

8 PAINTERS ON PAINTING

Article by Jennifer Higgle
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At a time of revolution in digital technologies, when making extraordinary images has never been technically easier, painting persists. Jennifer Higgle asked eight artists to share their thoughts on the whys and wherefores of figurative painting

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Why did I become a painter? In a family where my father is a pianist, my stepfather loves and plays music, and others are involved professionally in the arts, it was almost impossible to escape! Of course, it could have been another form of art: music is actually my favourite, but that would have meant going to the conservative, boring music school. All other forms of art were more complicated, especially in a town like Thessaloniki in the 1960s where the possibilities were limited. Painting is also something very simple to start: a piece of paper, a pencil, a few colours and let's go!

When I was 17, I decided that I was a painter. Everything I saw was transformed in my brain into a painted surface. I don't think there has ever been another period in my life when the image concerned me so much; it was only in my sleep that I thought of other things. I observed paintings in the flesh and in books, trying to understand and digest their good and bad qualities.

The way we read art makes it political or not. Isn't it the same in life, generally? Many of us need to overcome, or at least distinguish, injustice and inequality, whether we are the victims or the abusers. In my family, among our friends and in the world generally, things function in the same way: only the scale changes. Either we see this or we pretend that it doesn't exist. A vase of flowers can convey the same kind of drama – a box of emotions ready to explode at any

moment – as a face. A painting must have the tension to provoke us to look at it; to wake us up from a state of indifference. Then the rest will come.

The term figurative painter annoys me. Of course, it's a way to distinguish one type of painting from another, but I think it's badly used. Perhaps because when I started to paint, a figurative painter was considered the only real painter because he could paint things to make them look the way they are. I wanted to react to this closed environment, and it was hard to accept, and to be accepted, for that. In fact, I wanted to be an abstract painter – a Jackson Pollock, a Mark Rothko, a Brice Marden or a Christopher Wool – to go directly to the substance of the real thing, but my character didn't allow me to do so. We can't choose what we want to be; we have to accept who we are. I know very well that the solution, the big adventure of any kind of expression, is hiding behind idols, words and sounds. Since I have to use people in my paintings, at least I let them paint their abstract compositions.

Apostolos Georgiou lives in Athens, Greece. In 2013, his work was included in exhibitions at the Foundation for Contemporary Art, Athens, and the 4th Thessaloniki Biennale, Greece. This year, he will have solo shows at GB agency, Paris, France; and Rodeo Gallery.

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