

## SOREL-TRACY

ÉLAINE DESPINS: PRÉSENCE /  
ÉMERGENCE

Centre d'exposition  
des Gouverneurs  
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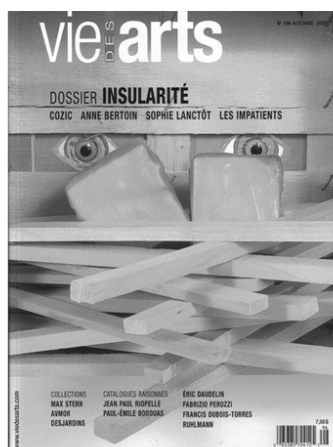
As if out of nowhere, grand oils by Quebec artist Éleine Despins have appeared in several galleries across the province. A paean to the human body and a bold manifesto in defense of figurative art, her paintings are a marvel to behold, though seeing is not the immediate intention of this unusual artist. Her bodies are meant to be “felt” rather than observed. Suspended in impenetrable blackness, they hover in a fetal position in the upper part of the painting, their backs to the viewer. Male and female, they lie quietly in this womb-like darkness, vulnerable, defenseless, almost unbearably human. Their embryonic contortions recall a fetus, yet these are adult bodies. This makes their position and nakedness all the more symbolic. The pictorial, plastic quality of Despins’ paintings is flawless, as is the complex, subtle play of colours on the stretched skin of the models. It accentuates the lifelike, tactile texture of the body, emerging from the soft, cushioning darkness in a delicate aura of light.

Seven large oils compose the *Présence/Émergence* series; 143 cm x 183 cm paintings that line the walls like a mysterious pantheon of faceless beings, their backs the only canvas of emotion for the viewer to decipher. Once in a while, a foot or a palm turned outward distracts the eye, its flaccid surrender adding to the sense of vulnerability permeating these works. As if to aid the viewer, Despins sketches barely visible faces at the bottom of some of the paintings, an emergence of features, a hint of a personality. These ghostly apparitions are an interesting compositional ploy as well, never disturbing the quiet repose of the suspended bodies, yet creating a slight ripple in the overall composition, a tear in the curtain as it were. Other smaller square portraits of faces grimace in motion.

There is a wonderful painterly quality to these works, the melange of pinks and yellows against her

trademark velvety blackness, turns these faces into shimmering apparitions, neither male nor female, vague and strangely beautiful. Profoundly visual and emotional, these works explore an inner vision. Despins is in the foreground of young Quebec artists who seek to reinvent figurative painting. These are all artists whose works speak of a quality achieved only through a complete and unfaltering dedication to the medium. Art is a hard taskmaster. Despins will exhibit at the Edward Day Gallery in Toronto in April 2005.

Dorota Kozinska



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