

MICHELLE GIUFFREDA: A TASTE FOR THE ABSTRACT

It is a balmy fourteen degrees in Melbourne. An easel stands on the balcony overlooking Fawkner Park. The sun is shining on a bunch of fresh basil on the bench top. On the stove, a rich, red sauce simmers beside a saucepan of squid-ink spaghetti; Miloš Karadagli 's classical guitar riffs serve as soundtrack. It is Saturday afternoon, a month out from the opening of her exhibition and Michelle Giuffreda is painting.



This will be her second exhibition at the South Australian Living Artists Festival, following on from the success of Arrival last year. Quite the feat for a twenty nine year old artist, but Michelle thrives under pressure. An acclaimed interior designer by day, her attitude towards life is as bold as her abstract expressionism. This exhibition continues her fascination with flamenco. "It's not just the dance. It's the rhythm and the movement and the choreography," she says, "and how that reflects your life at the same time."

Like her idol, Wassily Kandinsky, music has always been a guiding inspiration in her art. "I always paint to music and I let that drive out the passion in me. I like to change it up a bit but it's generally Spanish music." The romance and subtlety of acapella guitar is addictive, implicitly informing her brushstroke. The results are strikingly visceral and evocative. Through her strident palette and highly textured surfaces, she explores the moment when "the ordinary emotion becomes the element of wonder".

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CIERRE



TOQUE

Although a dancer herself, the emergence of flamenco within her work was a revelation. Initially her response to the music was predominantly abstract but as she worked towards Arrival last year, her work became increasingly figurative. Then a month before the exhibition was mounted, Michelle flew to holiday in Spain. In some little pablos bar in the backstreets of Madrid she saw some of the most amazing flamenco dancers. "I had intentionally left one more piece to do when I came back. It's amazing how much my style changed."

The female figure forms the focal point of this new series of work, paired with the voluptuous passion of the Spanish guitar. "It's very expressive. I've chosen some quite sexy looking women and it's nice curves and the movement thing again. That's what's evolving at the moment." Flamenco offers the ultimate expression of feminine empowerment; of what it means to become a woman. "They are dances that you can do on your own – you don't need a partner. You're on stage, you're saying here I am, this is what I have to offer."

From layered applications of gloss, impasto and gesso to the subtle use of text, her process is eclectic. Texture is vital. "I like to experiment with a lot of different mediums. I started many years ago in my dad's shed using old enamel paint that was lying around the house, and twigs for texture." Her parents encouraged creativity and the strength within her work reflects the vitality of her Italian background.

Her upbringing was traditional but modern. "There were big cook-offs with our Italian neighbours. There was always lots of family around. You're familiar

with the making of tomato sauce?" She laughs. "I am very proud and protective and passionate about my family."

This year however Michelle has left her family behind. During her tenure as Senior Interior Architect at Swanbury Penglase Architects in Adelaide, she received worldwide recognition for the fitout of the University College London. Although she counts this project, alongside her solo exhibition, as one of the highlights of her career, the search for new opportunities has forced her beyond the comfortable familiarity of Adelaide.



EN COMPASS

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COMPASS III

Three months ago she took up the sought-after role as Senior Interior Designer at David Hicks, the internationally acclaimed design studio in South Melbourne. She feels honoured to be working with a designer of his calibre and is inspired by his brazen innovation. "It's been a challenging and amazing experience so far. I'm working on some really great projects so I'm very happy to be here, that's for sure."

In the next five years Michelle hopes to integrate her art and interior design. "In both instances my aim is to create an experience for clients or the viewer or whoever might be occupying the space, to leave them with an experience that they will remember." There are thoughts of collaborating with other artists and with David Hicks to create that unforgettable moment. But for the moment she is happy finding her feet in a new city. There is the hunt for the best soy latte, the most decadent provolone cheese and Michelle is determined to relish every moment.

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