

Phaidon: 'Genieve Figgis - Why I Paint' 2016

Exploring the creative processes of tomorrow's artists today - as featured in Vitamin P3



Genieve Figgis photographed by Doreen Kilfeather courtesy Almine Rech

Genieve Figgis's sumptuous paintings depict familiar scenes with implicit narratives or plots – perhaps a portrait of a queen, a family gathering in a time when bloodlines were of great importance for dynastic identification, or a banal yet poignant group portrait of a hunting party, alluding to the privileges of the well-born. She taps into the history of what became known in the eighteenth century as 'conversation paintings', works commissioned by aristocratic patrons and the aspiring merchant class to spur genteel talk.

Yet Figgis's haunting paintings have an underlying, decadent perversion that lingers in their wake. Figgis's subjects swirl around enduring themes such as birth, life and death, and she captures these events as they radiate through social occasions and structures. Her paintings emerge out of a wet technique that marbleizes the paint. It is as if a sudden cold front had arrived and the paintings were abandoned in the garden, left to be ravaged by the elements. Here, the Vitamin P3-featured painter tells us what interests, inspires and spurs her on.



Genieve Figgis Olympia, 2015 Courtesy of the Artist and Almine Rech Gallery Photo: Prudence Cuming Associates Ltd

Who are you? My name is Genieve Figgis, born in Dublin in 1972. I am an artist and currently working from my studio here in County Wicklow.

What's on your mind right now? My research is constantly ongoing and everything I do seems to connect me back to my work. Music, film, art, history, archeology, travel, news, books, magazines, the internet.



Genieve Figgis Dinner, 2015 Courtesy of the Artist and Almine Rech Gallery Photo: Prudence Cuming Associates Ltd

How do you get this stuff out? It's all about beginning something and then getting lost in the process. That is what is most enjoyable about painting.

How does it fit together? Everything seems to come together in the process. The hardest part is just to begin.



Genieve Figgis Mr & Mrs Andrews after Gainsborough, 2015 Courtesy of the Artist and Almine Rech Gallery Photo: Prudence Cuming Associates Ltd

What brought you to this point? Where I am now and what has brought me to this point is something instinctive I feel where I am letting go and holding on. Experience of just knowing when to finish is something you can only know after many years of trying. I'm never truly satisfied but it has brought me to this point.

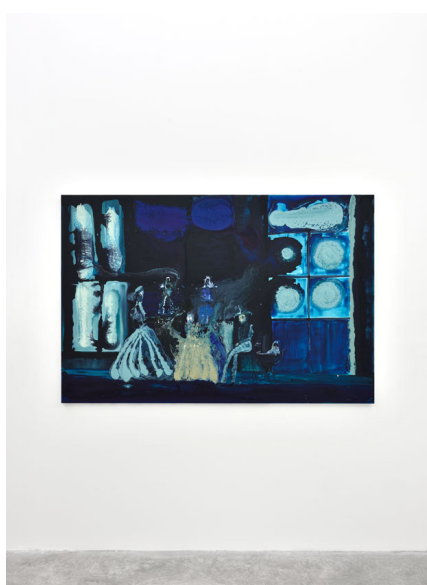
Can you control it? I think that what I do is experimental and that it is extremely addictive. I don't try to hard to control it because there would be no fun or surprises and that would be very boring for me.



Genieve Figgis Gentleman on a Horse, 2015 Courtesy of the Artist and Almine Rech Gallery Photo: Prudence Cuming Associates Ltd

Have you ever destroyed one of your paintings? Yes of course. I have a love hate relationship with my work but somehow I keep coming back to it. I keep work for years also but I don't allow myself to look back. I'm only interested in what I'm doing today.

What's next for you, and what's next for painting? I have recently completed Balcony Scene, a painting for the Metropolitan Opera's staging of Gounod's Romeo et Juliette in New York which opens on New Year's Eve. I enjoyed it and hopefully it will be a good show.



Genieve Figgis Family Outside, 2016 Courtesy of the Artist and Almine Rech Gallery Photo: Rebecca Fanuele