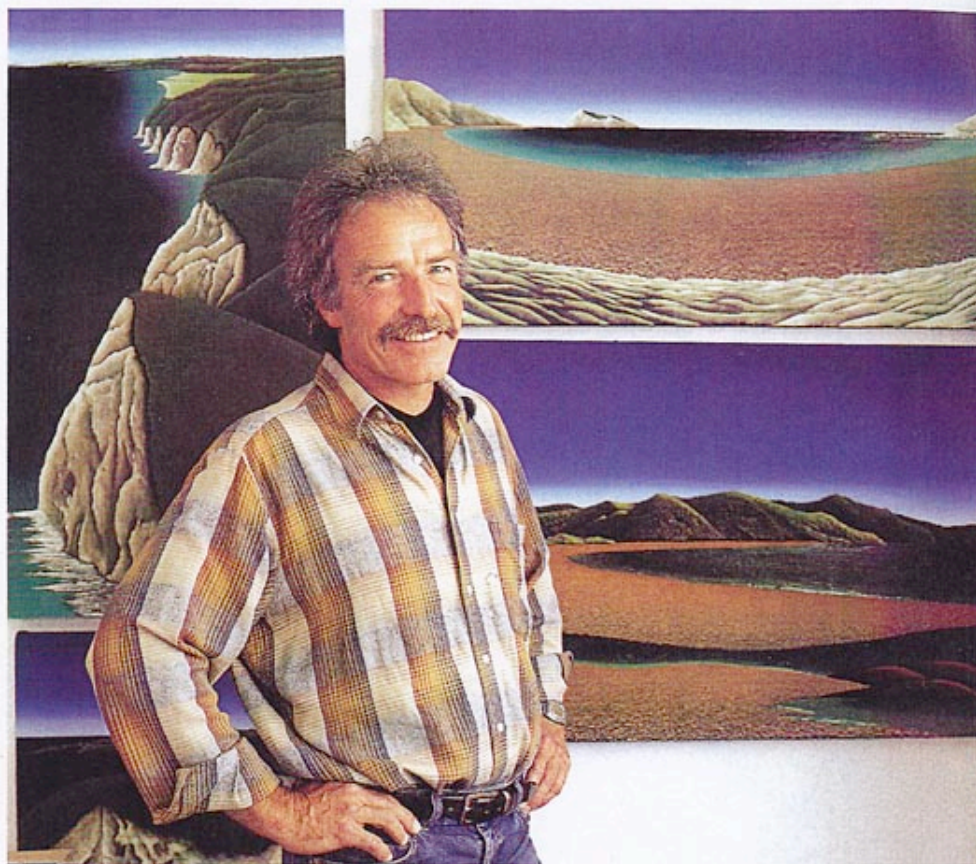
Hawke's Bay artist Jochen Schmidt describes himself as a "journey freak".

The German-born painter regularly travels around the country – Fiordland, Tolaga Bay, Waikaremoana – with the sole purpose of absorbing the landscape, light and shadows. He photographs striking coastlines, imposing cliffs and picturesque mountains.

Later, in the studio housed in an old farm building above the Hawke's Bay Eastern Institute of Technology, his snapshots evolve into vibrant semi-surreal landscapes on canvas.

"I like my blue skies to have a depth and purity that almost swallows you up," he says.

Brilliant, biting colour is not the only intoxicating aspect of Jochen's work. Dramatic texture is another. He uses sand, small pebbles and sawdust



in his work, incorporating his medium so deftly that at times the viewer has to touch the paintings to detect it.

Glass jars on shelves in his studio contain sands and small stones he has collected from the Sahara Desert, South Australia, Tanzania and New Zealand's coasts.

"Texture is intriguing. I like to use sand that actually comes from the beach I am painting," he says.

Jochen's personal story has taken him through vastly differing landscapes. Born near Heidelberg, he grew up in post-war Germany, training first as a draftsman, then as a teacher.

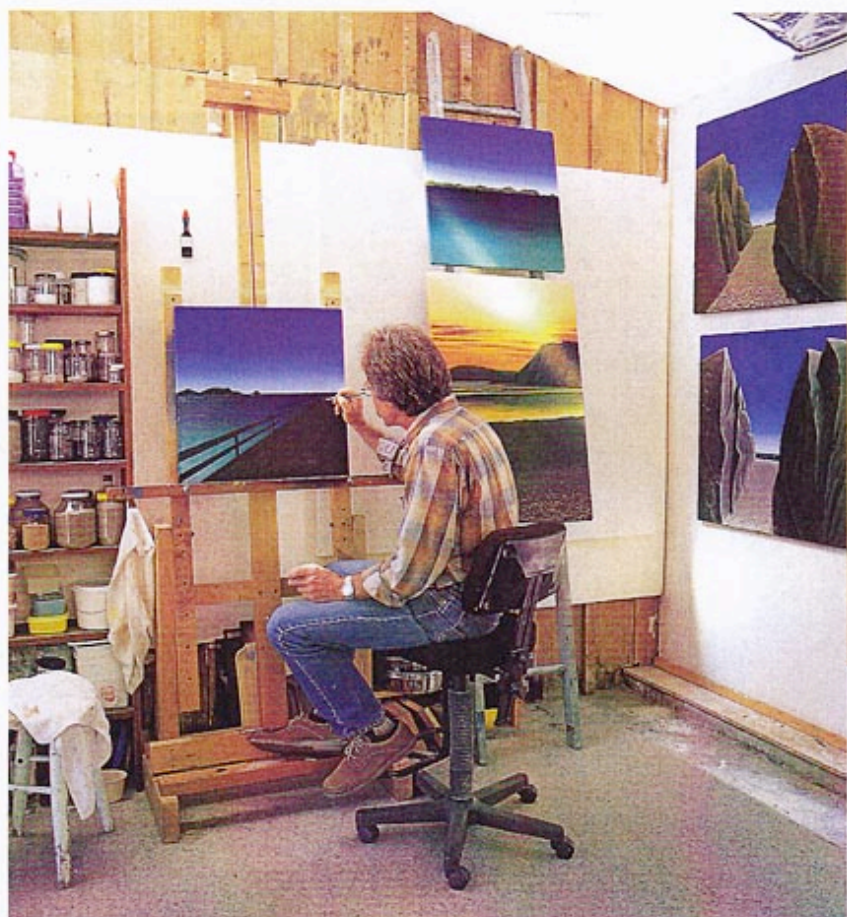
"I wanted to be an artist from the age of fourteen ... but having a reliable job was a higher priority in the post-war environment." ▷



ABOVE: Jochen Schmidt in his Hawke's Bay studio. Water is a powerful feature of his art.

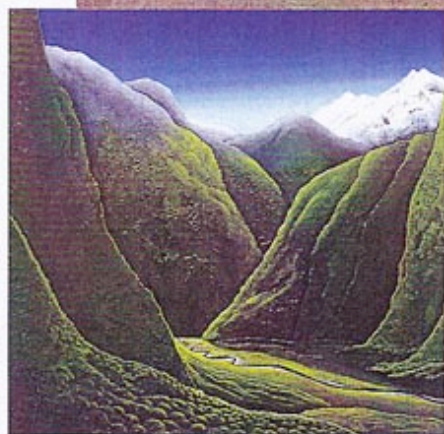
LEFT: The jars hold material that Jochen has collected for his paintings. *Gorge Rocks in the Desert* is infused with sand and pebbles.

"I like to create a sense of the distance drawing you on to a future time and place"



As a child Jochen used watercolours to create a paste-like texture. Today he works in acrylics and texture remains a hallmark of his work.

BELOW LEFT: *Fiordland.*



His thirst for travel took him to west Africa. He journeyed across the Sahara Desert three times and after a year in Nairobi settled in Mombasa for nine years, teaching and exploring painting on silk.

Jochen was enchanted by the luminous colours of the hot African hinterland, and it was in Kenya that he began signing his work with the Kiswahili name "Mashada", meaning a simple spray of flowers – a signature he continues to use on his paintings.

In the late 1980s Jochen realised he could never fully integrate into Kenya, nor could he return to his roots.

"After being away for so long, Germany seemed too narrow for me, both physically and mentally," he says.

With a growing desire to focus on his art, he travelled to New Zealand in 1991 and immediately sensed that this was his place. He completed a Diploma of Visual Arts and Design at the Eastern Institute of Technology in Hawke's Bay, and has been working as a full-time artist for seven years.

Horizons are significant in Jochen's art – his rivers, seas and hills always lead alluringly towards one.

"I like to create a sense of the distance drawing you on to a future time and place."

An appropriate aspiration for an artist who never ceases to travel, continually seeking fresh inspiration in the bold New Zealand landscape. □

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