

# Aida Tomescu

## Unfolding Presence

By Victoria Hynes

The title of Aida Tomescu's latest exhibition – 'Unfolding Presence' – showing at Orange Regional Gallery captures the essence of the painter's artistic practice. Since the 1980s, Tomescu has become known for her commanding abstract works. Despite the potency and range of her gesture, the paintings are always about uncovering and building form. This process is patient and considered, driven by a necessity to give each work a specific identity. In this sense, painting is evolutionary – form and structure, architecture and identity emerge as the content, subject and material entwine.

For the artist, there is no closure to the life of a painting: 'A painting reaches its natural state, and yet this state has no fixed end. By ending a painting, we mean the point at which there is a clear resolve and the unity of the work is visible. The relationships developed between all the elements in the painting are ongoing, the structure is live, yet there is resolution.'

Born in Romania, Tomescu trained in classical painting in her native city of Bucharest before arriving in Australia. At the age of 23, the painter made the decision to leave her birth country, and, in May 1980, arrived on the vast new continent with a new culture and, indeed, a new political system. Such shifts encouraged deep changes and reinvention as an artist.

Living in a new country – its space and light, its extreme distances, invited a new visual vocabulary and perhaps not surprisingly much larger canvases.

After an austere upbringing in a socialist Eastern Bloc nation, the artist's work and creativity began to evolve in this new place. She undertook postgraduate studies at the City Art Institute in Sydney, where she found support and understanding. Tomescu's transition from figuration to abstraction came gradually over a four-year period, with collage playing a critical role both conceptually and aesthetically in how she would begin to view painting as construction, with a necessity to establish form.

Nevertheless, her artworks have their roots in her academic education in Europe where she absorbed the literary works of Kafka and Dostoyevsky, and the abstract paintings of Kandinsky and Malevich. Equally Tomescu returns regularly to look at the work of Italian painters such as Piero Della Francesca, Cimabue and Giotto. She is attracted by their purity; the integrity of their expression.

The current presentation has at its centre a body of diptychs and triptychs completed in 2021 and exhibited at Fox Jensen, Sydney. In 'A Long Line of Sand' series, Tomescu has combined stained areas with expanses of raw linen alongside energetic, structured areas of pigment. The abundance of rich cadmium pigments against the fields of fluid white paint establishes complex areas of transition where paint and gesture cohere in a structure that is both alive and ultimately resolved. The works command the viewer's attention with their intensity and vitality, yet at the same time, they have a poetic quality and architecture that imply latter-day altarpieces.



*Larkspur*, 2011, oil on linen, 183 × 153cm

## FEATURED EXHIBITIONS

The artist remarks that: 'Forms that have existed and are disposed of almost always still reverberate and leave their mark within the structure of the work. Sometimes they are disposed of discretely and they become transitions; otherwise, their presence reverberates, hidden in the underlayers and builds form. They affect the work and thoroughly alter the life of the painting.'

Tomescu goes on to explain that the structure of her paintings often transcends the particularities of their initial conception: 'The form evolves through an intricate chain of transitions. The painting grows from the original intentions and conception and acquires a complex life of its own. The mysteries of the process dissolves many of my intentions, and generally, it always leads to somewhere more interesting, a unity altogether more stimulating.'

The titles of her work often come about as painting evolves. Many are drawn from literary or poetic sources. Tomescu explains: 'as they start acquiring a clear identity, they also acquire their title. At times this is there very early on from the work's inception.' The paintings, therefore, are embedded with a complex and layered history.

Orange Regional Gallery's director Bradley Hammond chose this exhibition to relaunch the Gallery and its new extension space. In choosing to curate a show by this authoritative abstract artist, he demonstrates the museum's serious commitment to contemporary painting. Over the summer, it is well worth turning inland from the coast and taking a journey west into country New South Wales to view this powerful and lyrical exhibition.

Victoria Hynes is a Sydney-based arts writer and editor.

**Orange Regional Gallery**  
**4 December, 2021 to 23 January, 2022**  
New South Wales



*Gloria* (detail), 2021, oil on Belgian linen, 200 × 460cm (triptych)  
Private Collection



*In a carpet made of water I, II & III*, 2017, oil, silver pigment on Belgian linen, 36 × 26cm



*A Long Line of Sand IV*, 2021, oil on Belgian linen, 200 × 306cm (diptych)  
Private Collection