



ÉLATINE DESPINS  
**A Luminous Darkness**

15 octobre, 2019

By Dorota Kozinska



*A Luminous Darkness*, oil on canvas, 36 x 60 in

In art, hands are imbued with rich symbolism; their body language is an integral part of the visual narrative. They are also the hardest to master, and many a great composition was lost to inadequate rendition. In her latest exhibition, Quebec artist Élatine Despins takes on this daunting challenge with audacity and impressive self-assurance.

A boldly figurative artist, Despins has an established career under her belt, and a recognizable painterly style bolstered by exquisite execution. In her recent series of works, she focuses entirely on hands—the tired hands of an elderly woman. “These are my mother’s hands,” she opens her statement, and the viewer is instantly carried into a world of both unbearable intimacy and creative beauty. Standing in front of the first of the pieces—all titled *Holding On* and numbered—there is no question that one is on hallowed ground, no doubt that Despins’s mother is no longer here, that these are works born of grief, and that an overwhelming creative impulse was needed to transcend it. These are, indeed, transformative compositions in the sense of their visual impact and in the way that Despins subverts verifiable reality. “I am trying to deepen a visual expression based on the felt experience of the body rather than our predominant, seen experience of it,” she once said of an earlier series. She continues this exploration with her hand portraits, exciting them not only from the body but also from their assigned symbolism. If we take away the underlying emotional component—and Despins is far from sentimental in her pictorial treatment—and allow the eye to take in the composition and the restrained yet powerful use of muted colour, an entire abstract universe unfolds. The transcendence is almost tangible, and a poignant kinship with the artist and her creative process makes itself felt. The economy of colour plays into the nocturnal feel of the works, painted against inky black, floating in and out of it, imperceptibly, hauntingly. The same aura envelops two paintings that stray away from the theme and into an entirely different universe, one of landscape and mystery. The eponymous *A Luminous Darkness* is a simple but visually laden composition, an enormous dark tree in a darkening light, oddly out of focus, as if in motion. A similar treatment is given to *Bélvédère*, in which a couple embraces against a familiar Mount Royal railing, the silhouettes obscured, half hidden by darkness.

A major element of the exhibition are Despins’s videos, projected onto one wall of the small gallery. Only a few minutes long, they are monochromatic, shape-shifting vignettes, often accompanied by ambient sound such as breathing or water. Barely decipherable forms emerge only to dissipate or fade, leaving behind an ethereal visual echo. Superimposed images and slowed-down motion create an otherworldly landscape, drawing the viewer into a meditative state.

For an aesthetically restrained presentation, *A Luminous Darkness* offers a plethora of sensations.

**Abîmes lumineux - A Luminous Darkness**

L'Atelier Galerie 2112  
2112, rue Atateken  
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October 3 - 20, 2019



*Holding On 2*, oil on canvas, 36 x 36 in

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*Holding On 5*, oil on canvas, 36 x 36 in

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