

## **EVERGLOW opening word**

### **Laurel Holloman at The van der Togt Museum in Amstelveen**

Do you all remember what you drew when you were young? Yes, I do mean everyone, not only the artist Laurel Holloman. Everybody draws when a child. Starting with undefined lines and scribbles, the drawings gradually evolve to become oval faces with eyes and a mouth and develop into figures in space. Can you still remember the joy of watching the movement of your hand and the colourful marks it left on the paper? Can you remember the fulfilment when reproducing the shapes of the people around you? Probably not. But that's what art is all about.

*The aim of art is to provide insight, understanding the essential life of feeling,* said the American philosopher and writer Susanne Langer.

Human beings are the only species who feel the need to make art, to physically and mentally 'grasp' life in an image to make sense of it. Everyone makes drawings as a child. And whereas most of us, when coming of age, prefer to communicate verbally, some people also express themselves visually, touching our deeper emotions with line, colour and form. And the American painter Laurel Holloman is one of them.

Laurel Holloman lives and works in Los Angeles. She studied art and drama, and started her career as an actress, acting in 35 feature films and several TV series, such as the popular L-Word series. But in the end this glamorous, glittering life didn't satisfy her. In 2010 she dropped acting and chose painting, taking the risk of giving her life a completely different direction. She painted every day, obsessively expressing her inner anxiety and relief, painting the series *Free Falling* (2012) and *Coeur Libre* (2012). During this period, in the footsteps of American Colourfield Painters such as Barnett Newmann and Mark Rothko, she produced huge paintings, immersing herself and the viewer in the colours that best reflected her mood.

But she didn't stop there and explored a variety of different styles. The adventure of paint on a surface paved the way for a new series in which the emotional expression is heightened by a dynamic brushstroke. 'I try to get the emotion out of my body and onto the canvas.'

Painting is a physical act, and the movement of her arm and brush results in sweeping lines, as in the dynamic *The Fifth Element* series. If you look carefully, you can discern a female figure beneath the white paint. 'A woman frozen in ice,' as Holloman puts it. 'That's how I felt at the time. The fifth element is the invisible force – love - that binds everything together. But the viewer is free to have their own associations.'

Art functions as a mirror for the painter and the viewer. It's a way to reflect on life.

For the artist this often happens intuitively, while interacting with the material. Holloman works with resin and alkaloids as well as oil paint diluted with linseed oil, each demanding its own drying time, and some paintings took months to dry. 'I paint with everything,' Holloman said in an interview. 'From sable brushes that cost \$100 to brushes from the hardware store, my hands and fingers and everything from a diaper to a baby wipe. It's all very tactile for me. I get real messy.'

She applies layer after layer to create depth. For *Into the Woods* she actually poured different shades of blue paint over the surface, resulting in mysterious veils which are reminiscent of a forest in the dark of the night. And your eyes are drawn to that faint light behind behind the trees...

Holloman also experiments with metallic paints such as gold and silver and Interference pigment powder that reflects like fish scales. In the series *Everglow* she takes this one step further, with paintings which literally issue forth light: Holloman has put Led-lights behind the canvases. The series *Everglow* is reminiscent of stained glass. These paintings emanate light, making the exploding cell-like shapes look physically energised.

Her last work, dealing with environmental issues, is more explicit both in form and content. Holloman is an avid photographer. When she spent a rainy week in a nature reserve in Carmel, California, she was touched by the sight of a deer, looking attentively at her, ready to flee. *Would this woman do her harm?* Holloman reproduced it on canvas and now she looks at us, her pristine habitat surrounded by dense layers of messy colours, which seem to have a more symbolic meaning. The title *Silent Spring* is derived from Rachel Carson's 1962 best-seller, which warned of the danger of pesticides, finally leading to a ban on DDT.

In her short painting career, Holloman has shifted her attention from her inner emotions to her concern about the world, while her style has evolved from abstract to an exciting combination of realistic expressionist brushstrokes. But no matter what she does, whatever style she uses, in all her work, she tries to make sense of life. Certainly, we should keep an eye on the work of Holloman.

Anne Berk, art critic and curator, The Netherlands 7 July, 2016