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Clarisse d'Arcimoles

Clarisse d'Arcimoles moved from France to London to study art in 2005. Having gained a degree in Theatre Design and an MA in Photography, both of which have had an obvious influence on her practice, she has since produced a couple of projects inspired by London history: *The Good Old Days* and *Rise and Fall* were her personal response to the demolition of a council estate in Caledonian Road in the north of the city. Now she is immersed in her next big project, which has led her to East London.

by Margherita Dessanay



— What made you decide to study art here rather than in Paris?
I came to study at Central Saint Martins, London felt a bit more crazy and open-minded, with a more 'work-in-progress' style. It is true that the foundation level in France is much higher; you have to study how to draw, how to paint, and you also learn a lot about Art History. In London it's more about concept and ideas, and the freedom you have to experiment.

— What were your first steps as a graduated artist?
My family portrait project *Un-possible Retour* at the degree show went pretty well, I was selected for an exhibition for emerging artists, *Fresh-Faced and Wild-Eyed 10*, at the Photographers' Gallery. Charles Saatchi visited the show and, to my surprise, bought all my works. Meanwhile I was already working on *The Good Old Days* at the now-demolished Market Estate. Everything happened pretty much at the same time. And it got me my first gallery, which does not exist anymore. But that was a really bad experience.

— Why?
As soon as I mentioned Saatchi, they wanted to represent me. They gave me a list of celebrities I should have taken portraits of. *Un-possible Retour* was something personal and intimate, but the concept was turned into taking a portrait of a princess of Monaco with rabbits...

Clarisse d'Arcimoles

— How has London fed your inspiration?
When I walk in the streets I am attracted by the things that have been there for hundreds of years. For this reason London is great, but for the same reason I think that now I should leave London and look for another kind of history, not the strictly Victorian or Edwardian or Georgian era any more. Now I've started looking at London in a black-and-white way and my new project is going to be about East London in black and white.

— Can you tell us something about it?
When I was a child, all photographs [seemed to be] in black and white and I used to think that life was in black and white. I loved the idea that you could physically walk through the picture frame and enter into a black-and-white photograph. And this idea was my starting point. I wanted to re-create a black-and-white photograph in 3D. I want to experiment with it and I would call it my life project, because this is really what I have always wanted to do, to enter into a black-and-white picture.

— How is the project taking shape?
The first thing was finding the right picture. I spent six months in libraries opening archive boxes. I didn't really know what I was looking for. I was looking at images of old shops and pictures of the slums in Spitalfields from the Victorian era. I was reading Jack London's *People of the Abyss* and I really focused my search in the East End of the early 20th cen-



East London



I wanted to re-create a black-and-white photograph in 3D



At that point I fell in love with a picture taken in Spitalfields in 1902. The woman is making brushes, surrounded by her children. I wanted to re-create it in its actual location, which means in a Victorian house in Spitalfields. Three months ago I made the model for it. You will enter from the ground floor and the space will look like a gallery space. There will be a sixpenny fee for going upstairs to the room. That was the minimum rent at the time. If you take a picture in the room, it should look the same as a black-and-white photograph. Every detail, from the wallpaper to every single object, will be painted in black and white.

— Where exactly it will be located?

Josephine [Breese] from [my gallery] Breese Little found someone that might be interested. It's going to be in Fournier Street, close to the Ten Belts.

— Is there any artistic reason why you're looking at East London for this project?

I've been living in East London and I've been conscious of the fact that it is a very arty area but also very commercial and expensive. So much has changed since Gilbert and George came east! That's why I like the idea of an introductory stage for the piece with people first entering in a gallery-like space.

— It sounds like a massive project. How long is it going to take?

It will take from six to eight months, I guess... For now it's a matter of finding people willing to fund it, I hope that it can create interest in Spitalfields fans, especially historians and lovers of history. Another problem I am considering now is the amount of craft involved. In order to re-create the perception of the historical time you're entering into, there will be a lot of small details of domestic life: a newspaper with the coronation of Edward VII in 1902, maybe a death notice of a child (considering the death rate for children in poor areas at that time). On the wall there will be a portrait of Queen Victoria and a picture of the church in Spitalfields.

I will also have a show in December for which I will look at the past again. I am going to re-create the backgrounds of old portraits in 3D and put myself in the set. I still don't know if I should be the only one in colour with everything else painted in black and white. And then I may reconstruct a photographic studio in the space so everyone can pose for a picture!

Clorissa of Antimoles

