

# EVERARD READ

FRANSCHHOEK

BIOGRAPHY

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## **GINA HEYER**

(Born 1983)

### **Solo Exhibitions**

**2012** 'Order and Division', Brundyn + Gonsalves (catalogue), Cape Town

**2010** 'Threshold', iArt Gallery (now Brundyn + Gonsalves) (catalogue), Cape Town

### **Selected Group Exhibitions**

**2009** 'Propositions: MAX Masters in Visual Arts Students Exhibition', US Art Gallery, Stellenbosch

**2006** 'Portrait Exhibition', AVA, Cape Town

**2006** Absa L'Atelier Awards (catalogue), Pretoria

**2006** 'Graduate Exhibition', Sasol Art Museum, Stellenbosch

**2005** PPC Cement Young Sculptors Award, Pretoria

### **Awards**

**2006** Public vote favourite artwork, AVA Portrait Exhibition

**2006** 2nd Prize, KUKO Art Competition

**2005** 1st Prize in technical excellence; PPC Cement Young Sculptors Award

### **Publications**

**2010** Melvin Minaar, Art Times (Review)

### **Collections**

Iziko South African National Gallery

University of Stellenbosch Sasol Art Museum

Sanlam

A silent drama plays out as linoleum, porcelain and painted walls reflect electric lights and diffused sunlight. Surfaces seductively draw the viewer in but at the same time the cold, hard and repetitive façades seem to stifle and alienate, reinforcing the sense of absent individuality. An uncomfortable silence is amplified in these still and empty spaces. There is both the urge to stay, to be seen and to escape as windows offer the promise of a world outside the dark solitary refuge.

Heyer graduated with a Master of Fine Arts from Stellenbosch University in 2011. She is currently a full-time artist, lecturing drawing part time at the Visual Arts Department of Stellenbosch University. Her first solo exhibition at BRUNDYDYN + GONSALVES (then iArt) entitled Threshold was concerned with subtle metaphysical and uncanny aspects of seemingly ordinary and unoccupied interiors.

### **Show Review: An ancient medium redeployed**

2010-02-26

Exhibition: Gina Heyer at the I Art gallery until February 25.

Review: Melvyn Minnaar

In her painting Fragment (oil on board, 2008-2009), a curious electric blue light glimmer ghostly on the wall to the right in the picture's high geometric construction. It shimmers like neon ectoplasm and seems to pull one's eye backwards and forwards from the 'ordinariness' of the image: a corner on a stairwell landing.

At first, as your gaze traces quickly across Heyer's pictures, they read as photographic imagery, hyper-real - painted with meticulous skill in indefinable brush strokes and colour tones to smallish sizes that invite closer examination.

Then all kinds of peculiarities seem to invade each painting. Your eyes get stuck. It's the trick of all good painting: telling a visual tale, producing poetry, that only that medium and an accomplished manipulator of it, can deliver.

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In this, her first small solo exhibition, the Stellenbosch art master's student is showing that she is not only an accomplished painter, but that that ancient medium can be reinvented for our time. She has produced, in this cleverly titled essay, *Threshold*, riveting imagery. It's great stuff.

She's painted views of interior spaces, most of them painfully empty. There are very empty corners, passages, hallways, entrances, inter-leading rooms and simply dead-flat facing walls. Some views seem to stretch into an three-dimensional endlessness, others are starkly boxed-in settings. All play vividly with the geometry offered by the intercepting square lines: a patchwork of surfaces gleaming with Rothko-like mystery.

Only one picture has a recognisable human in it. He is rather forlornly placed to the side with his back to us, his presence producing only a faint shadow from the fierce window light. In one of the *Hospital* paintings of what seems like waiting spaces, a vague figure looms eerily. Equally spooky are sets of portraits hanging on the wall at the back of two empty chairs in *Conversations*. Although vacant, all the spaces speak of human endeavour. Whether abandoned, just vacated or soon to be filled up, they seem, ironically, to ooze an urgency of action. Something is happening here, despite all the quietness, regardless of the air of melancholy. And thus, we place our own narratives within those spaces.

Not all the interiors are 'real', for she sometimes changes the same view by switching the structural elements: Room 1 could well be Room 3 as well. Recurrence literally looks like double vision. This playfulness adds to the visual intrigue, vivid and carefully painted.

In his accompanying essay Vivian van der Merwe points out how 'ordinary' these spaces, how familiar these scenes appear to be, and yet: "The familiarity of these spaces renders them almost archetypal as if we've all known such places, and yet the deconstruction of architectural and constructional logic, sometimes subtly and sometimes obviously, makes these places unreasonable and uninhabitable - the kind of spaces we can only imagine or experience in dreams."

Heyer uses the tightest discipline of traditional oil painting as a self-imposed challenge to take us to this marvellous experience. It's a very successful one.

This appeared in the Cape Times on February 24, 2010

**Excerpt from Gina Heyer 'Threshold' exhibition catalogue 2010 by Vivian van der merwe:**

"Painting is easy when you don't know how and very difficult when you do"- Edgar Degas

In a culture overloaded with printed and digital imagery, with artistic bling, with art that is desperately trying to be clever, and art that is often confused (and therefore confusing), it is profoundly difficult for a painter to proceed with a true sense of artistic purpose.

A painting is not merely a picture. It starts out as a piece of raw empty canvas, board or paper. As a painter, you start with nothing. Every small incremental step away from this nothingness requires painstaking thought and action. Nothing can be taken as a given. Every grain of pigment is applied with artistic intent. Every square centimetre of pictorial space succeeds or fails as a result of the sum of its relationships to every other square centimetre that makes up a painting. If successful, the infinitely complex layers of process, pigment, varying degrees of opacity and transparency combine to create a space that is at once three-dimensional and two-dimensional. It is within the layered archaeology of these diaphanous yet material strata and sub-strata of paint that artistic intent and intelligence are manifested. Painting today is no easier than it has been for the past 60 000 years or more. In the contemporary artworld painting is arguably more challenging than ever before.

Like Nietzsche's tightrope walker in *Also Sprach Zarathustra*, Gina Heyer's work balances on an impossible-to-define edge. Her paintings shift between representing universally recognisable places and the uncanny deconstruction thereof. The use of elaborate perspective theories, photography and digital technology are an integral part of her process. Like Degas, Vermeer and many of her predecessors, these visual technologies become creative catalysts deeply embedded in the constantly evolving art of painting. Heyer's rigorous use of classical and logical perspective is deliberately offset by the surreal subversion of such logic. We see little human presence in these uninhabited chambers and corridors, and yet these places resonate with intense pathos and humility. Photographic fidelity is constantly disrupted by irrational space, light and colour, rendered so convincingly that we are unable to distinguish between

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the two worlds. The familiarity of these spaces render them almost archetypal as if we've all known such places, and yet the deconstruction of architectural and constructional logic, sometimes subtly and sometimes obviously, makes these places unreasonable and uninhabitable - the kind of spaces we can only imagine or experience in dreams. And yet the attention to detail, texture, reflection, colour, light, shadow and spatial aesthetics leaves us completely convinced as to the intense reality of these spaces. As a young artist, working in a challenging and controversial artworld, Gina Heyer has managed to transform seemingly ordinary subject matter. Working within the strict limitation of the traditional medium of oil painting, employing conservative pictorial conventions, and avoiding any conceptual mannerisms, she has created a vision that is extraordinary, quietly powerful and artistically significant.