

Lara Viana

NJ Is this your first show with Domobaal?

LV Yes, the first solo show.

Tell me a bit about yourself, where are you from?

I am from Salvador, Brazil.

I came to England with my mother twenty five years ago.

You went to college here?

Yes, to Falmouth School of Art in Cornwall, then I went to The Royal College of Art.

And you have been painting since then?

Yes but I had quite a few years out between my first and second degree.

And the beginnings of your paintings, what kind of things interested you?

I was taken by ex-voto relics in churches, and the installation of photographs there.

'Ex Voto' what does that mean?

In some Catholic churches

people will put objects on the wall in a special room, wax replicas which correspond with a limb or body part of somebody who had an accident or is sick. They're known as 'miracle rooms'. People also put up photographs. It can be a way of saying thanks for recovery or success as well as an offering for assistance.

This is a very long tradition in the church, these votive offers which pray for a cure.

Yes, I used to go there every week and was quite fascinated by these things; the images of people's lives. This was a trigger point for me back then.

Did you look at classic Spanish painting, Velasquez or Zurbaran?

I did, I loved those paintings very much, but it wasn't like I was looking to develop from them. What we were talking

about in relation to the photographs; I have been fascinated by car boot sales, I go to these frequently and buy boxes of mementoes. I was interested to work from objects and photos.

To look into people's lives, from what you found there?

Yes, in the beginning I made a direct observation of those images. There's always been a strangeness in them; the holiday photos, family photos and the objects as well.

The new paintings are curious, intriguing. This one is a still life, but there's a feeling of deterioration in the objects.

Yes, I think about deterioration, but also a connection with the past, with a sense of home, and the feelings that we invest in the objects.

Like when there's a passing and the relatives have to clear the family home which is full of memories and suddenly it's empty; and the life that was there is now gone.

Yes, but also the impossibility of return, especially in relation to your sense of your own place. It is almost like the paintings are recreating that, restaging that.

The painting tries to hold a memory, or you start a painting then it goes somewhere else?

Definitely, the subject is just a starting point. Where it takes you and how that surprises you, that's what's really interesting. Literal description is not interesting to me, it's more about where it's going to go. Something comes along and takes you somewhere else.

The paintings are rather haunted, in a realm of ghosts?

Because of the nature of trying to conjure up something from images or from painting that attracts me in the first place, it's very intangible and so inevitably becomes ghostly. The very nature of what it is I'm looking at disappearing anyway is difficult to grasp in the



Lara Viana **Untitled** (table 6) oil on canvas, 2010 50 x 60 cm/20" x 24"
Photo: Andy Keate Courtesy: Domobaal

image, so this is a consequence of what happens.

Perhaps the paint itself doesn't feel comfortable with description.

It's true, because that very description is a sort of spoiling. When painting you want to be surprised by what you see. It's quite a selfish practice, but you want to learn from it, don't you?

Are these works different from previous phases, or is there a

consistency?

It is consistent, except the way I paint has changed. I used to be much more involved with the image or the object. Now that is just a starting point and the paint changes the work.

There is also a balance between the boredom of the image and the challenge of copying. After all you want to breathe through your painting?

Yes, you don't want to become

too attached because you lose the point of the painting.

This is a monochrome study, it's very potent, like we're looking into the abyss. It looks like you've captured something, are you happy with it?

I am, it's an oddly personal picture for me. When that happens it's quite difficult to describe it, I can't tell you why that is.

For me this painting resolves itself into a statement.

How is that?

The white frame with the abstract figure looking into a dark mirror. What is the pace of making?

The paintings are made through various attempts; sometimes it happens very fast, or after some time of wiping it off. I will often spend twelve hours painting something and wipe it off and start again the next day.

This small landscape is like facing a monolith. How have the elements changed in recent works?

Sometimes I'm quite detached from something I'm looking at, sometimes it's something very specific or very simple. I think this painting is one of those.

So it's an intricate relation you have of drawing from the world, but then departing. Are you letting the painting lead you somewhere else?

It's a very interesting question, I think in some ways painting does that.

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