

At Home in This Place

FOR **SUSANNE MULL**, ART HISTORY IS A SOURCE OF INSPIRATION TO FIND HER OWN RESPONSE TO THE WORLD AROUND HER. By Ani Kodjabasheva



ABOVE
**Hommage an
Rheinhessen No. 25**
(23¼x37¼)

OPPOSITE
**Hommage an
Rheinhessen No. 4**
(15¼x23½)

In the vineyards that crisscross Germany's wine country, Susanne Mull sees patterns inscribed since the time of the Roman Empire. In a French bar, she sees Édouard Manet's famous painting come to life, and a scene with three women calls to mind a composition by 19th-century German artist Wilhelm Leibl. Describing her studio, Mull says, "It's a little bit similar to Adolph Menzel's *Balcony Room*." This reference to the 1845 German painting readily evokes the artist's serene, sun-filled space with tall ceilings, hardwood floors, and French doors opening to a balcony.

Mull's home—a 19th-century brick building with a top-heavy Mansard roof—keeps her connected to the past. So, too, does the wine-growing region of Rheinhessen in which she lives. Located on the Rhine River, this area was a stomping ground for the German Romantics. For Mull, this 19th-century movement, like the influence of Ancient Rome, is ongoing.

Mull's relationship to the past is close, but not one of nostalgia. Rarely does she lament what is gone. Instead, she shows, over and over again, that the scenes and characters we know from historic images are alive and well today. "I'm

an artist of my time," Mull says. "Life provides the theme. I'm an artist of realism." She paints the world around her with curiosity and compassion. Though art history continues to influence her, "like links in a long chain," as Mull says, she has learned from earlier realist painters that the aim is to use the past to better see the present.

A LANDSCAPE CONNECTION

When the artist moved three decades ago from the north of Germany to Rheinhessen, located in the country's southwest, she started looking for a connection to her new environment. "I sought to identify with the agriculturally structured landscape," she said. Walking in the soft hills of the Rhine Valley, she imagined 2,000 years of history, from the Roman conquerors who established vineyards though the winemakers