

Dolly Thompsett

The Secret Life & Other Stories

10 June – 14 August 2015

Art First Projects is delighted to present extraordinary new work by Dolly Thompsett, whose multi-layered narrative paintings invoke the magic-realism of recent literature as well as the exoticism of the eighteenth century. She writes:

“In *The Secret Life of Mrs Andrews* my starting point was Gainsborough’s early work *Mr and Mrs Andrews*. At the time I chose to work with this theme I was involved in a new relationship, but actually *Huddle* was the first painting that I’d made during this period. Soon after completing *Huddle* I realized that it expressed my sense of trepidation about this love affair. Following *Huddle* I made *the Secret Life*. In the original picture the couple are newlyweds, and I remember that I was then thinking about the theme of sexual awakening in painting, and how all painting is about desire one way or the other. I tend to make these connections between my pictures and my life during or after a painting is done.

My paintings are not planned or known when I start. I may have an urge towards something or other, but that’s all, and then the materials and chance and attractions to images, colours and / or compositional devices lead me further in... *The Secret Life* contains references to Rococo painting and also to Victorian Fairy painting, both movements where sexual desire is a dominant theme, I also looked at Fuseli’s erotic drawings and at Dutch Flower painting. These are all to do with a certain disallowed or confused eroticism, which I can relate to in terms of the way that I’ve been brought up.

But the idea of a secret life also really applies more generally to my painting, which has always been a highly personal exploration of self. Painting is a parallel life for me. As a kid I would draw and paint hidden away in my attic room, isolated and enclosed and safe; and in so doing I would enable a hidden side of my self to emerge.



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The Secret Life of Mrs Andrews, 2014,
oil on canvas, 90x70cm



Huddle

2014, oil on canvas, 130x97cm

I have been collecting images for around 15 years in order to provide a language for this secret side. Many elements and motifs reoccur quite frequently, others are one-offs. So for example I often end up painting a ruined temple, seen from inside or outside, usually overgrown with creepers, sometimes with or without soldiers, old bones or collapsing ceilings revealing a starry night sky. Another recurring motif is a single boat heading into the unknown, into night, into a storm, or deep into a primeval jungle. Individual elements include spiderwebs, twisted branches and roots, mist, veils of gossamer, butterflies.

The images that I keep returning to are in fact variations of archetypes, they relate to countless older art historical images, they are psychological projections, they are dreamlike, they reveal both a personal and a collective inner architecture.

I would say that at the end of the studio day I have made manifest something of myself, and this may be fleeting or a state... this 'something' is articulated using a process of touch and response and recognition and layering."

Dolly Thompsett completed her PhD in fine art at Goldsmith's College, London in 2006, having previously received an MA from Byam Shaw School of Art, and has since had many solo shows in London as well as being included in international group shows in the UK, Europe and the US. She was, in 2009, the winner of the Artsway prize, having been a finalist in the Jerwood Drawing Prize the year before.

Her work is held in the collections of – among others – Ernst & Young, UBS & The Zabudowicz Collection. She lives and works in London.

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