

'Identities'

Clare Bonnet, Toni Cogdell, Henrietta Dubrey,

Veronica Wells

Sarah Wiseman Gallery

4th-25th March

Toni Cogdell

Toni Cogdell graduated from Bath Spa University in painting in 2002. Toni Cogdell's paintings are spiritual in their approach using sparkling light and overlaid imagery to explore themes around our dreams and their place in the reality of every-day life. She identifies our need to find personal talismans and signposts, such as a tree spotted on a daily commute or distant hills behind buildings.

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

'My typical day in the studio starts by 6.30am. I usually have around 10 paintings in progress at any one time in the studio so my day is divided into around 4 sessions focusing on one painting at a time. The early morning session usually lasts until 9am and is often the most important of the whole day; something about immersing the mind and body in a creative space so soon after sleep is invigorating and freeing. Even if I have to spend the day doing admin and domesticities I make sure that morning session isn't missed. Life and art are inseparable to me.'

2. Which artists do you identify with most?

'Maggi Hambling is an artist I really seem to identify with, right through to my bones. Everything about her outlook, approach and work-ethic resonates with me; the way she follows and trusts her own inner life and impulses: her gut response to the world, telling it to the canvas (or clay) with every drop of feeling contained in her. Whenever I feel I've lost my resolve, or lacking gusto, I just listen to Maggi Hambling talk for a while and I'm back in the game! I am also deeply driven by artists like Sally Mann, Patti Smith, Nicola Hicks, Marlene Dumas, Giacometti and Karl Weschke.'

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

'There was never a day when I made the decision to paint, as a living or otherwise. Art has just always been there, wedged in my life; It's my first language. I grew up with a great sense of support and encouragement to follow my bliss and develop my painting practice. Even so, stepping into a life as a full-time artist and into the arena of the art-world, awakens fear and doubt continually, or at least has done for me. I kept a toe in part-time employment for a number of years until a redundancy in 2014 ignited the spark to make my art a living as planned, realising it won't ever happen without a certain leap.'

4. What are your thoughts on how far women have come in the arts?

'To be being able to work as an artist, credited under your own name, acknowledged, with a voice contributing to the pool of culture is a tremendous improvement on history, where women quite literally worked in the shadow of men. I feel we have a way to go yet still, but the tide is turning and it's an exciting time, for all artists. We have a lot to say. We have much to wade through and damage to undo, but even more to cherish and defend as we move into an uncertain future.'

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

'While I'm proud to identify as a woman and make art from my own life and voice, which is a female one, I do not define myself as a 'Woman Artist'. It's a loaded term, and a label I don't think male artists have ever needed for themselves. Does it need to be pointed out, prior to everything else, that the artist is female? The fact I'm female can be included in the subtext, somewhere along with my inspirations, dislikes and favourite hot beverage. It can be there for people who are interested and wish to know more, but I feel it doesn't need to be an introduction. So, artist or painter or long-suffering maker of art will suffice for me! I just feel we all have something to say and something to connect to and with, from our own experiences and life paths. Male and female are both present in all of that.'

6. Can you tell us about the women that appear in your paintings – are they people that are known to you, or autobiographical, or do they appear as more of an exploration of other themes important to you?

'The women in my paintings are Everywoman / Everyman; I want them to represent and connect to a universal feeling of being human. They are figures in spaces which are part landscape, part 'inner-scape', revealing layers of emotion and experience, hopes and dreams. Starting from my own surroundings and life I work on the paintings until they begin to open up enough to be able to create and hold a space for someone else. A window and a mirror.

I paint women more often than men, as being female is my lived experience and therefore a truer place to begin my expression and to navigate from, to locate meaning. My women, painted by a woman, are seen and portrayed without the filter of the 'Male Gaze''

Toni Cogdell, February 2017

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