

'Identities'

Clare Bonnet, Toni Cogdell, Henrietta Dubrey,

Veronica Wells

Sarah Wiseman Gallery

4th-25th March

Henrietta Dubrey

Henrietta Dubrey was born in Sussex, and now lives and works in Cornwall. She has exhibited widely around the UK, her paintings held in the collections of The Old Bank Hotel Oxford, De Beers and the TwoFour Group. Her work oscillates between figurative and abstract, exploring her own experiences and reflections on her own life.

1. Can you describe a typical day in the studio?

I am sure that it is every artist's dream to spend as much time as possible in their studio. The studio is a sanctuary, a place I come to, to try to escape the ordinariness and mundanity of everyday tasks and the outside world and its news that can so easily invade one's creative space. It is not always the case, but at the moment I like to work in complete silence. I will start the day by making sure that there is as little distraction by way of paperwork on my desk and that not too many paintings are visible all at once. I tend to work on quite a few paintings at a time, and they will quite often be both abstract and figurative in nature. I will have my sketchbooks and other inspiration in the form of magazines and artist's books on hand so that I can maintain a train of thought throughout each painting. Once I have started painting I can become fully absorbed in the actual action of applying paint and can begin to let the composition start a dialogue with me. I like to work by natural daylight if possible, so that most of my actual painting time is done during the day, followed by reading as much as possible at night.

2. Which artists do you identify with most?

'I am constantly looking at other artists' work by both men and women, but it occurs to me that there are so many female artists that have inspired me over the years. These include Kate Nicholson, Joan Eardley, Mary Fedden, Gillian Ayres, Barbara Hepworth, Louise Bourgeois, Joan Mitchell, Eva Hesse, Frida Kahlo, Sandra Blow, Jenny Saville, Prunella Clough, Chantal Joffe, Marlene Dumas, Alice Neel, Amy Sillman, Sarah Lucas, Maria Lassnig, in fact the list could go on; Helen Frankenthaler, Etel Adnan, Ruth Kligman, Lee Krasner... I also admire a lot of female photographers; Corinne Day, Diane Arbus, Sally Mann and Harley Weir.

The remarkable drive and presence of these female artists in their predominantly male-driven environments highlights their resilience and single-minded approach to making the art which was important to them, and that now we can enjoy as documents of their time as seen from the female perspective. These artists have all been important to me, providing inspiration for both my abstract and figurative genres.'

3. When did you decide that you wanted to paint?

'From a very early age I knew that I wanted to be an artist. My father was an architect and a fine painter himself. He encouraged me as a young child to draw and paint in an uninhibited way. Being surrounded by paintings my parents had collected and visiting artists houses was a tremendous influence. I can remember being quite obsessed by the naked figure and it became my favourite subject for some time, having been given a book of photographs by David Hamilton which I innocently believed were truly beautiful. As an impressionable teenager I was already looking at fashion magazines and studying artists who used the female as their muse. As a young adult I visited Charleston Farmhouse, home to the Bloomsbury Group, and as a result painted naked murals all over my bedroom walls. I was always attracted by the seemingly bohemian life style that artists appeared to lead and therefore knew that I wanted to be an artist myself. At school, by far my happiest memories were from many hours spent in the art room. I was adamant that I was going to art school, even though my school encouraged girls to follow a more 'academic' trajectory.'

4. Do you define yourself as a 'Woman Artist'?

'Yes, absolutely. I feel that my whole painting language is very female orientated. It is interesting to note that I very rarely paint men, and that if I do they will mostly be entwined with a woman in a loving, physical dialogue. My subject matter and the way I apply paint feels tremendously intuitive. I follow my feelings and emotions which dictate formalities of composition and colour choices. My inspiration is mainly derived from images of women, stories about women, and I have a strong belief that women and femininity are a primal and powerful force with their instinctive vision and philosophy of life. Women seem to comprehend and with their life-giving abilities are able to see what really matters. Their observation is critical in the way details are realised and brought to our attention.'

5. Can you tell us about the women that appear in your paintings – are they autobiographical? – or more representative of other women, their lives and thoughts?

'The figures are often autobiographical, self-portraits, although they are not necessarily visually recognisable as myself. I like to imagine and try to paint how it feels to be a woman, and each painting describes situations and emotions which so often arise around the female predicament. Inspiration for my women also derives from the pages of the plethora of beautifully produced fashion and lifestyle magazines, the more progressive of which do not necessarily show only classically beautiful women. There seems to be a trend towards more unusual looking people of all shapes and sizes which I find fascinating to observe.'

Henrietta Dubrey, February 2017

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