

Maria Gabankova

Artist's Statement

"In Art there is only one thing of value, that which cannot be expressed in words."

G. Braque.

In my drawing, painting or sculpting, I strive to express that which is invisible – like music – through the means of the visible. I love to search for the hidden, the mystery and poetry. Over the years there has been a continuous development in my art in the way I use the human figure as a primary focus.



Detail from *Messengers*

I am also interested in exploring the subtle symbolism of objects, architectural and natural elements in their relationship to the human figure. I have used the figure in a number of compositions where I explore the meaning of spiritual reality in modern existence.

In this respect, my work has largely been connected to the act of observing and analysis as a way of recording. The primary catalyst to an artistic response is a sense of wonder at anything that exists.

The processes of drawing, painting, or creating an installation then facilitate a possession of reality; whether immediate or transmitted. Much of my work reflects on impulses in everyday life. The vast flow of information and news items all have an impact on my work: environmental concerns, food, medicine, human conflict, absence and presence, concealing one form to reveal another. I like what has been said of Rene Magritte, he "never ceased in his concern to demonstrate that what we see is in fact concealing something from us, while what is invisible is for its part incapable of remaining hidden."

I use the figure, mannequins and half humans as an allegory exploring the meaning of spiritual reality in the context of contemporary existence. The body broken speaks of: "the human body as shown in its isolation, fragmentation and decay (serves) as a metaphor for the brokenness of the human condition. Yet underneath and in between Maria's theatrical display of life's incongruities, there are also glimpses of wonder at the body redeemed." (Adrienne D. Chaplin).

Complex figurative paintings echo the radical essence of Biblical narratives: "Here, tenderness, community and fear jostle for space in the same canvas. Although there are images of apocalypse and darkness, compassion and humanity dominate." (Russell Smith). My fascination with the human figure in art finds its expression also in portraiture. The unique character of each individual presents a wonderful challenge, one that for me goes far beyond an attempt to capture a likeness. The elusive, yet, very real relationship between the physical outer appearances of the body and face and the inner being is an important component of my work. The images I create become suggestions of hope and meaning.

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Short Biography



Detail from *Report from a Leaky Boat*

Maria Gabankova was born and grew up with her brother Jan in former Czechoslovakia in a family of visual artists. Her parents Antonia and Jozef Gabanek had attended the Prague Academy of Fine Art and had a profound influence on her development through their art and dissident lifestyle.

Based in Toronto, she also spends time in British Columbia and in Prague, Czech Republic. Frequent stays in Europe provide an input and bring fresh contact with the Czech and international visual art, cinema and music scene.

Maria has received several awards and her work is represented in private and public art collections in North America and Europe. She has exhibited her work extensively in Canada and internationally since 1980.

In 2007, British publisher Piquant Editions reproduced a selection of Maria's work under the title *Body Broken-Body Redeemed* in which more than 50 of the artist's works appear in colour. This collection brings to light the attention to realistic figurative representation and conceptual emphasis on spiritual and Biblical themes that are present across her work.

Portraiture holds a special focus in her practice with an impressive record of commissioned portraits. She was commissioned to paint portraits of many distinguished Canadians and Czechs, including members of the Canadian Agricultural Hall Fame, a historical mural painting for Ft. Langley Museum in BC, and the Fred Metzger Collection.

In addition to being a founding member of Loop gallery, Toronto, Maria has been invited to serve on art juries, conferences and work in film (Warner Brothers) and theatre.

She continues to be an active member of several artists' organizations and initiatives.

Maria looks forward to her upcoming exhibition entitled "Body and Word" in Prague, Czech Republic. Her work will be featured through May 2019 at Sv. Martin ve zdi (Church of St Martin in the Wall) and will join the program for *Noc Kostelů*, or *Night of Churches* on May 24 2019.

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