



Larissa Exalto... in her own words

On the eve of Larissa Exalto's first solo show, entitled *The Colours of Life*, Ian Welland found the artist in poetic mood alongside a tremendous oeuvre of abstract work

Ukrainian born Larissa Exalto is an instinctive emotional artist. From an early age she dreamt of becoming an artist. Although her path was not totally artistic-bound, there is no doubt in my mind that the struggles and barriers to entry have now been overcome and she has reached the point of utopia on her journey. Significant also is the unveiling publicly of her work next month at the wonderful 3 Bedfordbury Gallery. The time had come to unlock the inner-artist!

What has been the main driver behind your artistic journey?

I took up art because I have this feeling and urge sometimes to paint what's in my head and I cannot relax until it's done. It's like a hunger. I always knew I wanted to be an artist, but I was told I would never be. Sadly I had to keep my art as a

secret hobby, but now this is not necessary. I moved to London fifteen years ago, gained an honours degree and decided to stay. Over the last few years I have received an enormous amount of praise from friends and fans, and I am pleased to say this now extends to my family who initially pushed me down more conventional channels other than art. I am grateful for the opportunity to have studied in the UK. Had I stayed in the Ukraine, it is unlikely that I would have been given the chance to realise my goal of becoming an artist.

The support of your family at this time must bring a great deal of comfort?

I guess now my parents understand me more. My mother wishes she had now sent me to Art College, as she can now appreciate my inner talent for art, but I have no regrets. I realise it was a difficult time

with the pressures surrounding a typical working class communist family. It is comforting to know I have their support now.

How would you describe your art?

Some people describe my art as decorative; others as new age abstract expressionism. Basically, it is for the viewer to decide. As artists and viewers, we don't need eyes so much; we need vision. I don't like tags or labels. I believe it's only a starting point whatever people wish to say or label my art as. It's on the brink of starting something new and great. I am still working on it!

Your work is bold and full of colour?

I attempt to capture emotion. I try to portray the everyday pain and beauty. My art is about life and the importance of simple things around us - things which we take for granted and rarely look at. Mainly, my work is like a little door to those deep and powerful feelings locked up inside every one of us. I want people to see, uncover and unlock their emotions to discover their inner self. I know my art can assist this process.

Where does your own emotion and passion for art stem from?

My Ukrainian background has moulded me into whom and what I am now. The folklore, the traditions and influences of my homeland has shaped

me from my earliest years. Ukrainian people are typically very emotional and passionate, with their spirit often likened to the French or Italians. I seem to have inherited all the passion and the depth of emotion that comes from my birthplace.

I can see the likes of Cy Twombly, Mark Rothko and Jackson Pollock in your work. There are hints of JMW Turner and Francis Bacon. Where does your inspiration come from apart from your inner self?

I draw little inspiration from other artists or famous artworks. It comes from within and the natural beauty found in everyday life. These can be momentary feelings from rays of light from the sun or listening to the rain. I would say it is a subconscious channelling of emotions. Not taken from the artists directly that you have mentioned; not even Dali or Picasso. I believe that you cannot step into the same water again. Wherever I start, turns out completely different as I paint. It's like I am entering other worlds, trying to replicate what and I how I see there, here, in our time and life. I rarely watch television, keep up with Facebook, read books or newspapers, but I love music and this is something that is constant in my day. If there is one thing that influences me alongside the beauty of the everyday, it would be music and, in particular, classical, flamenco and energetic violin and guitar.

Do tell about your creative process?

I don't really have a creative process as such. There

opposite: Rainbow

below: Love



below: Butterfly Effect
opposite top: The Sun

is little structure or planning. It's a momentary feeling I get and this can be any time of the day or night, even midnight. If the urge and inspiration comes, I have to start painting. Then I have this kind of vision/sketch in my head that I put down on the canvas first, before starting to work with colour. When the painting is finished, more often than not it will not resemble the original sketch that lies underneath the layers of paint. I don't know why it turns out something else than it was meant originally to be.

But your work has an experimental technique about it and the canvas can look heavily textured, similar to the effect achieved working with acrylics?

My methods are largely self-taught and, yes, experimental. I apply oil paint heavily; sometimes it can take several layers seven months to dry before working into and moulding shapes over and

over with colour. These shapes appear chiselled, ribbed and sculpted, resulting in a fairly unique impasto. The paintings look textured with almost a three-dimensional effect.

You have your first solo exhibition. Tell us about this?

The Colours of Life is my first solo exhibition. I feel my art is strong and bursting with deep powerful emotion. This exhibition is a very exciting prospect. The 3 Bedfordbury Gallery is an excellent modern gallery in the heart of London offering an airy exhibition space for artists and I am thrilled to be there. The high ceilings make for great lighting and I have twenty original works that will be featured. I want as many people to see, uncover and unlock their emotions, discover their vision and feel other visions; just as I have.





There is a grace and tranquillity that can be seen in and felt from your work. There is poetic tone that filters through your work?

You are right. The title for the exhibition is taken from a poetic verse that I have released as a statement:

*Find the rainbow inside of you,
Feel the colours of life,
Love the moments it gives you
In every heartbeat, in every breath,
Love. Feel. Live.
See the magic of the rain through windows of your soul,
Feel the passion of nature that lightens your heart,
Call it love. Call it life.*

*Welcome to my world, my dream, - my art.
Where all is possible. Where raw emotions rule with absolute power and inspire me all the way through.
What will you find behind the bars and walls built around you?*

Only what your imagination will want to show you. See. Feel. Love.

Where do you see yourself as an artist in the next few years? What are your hopes and dreams?

I see myself in a few years just painting all the time. I would like to hold a collection show exhibition at the Saatchi. My ideal is being able to use what I have to the max and make this world a bit better, making a little change in my way. And what are my dreams? What are my hopes? People don't dream and hope in this time anymore. We just need to let it go so that the hopes become dreams and then the dreams become true. If the sky is the limit, then your dreams are only beginning.

Larissa Exalto: The Colours of Life, runs 26 October - 1 November at 3 Bedfordbury Gallery, Covent Garden, London, WC2N 4BP. Telephone: +44 (0) 20 3268 2184. www.3bedfordbury.com Further details available at www.larissaexalto.com