

To and fro.

With love from Batik Babe, Casino exotique, Be(co)ming Dutch....

Between 2005 and 2009, Hadassah Emmerich's titles for her shows evoked issues of identity, post-colonial art, gender, exoticism. The works explored these issues - both playfully and critically - by means of clichéd orientalist figures, sharp colours, ornamental shapes, and large-scale installations.

Simultaneously, Emmerich researched techniques and art history references echoing her concerns and inner motions.

In her show "Salon" in Warsaw in 2008 she revisited Theo Van Doesburg's *Mouvement héroïque* (1916) by painting a replica of it onto the wall of the exhibition space.

From then up to 2016 and her current exhibition CONTRE - JOUR in a salon-like domestic gallery space, the artist has made a huge leap, her work unfolding from figurative exoticism to cubistic abstract-like compositions - embracing freedom and sensuality as much as controlled, structured constraints.

Emmerich works in stages, she organises her work in planned processes, stemming from a need for "self-protection" she says. And indeed it seems the printing process she has engaged in, working with pre-collages and templates, forms a shield between her and her canvas. The rough physical involvement and energy she used to thrust into large-scale mural paintings are now channeled through a carefully thought process.

First comes a photomontage, a collaged image she creates on the computer, gathering references from her own work, from books, from referential artists' works of different time spans (Fernand Léger, Evelyn Axell, Kerry James Marshall being some of them).

Then comes the making of what she calls templates: these are cut-out shapes (most of them large-scale) she uses as printing elements, inking them and pressing them onto the canvas. They shield her, allowing her to indulge in the sensuous physicality of painting without touching the canvas.

So she goes to and fro along the process – from computer to paper to cut-out templates to canvas and back; from exoticism to abstraction; from print to watercolour; from flat canvas to 3D objects; from light to dark, and back.

While she goes beyond the boundaries of media, epochs, cultured-identities, widening the scope of her work, she outlines the contours of figures, shapes and colours on the canvas, managing for them to be subtly intertwined without being blurred.

She superimposes layers of meanings, playing with the senses, melting figures and nudes into abstraction, her to and fro movement a continuum annihilating the gaps, filling the blanks as a gesture sweeps the space.

Works for her current show were sparked by photographs of nudes taken with backlight, à contre-jour – one of the ways 19th century orientalist painters used to enhance exoticism, somehow objectifying the figures, making them both sharper and more voluptuous.

Yet Emmerich, in her ongoing reflection upon the exotic and the mundane, considers this lighting technique as a possibility to confront – perhaps to associate – both aspects, her work epitomizing the very elements she assembles. She plays with light and shadow, cold and warm colours (as in her “Cold Shoulder series”); she creates a sensuous, ambiguous atmosphere, going from semi-abstraction to narrative compositions such as “Nude reading group”.

The work creates a sense of estrangement, a feeling of the uncanny that we, the onlookers, experiment while simultaneously being drawn into the complex, capturing architectures of Emmerich's paintings, drawings and installations.

Cosa mentale, Da Vinci said of painting. Emmerich's works are indeed “a thing in the mind”: they stem from the above-mentioned carefully-thought process. They are also remarkably physical. Intrinsically, by their often large-scale dimensions; in their making, as the artist hand-prints the templates, climbs scaffolds, lifts and places heavy material, makes hefty movements, intensely concentrates.

As a result, they radiate interiority without sentimentality, sensuousness without crudity, hinting to narratives without being explanatory. They are of essential nature, in fact, as they echo the deep concerns and inner motions of their author.

As she journeys through inner and outer geographies, Hadassah Emmerich materializes in her work a territory both new and familiar, close and remote. Perhaps her ceaseless and consistent motion in search of that very territory is Emmerich's own *mouvement héroïque*.

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