

From the first glimpse of Ece Clarke's work one is drawn into her own private world and made vividly aware of the dynamic energy of the artist's vision, a vision which is almost religious in its intensity. Although abstract, her work has a strong affinity with the natural world – cloudscapes, seascapes, rolling hills and valleys, even the pelts of animals. The colours she chooses are deep and rich, blood reds and dark browns, with an occasional cerulean blue, but no one piece is a single colour, rather the colours mutate into one another. She works on each one for days, weeks, even months, building up layers of colour, wiping them off, then adding more layers, until she has achieved the surface she wants which seems to glow with an inner light. It is a palimpsest of her daily life as an artist, a journey whose final destination, when she sets out, she does not know.

Ece Clarke's technique is complex. She uses Somerset paper, which she likes for its flexibility. She can bend or fold it at will, often into a cylinder shape which has to be perfect before it pleases her. The paper itself bears witness to the stress and struggle which has gone into its making, often torn and abraded, but after the storm calm and serenity prevails. One of several different materials she uses is bitumen, a difficult material to handle, but she loves it for its historical associations as well for its physical properties.

Magnets play an important part in Ece's work. Using magnets gives her the flexibility she desires, she can move the work around into different configurations, and it is important to her that they are a visible part of the process. Another element she employs is smoke, which she uses on paper mounted on aluminium panels. She likes its mysterious, misty effects, which she achieves with a gas lamp and occasionally with candles. Here too there is the historical association with the *sfumato* technique used by Old Masters, in particular Leonardo da Vinci. At times she goes even further and burns the paper, which she has splashed with water, creating crusty textures in the smoky dissolution. Again she does not know exactly how it will turn out, leaving it to chance and a mystical belief that the image will emerge.

Another small mystery which only gradually reveals itself is her use of jewellery. She buys Indian beads and, after reducing their brilliance with paint, she inserts them into small tears in the paper where they lie in wait to be discovered. This hidden aspect of Ece's work is part of the slow discovery which is necessary to fully appreciate her alchemical magic. The tiny hidden clusters of beads are at the opposite end of the spectrum from her three tall cylinders which stand like sentinels guarding a citadel.

Ece Clarke's artistic mentors run from Rembrandt to Rothko, with a passing nod to Fontana and Manzoni. She may have light-hearted passages from time to time, but the prevailing mood is sombre, even tragic. From her struggles with herself and with her intransigent mediums her own unmistakable style has emerged. I would like to end by offering her the two last lines of Dylan Thomas's great defiant poem which I think is appropriate to her work:

*Break in the sun till the sun breaks down,  
And death shall have no dominion.*

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