



Cristina Popovici - as vibrant as her paintings

Gonna change my way of thinking,
Make myself a different set of rules.
Gonna put my good foot forward,
And stop being influenced by fools.
So much oppression,
Can't keep track of it no more.

Bob Dylan

Slow Train Coming, 1979.

Interview

The visual language of Cristina Popovici, Abstract Expressionist

CS News: words are very fashionable in paintings, and you used them McCahon-like in a recent painting *Manuscript of Love* (2003). Is there an important crossover between words and paint for you?

I hate words, they are sad, because they disappear almost as soon as they arrive. I always struggled as a child to communicate with words, I was always visual, preferring a different 'language' to express my ideas and feelings. Words are the most common form of communication, but visual was better for me. I drew through all my words. Every time I had an instrument in my hand, I attempted to communicate with it, in pictures. I still do.

After emigrating [from Romania with husband Valentin Tinc and their two daughters, in January

2000] the only way to communicate with family back home was through letters. I was impressed with words for the first time when my mother wrote about how she felt. Words showed me for the first time a different person, my mother in a different frame - as a lonely woman. I translated those words into a picture (of myself) as my mother led me on a journey of self discovery. It is her picture of me, through words.

[The work that resulted was the nine-panelled *Letter With Words Hidden in Colour* 2002, (after nine letters from her mother) which collectively built a self portrait of Cristina]

You're a professed Christian. Is there any significant intersection of art and faith for you?

I come from eight generations, 400 years, of priests in Romania. My Popovici [Popo-veech] grandfather was a painter/priest of neo-Byzantine churches. My father was part of the revolution against Ceausescu. He encouraged the people terrified by the blood in the streets and, in one very romantic moment, came between the guns and the people with the cross in one hand and the Romanian flag in the other. His Christian faith was very apparent in that selfless act. So I believe very strongly, but because I studied art so intensely and professionally I developed like any other person simply following their heart. I didn't see faith or art as the same thing.

After many religious experiences (including a trip to Jerusalem, that most religious of places) I became critical of the church where I could not discern the presence of God, just fear, tension and conflict. After a deep personal journey, I now see God within us, as unconditional love. The Orthodox tradition and other Christian experiences led me down a different path, and I became judgemental, even hated churches. I'm redeeming those attitudes now. My belief draws me closer to God. I don't imagine God, I feel Him. I try to capture the beautiful feeling - the presence of God - and put it on my canvases.

When I came to New Zealand the freedom of expression I enjoyed after totalitarian rule allowed me to choose a church where I could experience the presence of God, in happiness, peace and harmony. So, I've changed my way of thinking. I'm not looking for the negative in things (which is how I used to view). I try to view God's essence inside things, the positive and good. You could say my paintings are about expressing the presence of God as I perceive Him.

What is a New Zealand influence that inspires you?

Romania shares New Zealand's convention of an earth palette, but I wanted to move away from the earth and soil. For me, New Zealand was about sky and water. My early New Zealand paintings expressed aqua, blue and green tones. One of my favourite painters is Neil Frazer. I adore his use of colour and texture - his 'language.'

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