

# Morning Talk Review **Dominica Vaughan**



since most of the paintings have long been sold, some superb work. It also became very clear that Dominica is an artist with absolute integrity to her own inner vision, and in every sense a working artist with a long track record. Even in the six years she spent as a teacher she continued with her own practice. She is a founder member of the group now known as the LSA (Leamington Studio Artists). For a short while she established and ran an avantgarde gallery in Paris together with her partner, Florian – the gallery only closing when its lease expired. In her own right she is a much exhibited artist. She was also the winner of the first prize in the inaugural Leamington Open.

Much of Dominica's work runs in series, but changing, sometimes radically, in form and focus. Yet there is also a constant: Dominica's art as an expression of her own interior landscape, be it emotional or intellectual, consciously directed or subconsciously emerging. Early work is part apprenticeship – learning to handle paint – but also exploding with colour and fizzing with energy. Taking themes such as the flow of water, or hair, or volcanoes, and acknowledging influences as diverse as Leonardo, Durer, Turner, and, later, Francis Bacon and Chaim Soutine, she has produced

The very well attended May talk was a real pleasure. Perhaps the first thing to say is that we saw, albeit largely in digital form



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some powerful works that shone with an inner light. Scraping back paint to reveal layers beneath, and deepening colour and luminosity with glazes were part of her early practice, and these techniques continue to be used as her work has matured and changed. Over time, the human figure began to emerge, at first subconsciously, and then, again over time, be both revealed and concealed by the painterly processes involved, and given presence by Dominica's strong grasp of draughtmanship. These were still portraits of the spirit rather than photorealism and influenced, for example, by African dance. The imagery was unforced, but allowed to emerge and only then be reinforced.

As the figure became increasingly present and commanding in these paintings so too Dominica's audience became increasingly held in and captivated by these pictorial revelations of her inner world.

The format of a talk could perhaps not do these paintings full justice: these were powerful paintings that invited the viewer to spend time with them in quiet conversation. The intensity of some of this work, mostly executed in a high colour palette, led some to compare the paintings to stained glass. That was indeed also their physical scale, with paintings up to eight feet high, whereas some of the earliest works had been A4 or less. There were also comparisons to Gustav Klimt, not least for the way in which the background was no less important than the foreground/half concealed or dissolving figure, the background often highly textured or textural, and each merging organically with the other. Dominica's own words perhaps best describe this process:



Beatrice Dalle

The portrait series *Le Grand Duc*, *Flaming June*, *Icarus*, *Le Carnaval* and *Femme aux Plumes* were all produced in Paris, 2005. They depict people isolated and framed with a new identity in an imaginative background. I continued to use the process of applying paint in layers, 'pushing' and 'pulling' it over the surface plane then obliterating the image with a dark ground. Scraping back and dissolving this 'shroud' allowed the figure to reemerge and harmoniously place itself in its infinite universe. (<http://isaartists.org/members/profiles/dominicavaughan/> )

Not all the images were comfortable. There was an extraordinary and compelling female figure floating somewhere between life and death, reminiscent of Ophelia; or the beautifully drawn and coloured pictures ultimately derived from a miniature Japanese pillow book. There was the discomfort and compelling beauty of images that reminded this viewer, at least, of Rodin, Klimt, and Schiele, although Dominica's paintings are in no sense derivative but speak fully of an artist with her own vision and authority. As she talked, it became apparent, too, that a strong intellectual rigour underpins her work. Even the titles she has given to her series paintings are intriguing: for example, *Freeing the Spirit*, *L'Esclavage* (the slave), *Beyond Skin*, *Resurrection*.

The most recent series is again a change in visual direction, being a more graphically presented series of portraits of actors and musicians, mostly French. Yet even in this flattened picture plane, the background and foreground duet with each other and, in the female figures particularly, it is difficult to know where one begins and the other ends. At the close of her talk Dominica was asked the perhaps inevitable question, 'Where next?' For that, both we – and she – will have to wait and see.

Margaret Condon