



INDEPENDENT

**Adrian Ghenie, painter: 'You cannot paint this with a brush.
It's simply the result of an accident'**

by Karen Wright

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Painter Adrian Ghenie first came to Berlin from his native Romania in 2007. His studio is near the Hamburger Bahnhof Museum in an area now being redeveloped as the new Berlin. The space was formerly a garage and a gallery for contemporary art. There is something funny about an artist occupying a gallery as a studio, particularly one working with gloriously messy paint.

I ask about the cat food on the table. Ghenie confesses it is the last supper for the invading rat. Unfortunately, the creature loves cadmium yellow, which is meant to be deeply toxic. After the yellow it went for titanium white – another toxic brew. "Expensive tastes for rats and painters," he says.

Born in 1977 in the Romanian city of Baia Mare, he studied at the University of Art and Design in Cluj, and moved between there and Berlin until 2013 when he finally chose the German capital.

Growing up in Romania was different. His grandmother used to bring animals into the house in the winter – "like the Brothers Grimm". Ghenie's father was a dentist but also in the secret police, which gave the young student a certain cachet. "It was your connection with the structure that has real power, like the secret police. And I remember as a kid I was kind of proud that my father was influential." His parents were not artistic but they had a neighbour, Monica, who spotted Ghenie's talents as and brought him art books and drew with him. "She is guilty for the fact that I am an artist."

When the political situation changed so too did his father's psychological state. "He started staying in the basement among the furniture that my mother would throw out of the house." Ghenie himself turned to these memories after having a crisis as an artist. "I had these sessions of remembering. I was just sitting there and remembering, and then I had this image of this garage and I thought, you know what? This is very powerful."

Ghenie's paintings are gestural in the making. He chooses not to use the traditional tools of the painter opting for a palette knife and stencils. There is not a brush in sight. "You cannot paint this with a brush. It's simply the result of an accident. Everything is an accident. Very few things are actually painted."

From a distance the paintings look neat but when you get close to them you see the incident and spontaneity invoked in the making. "Something is applied to the surface which can destroy the surface, but if it doesn't destroy it turns it into something good. Fifty-fifty. It's a Russian roulette moment."

Ghenie is not the only painter from Cluj to emerge on the international scene. He says "They all have this DNA, the fact that they came from there and managed to conquer the West and made a lot of money is unnatural." Ghenie co-founded the Fabrica de Pensule in Cluj, a former paintbrush factory with an art library and studio space that provides "a common playground for discussion".

Ghenie takes nothing for granted. His upbringing has prepared him for the worse, "I grew up with the mentality that to lose is the rule and to win is the weird exception!"