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NOVEMBER - AIDA TOMESCU - SYDNEY

AIDA TOMESCU UNDER THE IRON OF THE MOON
AIDA TOMESCU
The Poetics of resistance

"Art begins with resistance -
at the point where resistance is overcome. No human
masterpiece has ever been created without great labour"
Andre Gide.

"...where the moon
shudders before the linen screen."
Thomas Bernhard

Everywhere in Tomescu's studio are signs of resistance... some
of it on the floor.
This resistance isn't driven by the kind of muscular flex that
some painters seek to swell their paintings with, rather
Tomescu's resistance dovetails with Gide's policy that without
great labour the membrane surrounding creativity will not be
broken.

One can sense this not a game for the weak-hearted though -
these paintings are made at paintings' anaerobic threshold.
The material carries evidence aplenty of resistance and
endeavour, of contention and striving.

I remain fascinated by the experience of Tomescu's work over
time and one ought to commit time - looking 'through' the
work to feel its true character. This character is driven
significantly by colour, its lightness and its density; its
emotional clout and its delicacy.

Matisse said that "cutting into colour reminds me of the
sculptor's direct carving" and certainly there are passages in
Tomescu's work where we sense her probing and cutting at
the body of the paint, getting under its skin.

Let's also not confuse the determined and committed way
that Tomescu works her material and gesture with enactment.
Her paintwork doesn't contain any boisterous flourish; rather it
has firm obligations to structure. From the dense and granular,
to the open and excavated areas, even the shards of script
that trace the tooth of the linen - all are complicit in their
duties to drawing and form.

It strikes me too that one of Tomescu's capacities is the way
in which collage, a long trusted process for her, is invoked in
the way she lays material down. Stroke upon stroke, colour
upon colour, all the while being pre- pared to disrupt the
surface to unearth and further assert form.

Tomescu is alive to the complimentary ambitions that painters
and writers, poets in particular can share in. One thinks of
Titian's Poesie series based on Ovid's Metamorphoses and of
painters like Guston and Keifer who responded to the
humanist themes of poets such as Yeats, Elliot and Celan.

In Thomas Bernhard's Under the Iron of the Moon, from which
the title of this exhibition is taken, we see him exploring
themes
of nature and death, faith and meaninglessness. His writing
too, is a kind of collage - a gritty caustic expressionism,
layering love and loathing, sweetness and acidity in equal
measure.

As much as Bernhard's writing wrestles with the pathos and
desolation of post-Nazi Europe, my sense is that it is to the
materiality of his language that Tomescu responds and to the
hope and fundamentally redemptive possibility of endeavour.



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Humour can unexpectedly leaven the atmosphere in Bernhard's writing and there is a warmth and humanity that finds a corollary in Tomescu's painting. Her work side steps the wry, sardonic demeanour that infects much contemporary painting, favouring compassion and joy in the way that she paints.

The paintings that comprise Under the Iron of the Moon are dramatic and forceful. Colour is corporeal, gesture is authoritative.

These qualities are given most latitude in two grand diptychs where the scale allows maximum opportunity for the cadence and command to amplify. Amidst the energy and power there is tenderness...there is time and space for the gentlest mark, small, discreet and vital. We see this in the final group of works that Aida painted - a modestly scaled quintet.

When I first saw them I thought of Twombly, less so in terms of gesture, but rather for his saying "white paint is my marble". Little more than 35cm tall, these paintings are almost purged of demonstrable colour though of course it is there everywhere, hibernating under a cool permafrost. The white pigment that one registers first is touched by the colours beneath so that the white carries traces of pink and silver, blue and the deepest red. These small canvases might be seen as notations against the expanse and grandeur of the diptychs especially. However regardless of scale, every gesture, every cut, every movement is made with consideration and love of a sonnet.

Andrew Jensen, October 2017

AIDA TOMESCU, UNDER IRON OF THE MOON ...

AIDA TOMESCU UNDER THE IRON OF THE MOON
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