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THE ALCHEMY OF PAINTING

Artist Loribelle Spirovski's collection *Coronation* is about post-pandemic recovery and the reclaiming of painting. She tells us about her inner world.

BY CHRIS JENKINS





Born in 1990 to a Filipino mother and a Yugoslav father, Loribelle Spirovski graduated in 2012 from the College of Fine Arts at the University of New South Wales as a Bachelor of Art Education, and has since exhibited her distinctive paintings in Australia, Europe, the UK and the United States.

Loribelle has developed a reputation as a highly sought-after young artist on the international scene, and showing in June at HOFA Gallery London and in a virtual exhibition is *Coronation*, her latest collection of works, produced during lockdown.

Using her signature oil and acrylic line technique in portraits, and distorted, digital-style imagery rendered in eye-popping colours, she depicts the tenuousness of a reality mediated by technology and social media distortions, in works such as the diptych *War and Peace*.

Loribelle's migration from Manila to Australia was an early influence on her work. "Even while growing up in Manila, I felt like a bit of an outsider - no one looked like me" she says. "But when I came to



(Top) Loribelle Spirovski in her studio

(Above) Loribelle Spirovski, *Homme 249*, 2020

(Left) Loribelle Spirovski, *The Solipsist*, 2019

“

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– Loribelle Spirovski

”

Australia, it appeared to be the opposite situation, where no one looked like anyone else. It was such a multicultural mishmash.”

COLLAGES

“The art that I made even as a kid would always take the form of collages, cutting from photographs of the Philippines, cutting from stolen copies of my dad’s National Geographic magazines. I have always been drawn to juxtaposition and emigrating to Australia simply solidified that.”

This collage approach still influences the

more sophisticated painted style which now marks Loribelle's art. "Because my earliest works as a child were primarily in clay and collage, a similar aesthetic continues to guide me in my paintings. I approach portraiture from a sculptural understanding of form and compose images with collage in mind" she says.

The tension between photorealism and surrealism in Loribelle's art reflects her inner world. "Earlier in my development, I felt the need to 'prove' that I could paint (mostly for myself)" she says, "and it took experience and time for me to let go and simply enjoy the medium." She's also influenced by music, which she feels can harmonise with her art; "My tastes vary as much as my visual output does, so my playlists range from classical to jazz to prog rock to Motown and rap".

Is her art, though, consciously pessimistic, or dark in theme? "I have never intentionally begun a painting trying to be dark, but as someone who is prone to existential thoughts and who has had

anxiety issues for most of her life, I think it manifests whether I want it to or not", she says, "because more than anything, each painting is a depiction of my present reality."

In her portrait work, Loribelle works mainly from photographs, deviating quite intentionally from the actual features of the sitter – "When I do have a sitter, I generally have to be inspired by them and I try to fit the form of the painting to match their personality...ultimately, sitters are conduits for a feeling."

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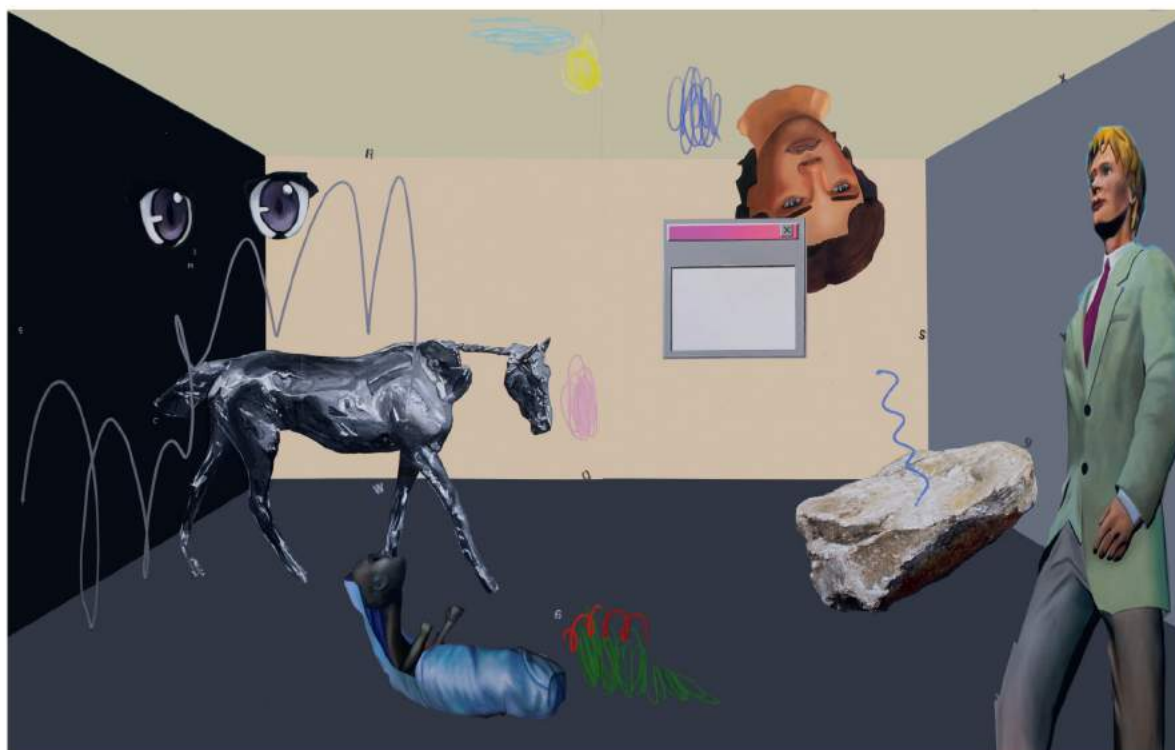
MINDFULNESS

The viewer, then, has to bring something to an appreciation of Loribelle's work – "I want them to be open and to allow themselves to have a moment of mindfulness" she suggests. "Sometimes, the pictures are quite serious with heavy themes and subject matter but I also need a break from the heaviness and will often balance these paintings out with ones that are simply for fun and colour."

So how has Loribelle adjusted to working during the pandemic lockdown? "We were very fortunate in Australia to not have been affected as drastically as other countries" she says. "But global events always have a way of permeating an artist's work, and despite our global isolation I felt very connected to the events in other places and felt compelled to respond to them in my work. This is what 'Coronation' is all about. The shifting of power and the loneliness that can come with isolation".

Global events have indeed influenced Loribelle's *Coronation* collection, which





(Left) Loribelle Spirovski,
Year of the Horse, 2021

(Opposite) Loribelle
Spirovski, *War and Peace*,
(Dptych) 2021

(Below) Loribelle Spirovski:
"Each painting is a depiction
of my present reality"

will be on show at HOFA Gallery London and in a virtual exhibition in June. "For this collection, I have drawn influences from global events and my own personal experiences over the past hectic year. Working away from my usual studio has challenged me to create in a smaller space, but has ironically been accompanied by a tremendous feeling of artistic freedom, especially as the world begins its recovery" says Loribelle. "In a way, this show is about recovering and reclaiming."

ALCHEMY

So what is the future for the painted medium in a world of digital art and NFTs? "This is a question that painters must face every time they approach a canvas" says Loribelle. "It's easy to fixate on the limitations of the medium in depicting the world as it is, but no medium is ever going to be able to encompass the complexity of reality, especially when technology is rising beyond our capacity to catch up or understand. So, I feel as most painters do, that I have enormous respect for the archaic, simple, endlessly fascinating, intellectually challenging medium that is paint. It's still alchemy to me." ♦

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