

Parts that Create the Whole

A portrait is the best mean devised by the ingenuity of art, to substantiate the fleeting form – to perpetuate the momentary existence. It is thine, O Painting! To preserve the form, which lies mouldering in the tomb... 1

‘Portraits’ are about identity, that fluid state which people strive to define in themselves and then firmly fix into their lives. But identity isn’t so fixed and one-dimensional. As an aspect of personal character, it is naturally quite abstract, evolving and multi-faceted. It is also something that could be considered almost spiritual, because it’s the outer expression of many inner struggles. From a distance, we categorize according to the age of the body, how it is dressed, undressed, veiled, uniformed, contorted or sculpted. But these are just outer facades because it is the face that holds all the clues we need and the apertures to inner identity are through the eyes. It’s no accident that the ancients also considered them to be the “windows opening to our soul”. Alea Pinar Du Pre’s portraits’ search for clues to the true identities of her subjects through their outer facial expressions.

In these works, predominantly women’s portraits, Du Pre’s women look boldly beautiful. The power of the female spirit and its intelligence is portrayed via the fleeting expressions found in their eyes and deep in their faces. The eyes come into direct contact with their admirers, capturing them like birds of prey. The features are sharp; lips are either closed or semi-closed. The characters don’t show their teeth, but we cannot doubt they could. These are characters who don’t need to play for dominance in each. There should be no dilemma. But minds jump to define if there was ever more to success than beauty. The old underlying thought patterns struggle to categorize what we’re seeing, more than who we’re seeing and how that person sees themselves. It is these layers in our own reactions that Du Pre also enjoys confronting us with.

Thankfully beauty is no longer the only road to success. But it has a market value greater than ever. Beauty has been transformed into a sophisticated line of business driving brands and leaving millions enthralled.

In Du Pre’s portraits, women are both observed in classical postures and expressions, while on the other hand the artist’s distinctive perspective represents them as unique and heroic figures. While at one level aesthetically glorifying the beauty in the women she portrays, on another level she invites us to study the success in the identities they have shaped for themselves. She does not try to make her portraits totally accessible with the iconic graphic simplicity of a ‘pop art’ approach, but rather asks the viewer to identify what aspect of the persona has made them popular and perhaps to try to unravel what other aspects of their inner identity may be hidden. In Du Pre’s portraits, none of the women depicted can be seen in one simple aspect. However boldly they face us, each portrait invites us into further evaluation. This is perhaps a deliberate reflection of how contemporary society is starting to discover and appreciate complexity in our ideal female characters, however unsettling we still find that experience.

Du Pre, continues to write stories around the nature of existence, told through the depiction of people and in their multiple, granular identities.

The artist explores this journey with her last series, Space / Time (2018), while also touching on the wider subjects that continually interest her and stimulate her curiosity about the dilemmas in the nature of our world.

She is continually interested in the strange, illusory nature of matter itself and it would not be an exaggeration to say that her artistic inspirations are more directly related to physics than to the schools of art influencing her technique. She finds inspiration in the scientific confrontation between the clarity of general relativity and the ambiguity of quantum mechanics, with the latter leading us to question the nature of everything we observe. While everything is crystal clear in one, uncertainty dominates the other. In one, time is fluid, while it yields to be defined in singular moments in the other. In one, there is a travel from one part to the whole, while the other is composed of particles with no apparent continuity. In her latest series displayed here, named Space / Time, we encounter visions of the ruptures in the impermanent moment.

Although they might appear to be a sequel, they are independent images. Feminine images introduced through shattered reflections, reveal one by one the fragmented identities of the woman. It expresses all the roles – mother, lover, business woman, wife, sister – that she may assume during the day, and how these roles can intertwine to create the rich complexities and pressure on a woman's life.

Alea Pinar Du Pre's portraits are, on the one hand, about capturing an identity in a moment in time - a singularity in the form of a character. On the other hand they also remind us that they are part of the unstoppable struggle of existence itself.

The artist is experimental in her production techniques and makes full use of modern technology in her layering of imagery, but the process itself remains highly hand-crafted and increasingly labour intensive. Her portraiture began with a preference for complex, digitally manipulated productions, but over the last few years the artist has increasingly preferred to texture and layer her work working on traditional canvases and using acrylic and glass paints. In her new Space / Time series, her canvases feature a new technique which she feels allows us to sense the fleeting and sometimes illusory nature of what we see in nature and in the true identities of characters we can never quite 'capture' when we observe them directly. The physicists amongst us will appreciate that.

In short, Du Pre's portraits touch on the nature of individual identity and how we're coded to try to de-code female beauty and success. What further absorbs the audience is the depth of artistic craft designed to visually and physically uncover hints of the inexplicable in existence itself..

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