

# The Sunday Independent 'Dancing diptych puts a structure on chaos and invites interaction'

By Niall MacMonagle | Sunday 29 September 2024



“**A**t what point do you become aware of art?” asks Liliane Tomasko. In her case it was very early on. “I have vivid memories of myself in kindergarten, sitting at a desk drawing things – and feeling elated by seeing my observations, thoughts and feelings take shape on paper.”

“To me, it was just the best thing in the world, and somewhat of a revelation that there were tools

available to express the ambiguous and undefined and turn it into something material, solidified.”

Born in Zurich, her Swiss/Hungarian background has shaped her as an artist.

“There is no getting away from your cultural conditioning,” she says, adding that she’s “profoundly shaped by both cultures”.

That Tomasko’s parents fled the political troubles of the Hungarian uprising of 1956 has left in her “an



indelible sense of having been ripped from a place that holds the key to your story”.

The family returned to Budapest and Lake Balaton in the 1970s to visit her parents’ families – but the unease remained.

“Despite the joy of reunion, there was always a sense of shadow, of things unspoken and of sorrow pushed deep.”

“I suppose this was not only due to the country’s political upheaval, but perhaps a result of my own family’s somewhat dark and violent history. Many members of my extended family

died of alcoholism and other self-destructive behaviours.”

Tomasko sees her Hungarian heritage as “a mixed bag full of wild behaviour, madness and the sad consequences left in its trail. It was chaotic but also colourful.”

However, her Zurich hometown offered little, “apart from a highly organised, hard-working society, born out of the puritan fervour of the Protestant Reformation.”

“In Switzerland, “this need to trim things down, to make them neat and small” was such that “I knew instinctively that in order to protect my imaginative self, I had to leave.”

Both cultures, Hungarian and Swiss, “made me want to run and look for alternatives”. And stepping out of her comfort zone into “a world of moving parts made it possible for me to become an artist”.

**The teenage Tomasko never** went anywhere without a camera. She photographed “shadows, liminal spaces, objects placed out of context, anything which seemed to be lit up by ambiguity”.

Her early work “made reference to recognisable reality” and she says she still spends “a lot of time observing my immediate environment, so I might catch a glimpse of something extraordinary which often lies nestled in the unremarkable”.

Tomasko’s avid interest in “paganism and Monty Python” prompted her move to London. At Chelsea College of Art, her work included cloth and wool sculptural floorworks, based on the Vedic square of Indian mathematics, geometric patterns and magic squares.”

Her later acrylic on canvas work also contains shape and pattern, though are “not mathematics or geometry-related”.

*Stacks*, her 2009-2013 series, was based on “Polaroid images of stacked patterned fabrics and textiles photographed close up in dark spaces with just a little daylight”.

These patterns “started to disconnect visually from its matrix – the fabric – and occupy the picture plane as floating lines and opulent masses”, elements she sees in her current paintings “but this time the source is not an abstract idea, more something that belongs to our everyday world”.

Her work, she says, is sometimes “cool and elegant, sometimes rambunctious and vital”. It “always insists on retaining its relationship to the world” and she has “no idea where a work will go at the outset”.

“Each painting brings together a variety of currents and energies. My working process often feels like a dance between structure and chaos, and it goes on until I recognise a tentative equilibrium.”

A teenage Tomasko’s “struggle with nightmares kindled an interest in the occult”, which led her to early abstractionists such as Kandinsky, Mondrian, Klee, Munch, Marc and Malevich.

“They explored the invisible forces that shape our universe, including those spiritualistic and esoteric movements which seemed to be coursing through European culture at the time. Were it not for those profoundly disturbing dreams I was subjected to at the time, my life might have taken a different turn.”

**She and her husband Sean Scully**, both acclaimed artists, create distinctively different work though a superb handling of shape, colour, line and texture belongs to both. In *Twofold*, her solo exhibition at Dublin’s Kerlin Gallery, there are five big two-panelled acrylic works on aluminium and three works on paper, all made in 2024.

“What confronts the viewer first of all is the purely visual aspect of a painting, but embedded in the works is a lived knowledge of history and its cultural symbolism.

“The viewer who spends time with the work not only completes it but carries the exchange that happens between themselves and the painting forward into the public arena where it then mingles with the wider cultural currents.”

This featured painting, *To Shift a Shape, to Shape a Shift, Across a Line and Causing No Rift*, takes its title from her contemplating how the two panels of the diptych create a third element – a new reality that also ended up as a little poem.”

“Standing in front of a large blank canvas fills me with joy and excitement. At that moment all is possible and there is nothing to lose.”

Looking at the finished work, Tomasko says she’s transported “to places, spaces, feelings, memories, outside, inside, up and down, to nature, art history, dusk, dawn, heat and cold and so on. It is the experience of being human.”

***Twofold* is at Kerlin Gallery in Dublin until 19 October**