

## POETRY IN PAINT – A CRITICAL REVIEW

*"I found I could say things with color and shapes that I couldn't say any other way...."*  
Georgia O'Keefe

Alethea Eriksson started painting only in 2011, yet her work already demonstrates a degree of sophistication and understanding of materials that, taken together, represent a remarkable achievement. In relatively short order, the South African-born painter has clearly come into her own hand, as was evident at her first Open House exhibition on 27 and 28 January 2017.

While her earliest work leans to a degree on the great modern masters – Mark Rothko and Helen Frankenthaler among them – the more recent abstract paintings show her settled firmly in a visual vocabulary that is uniquely her own. Plasticity and texture are her hallmarks, and many of her canvases have an ethereal, atmospheric quality that one might easily translate to "poetry in paint". The artist gives titles to some of her works, and the imagination may choose to see subject matter in others – a wooded glen, a detail of the human body, for example – yet it is just this push-pull between the representational and the purely abstract that accounts for the tension in her work.

The artist's favoured palette of colours ranges from subdued and restrained, to strong and more demonstrative. From early on, she welcomed the inclusion of foreign materials – bitumen, ash, sand, even coffee grounds –, showing herself ready to use a host of experimental treatments, markings, and incidental effects. Her striking pictorial technique involves layering mixed media on paper, wood board, or canvas; and while she has explored a wide range of technique combinations with acrylic paint in the past, she works more today in an oil paint/cold wax medium. She is a builder of sorts, and the nuances of what ensues – rough, translucent, subtle, opaque – render her images nothing short of intriguing.

As such, Alethea Eriksson's artistic pursuit is – as Ferdinand Léger cited of his own – "a matter of making something beautiful, moving, or dramatic" out of the world around her. Inspired by nature's beauty, her weathered surfaces and lyrical expression impart a sense of serenity and the contemplative. What's more, by inviting her viewers to share their own interpretations, she invites each of us to enter into the creative process.

Sarah Batschelet, 8 February 2017.  
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