

FELIX & SPEAR

Modern British and Contemporary Art

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“Motherhood”

Paintings and Drawings by Susanne du Toit

9 March – 12 April 2017

Private View: Thursday 9 March, 6.30-8.30pm

Ealing, London W5, February 1, 2017 – Felix & Spear Gallery is pleased to present an exhibition of paintings and drawings by the award winning artist Susanne du Toit (born 1955).

At the centre of Susanne du Toit's latest series of portraits, Motherhood, are three generations of the same family. The subjects of these paintings are her daughters, sharing intimate and often uncomfortable moments with their own children – in the womb, at the breast, finding their feet. Meanwhile, on the other side of the canvas there is du Toit herself, grandmother and painter, reliving the harsh and formative experience of motherhood through these scenes.

Susanne du Toit has always preferred to paint those closest to her. She explains:

“I like to use my family as subjects because I feel that this is my world, that it's unique to me, and this makes my work personal rather than generic. I found this series especially rewarding to paint, because I can remember the inner-turmoil of motherhood so clearly. For me – and for many others I'm sure – having children was a decision I made freely but could never quite reconcile myself with. I certainly don't regret it, but being a mother and being an artist are two very different realities, which I found to be in constant tension with one another. For many years, this led to a profound dualism in my life, and now I can see my daughters facing the same situation.”

By painting her own flesh and blood, du Toit is able to represent not just the inner life of her model, but a rich and complicated relationship between artist and subject. It is unclear where the personality of the artist ends and those of her sitters begin, and the emotional intensity of the Motherhood portraits only heightens this ambiguity. The resulting paintings have something

uncanny about them: as du Toit's decisive brushstrokes and luminous palette bring these uncertain depths to the surface, closeness become distance, the familiar becomes unfamiliar.

The clearest expression in these portraits is empathy with the situation of a mother. And yet, this inevitably brings du Toit to a confrontation with herself. The all-consuming process of raising children captured here is the same one that she, like many women, struggled for years to reconcile with the demands of painting. So, these paintings have, even at their most lyrical, a reflective mood. The fatigued body language of the women resonates with the consciousness of sacrifice. There is the sense that no commitment, however rewarding, comes free of oppression.



Solfeggiotto, 95 x 125 cm, oil on linen

All of this puts du Toit firmly at odds with our favoured notion of what a painter should be: one who is free to reshape the world, real or abstract, in his or her own image. The artist is seen as an independent fount of meaning. And since the Renaissance, this has meant, also, that the artist is seen as exempt from the mundane claims of life. El Greco, when asked why he chose to leave Italy, famously said: "I am not obliged to answer that question."

Motherhood, and family in general, is a reality in which there is no option of avoiding the question. Just as the women in Susanne du Toit's portraits are bound by the claims of their children, so she is bound by their claims on her. Her practice is a means of exploring these ties, and in their brooding tone, we find the rare admission that the artist is not exempt from the endless demands and restraints that characterize the human condition. It is this honesty that makes these paintings so relatable.

ABOUT SUSANNE DU TOIT

Susanne du Toit studied Fine Art at the University of Pretoria in South Africa during the 1970s, and received a Masters in Fine Art from the Massachusetts College of Art, Boston, in the 1980s. She has worked in a range of media, particularly etching and oil paint, and in recent years her practice has become focused on portraits. In 2013 she won the prestigious BP Portrait Award held at the National Portrait Gallery, London and since then has been featured in the Ruth Borchard Self-Portrait Prize, the Columbia Threadneedle Prize at Mall Galleries, and the Lynn Painter Stainers Prize. Susanne has also shown work at the Royal Academy Summer Exhibitions, and won prizes at the Royal Watercolour Society and the Chichester Open Art Exhibitions. She works from her studio in Berkshire, UK.

NOTES TO EDITORS

Gallery address: Felix & Spear, 71 St. Mary's Road, London W5 5RG

Exhibition Opening Hours: Tuesday – Friday 10.30am – 6.00pm, Saturday 11.00am – 4.00pm

If you would like more information about this topic, please contact Cameron Amiri 020 8566 1574 / info@felixandspear.com

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