

JOSÉ ESCOFET

&

MIRIAM ESCOFET



Old Flames
Oil on canvas 71 x 61 cm, 28 x 24 in
José Escofet
see page 25

JOSÉ ESCOFET & MIRIAM ESCOFET



A Collection of Flower Paintings,
Allegories, Myths & Legends
(by Father & Daughter)

johndaviesgallery

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The Heavens (detail)
Oil on canvas 147 x 102 cm, 58 x 40 in
see page 23

Miriam Escofet

Miriam Escofet was born to her Spanish father and British mother in Barcelona in 1967. Within this artistic background, Miriam became captivated with paintings from the Gothic and Renaissance which developed into a fascination with the classical and mystical. She studied at Brighton School of Art graduating with a BA (Hons) in 1990. Her subjects now range from allegories and myths to legends, and in addition she is a highly accomplished portrait painter. She has exhibited in a number of distinguished galleries in London, including the Christopher Wood Gallery, Mallet of Bond Street, Rafael Vals, Duke Street and the Albermarle Gallery. Further she has been selected for the BP Portrait Award in 2007, 2009, 2010 and 2012. Miriam has also exhibited at the Royal Academy, where her 2013 exhibit *Titania* sold on buyer's day.

A conversation between Miriam Escofet & John Davies

JD Shown opposite we have a blown up detail from your extraordinary painting *The Heavens* to which we give greater attention on pages 22 and 23. Illustrated on page 5 and also on the back cover of this catalogue we have images of your paintings of olive trees - *Terra*, *Olive Tree 111* and *Olive Tree and Moon*. Being half Spanish, and growing up in a Mediterranean country, such trees must have a heart-felt, even spiritual significance for you. Can you expand on this...

ME I think it is impossible to grow up in the Mediterranean and not love the olive tree. Not only is it such a wonderful and distinctive feature of the landscape, it is also so embedded in the history, mythology and religion of the land. It is a very symbolic tree, yet also so everyday, its produce nourishing people for millennia. For me it is a sacred tree. There is something about the light in the Mediterranean which lends these trees a sculptural quality, contrasting their twisted trunks and casting strong shadows on to the dry red earth. Their canopies are like cloud formations gently stirring in the breeze, their silver leaves

look almost alight contrasted against the sky or the earth. When I decided to work on a series of paintings on an olive tree theme I travelled back to Spain and spent an obsessive few days sketching and photographing fields of trees. It felt like communing with old benevolent entities, each tree very much an individual. Interestingly the visual memory of them was so etched on my mind that, when I returned home, I felt no need to refer to my documentation; each study or painting grew mostly out of memory.

JD With the third olive tree subject of yours, illustrated on the back page of this catalogue and titled *Terra* I believe there is a particular story behind the inspiration for this painting. Was it drawn from a dream you experienced?

ME Yes, I occasionally have very lucid dreams which are full of symbolic imagery. I love it when they happen, partly because they feel so 'real' but also because the images I see feel like 'gifts'. In this particular dream I was standing looking at the night sky with my nephew Kai and my goddaughter Maddison. As we gazed at the sky, which was more like dusk than night, I suddenly realized we could see these huge moon sized orbs, quite faint and almost transparent, some overlapping each other like ghostly images, each one with a very subtle different colour or 'glow'. We were thrilled to realize that these were the planets in our solar system, and we started pointing at them and naming them. The moment felt magical, as if a veil had been lifted, opening our perception. When I awoke I annotated the dream; I knew I somehow wanted to use this imagery in a painting without feeling any need to analyse or understand it. I was working on the olive trees at the time, and in *Terra* I wanted to convey this sense of timelessness, turning the elements into archetypes; it just felt right to incorporate this dream within the depiction of the sky in this particular work.

JD I identify with the feeling that the images in some dreams are gifts - that's a lovely way of putting it. I am still thinking about the depth of regard you hold for olive trees, and the aroma one can pick up in an olive grove even on a mild day in the Mediterranean, let alone a hot one, and this also makes me think of cork trees.

Before we leave the olive tree subjects though, in *Olive Tree and Moon* illustrated on page 5, opposite, the moon is very large, verging on the surreal, yet in an almost ethereal manner. Can you tell us more about this



Olive Tree and Moon
Mixed media on gessoed board 56 x 51 cm, 22 x 20 in



Olive Tree III
Gouache on paper 60 x 50 cm, 24 x 20 in

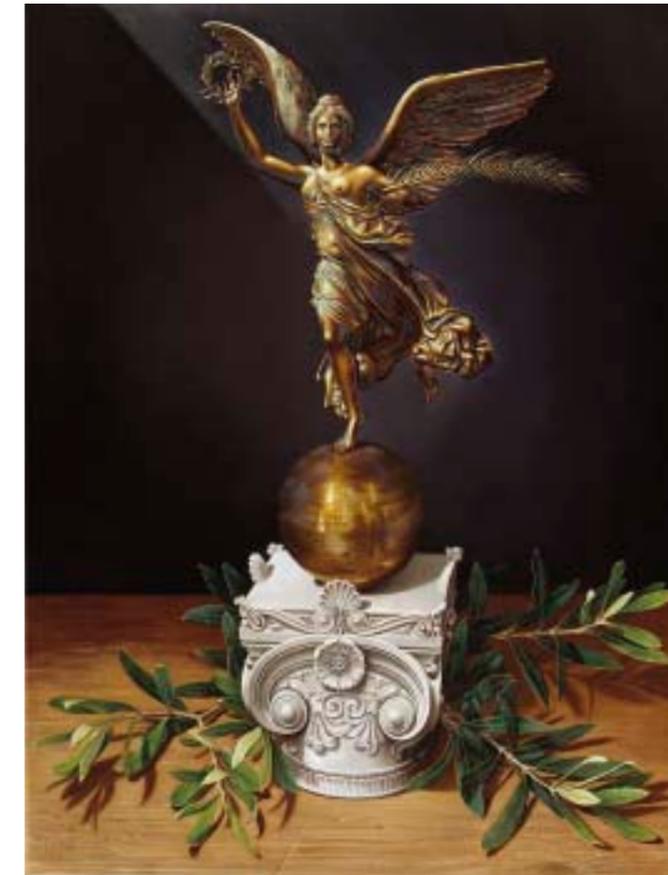
very obviously pronounced depiction of our closest friend in the solar system?

ME Again I was aiming at a depiction of the 'archetypal' olive tree, so the composition is reduced to bare essentials - the earth, the tree, the sky. In the sky we see the sun and the moon and the stars, but in some ways we are most familiar with the moon as we can gaze at it endlessly, unlike we can with the sun. It is undeniably beautiful, so close and yet so far. The sky at night is unknowable and full of mystery, regardless of how many scientific theories we arrive at to explain the cosmos. When we look at the night sky we are all filled with wonder. The moon may be visually a small object in our lives, but in our psychic landscape it is large. When I introduce the moon into my paintings I exaggerate its qualities because I want to allude to its psychic weight. Incidentally, these pictorial choices which I am verbalizing here are all made instinctively at the time of creation; as an artist you have to allow your unconscious to come through and trust its triggers and impulses.

JD There is no doubt that there is a strong sense of mystery and wonder in your paintings, yet for me they have a sufficient sense of 'earth' to be tangible, grounded and properly engaging.

Illustrated opposite on page 7, we have three symbolic pieces; for me at least, *The Angel* and *The Devil* are perhaps more straightforward characters in our history than *Victory*, but do please tell us more. *The Angel* is supporting a bubble, and is accompanied by a glass sphere, and the *Devil* is holding what appears to be a marble attached to a chain...further we associate laurel leaves with *Victory*, and yet I have no idea how laurel became associated with the manifestation of victory, or why...

ME I like painting objects and finding layers of meaning, character or even humour in them. This can be explored in the juxtaposition of the objects in a composition or by changing their context. With careful placing a relationship can start to develop between an object and its environment. These paintings to which you refer are rather whimsical, not really meant to be over-studied. *Victory* is essentially a still life painting, and the leaves are actually olive leaves. The use of the olive leaf wreath dates back to the ancient Olympic Games; the winner was crowned with a wreath of wild-olive leaves taken



Victory
Oil on canvas on panel 40 x 30 cm, 16 x 12 in



The Angel and the Devil (Diptych)
Oil on canvas on board
Left & right panels 24 x 18 cm, 9½ x 7 in

from a sacred tree. Later on I believe the Romans adopted this tradition and evolved the laurel leaf wreath with which we are more familiar today. The imagery in *The Angel* and *The Devil* just felt apt, the angel is hovering over a marble which you can look on as representing the earth and she is also holding up a clear glass ball representing the celestial sphere. The devil is chained to the black marble which is a visual reference to the underworld.

JD Your painting *The Fairy* is a delightful contrast to the devil, and certainly takes us to a more welcoming environment...

ME This painting is on a similar vein to *Victory* and *The Angel* and *The Devil* in the sense that, essentially, it is an 'allegorical still life'. I have a huge fascination for the *object*, especially small sculptural pieces. I think this comes from my background in three dimensional design and working in clay. I am intrigued by the textural and spatial qualities of objects as well as the way they relate to each other. For many years I have collected quirky and lovely pieces from antique markets when on my travels. They surround me in my studio and regularly find their way into my paintings. They often assume a different identity depending on the composition. Arranging these pieces can feel a little like moving figures on a stage, particularly as I take great care lighting them, altering their mood and character. Also I will sometimes morph my objects within the canvas into other pieces from my imagination; this tends to happen with my larger canvases where I introduce figures and objects from museums or collections. The whole process of setting up a composition can take days or weeks even, gently tweaking things, moving them around to the point I know that I have arrived at something interesting.

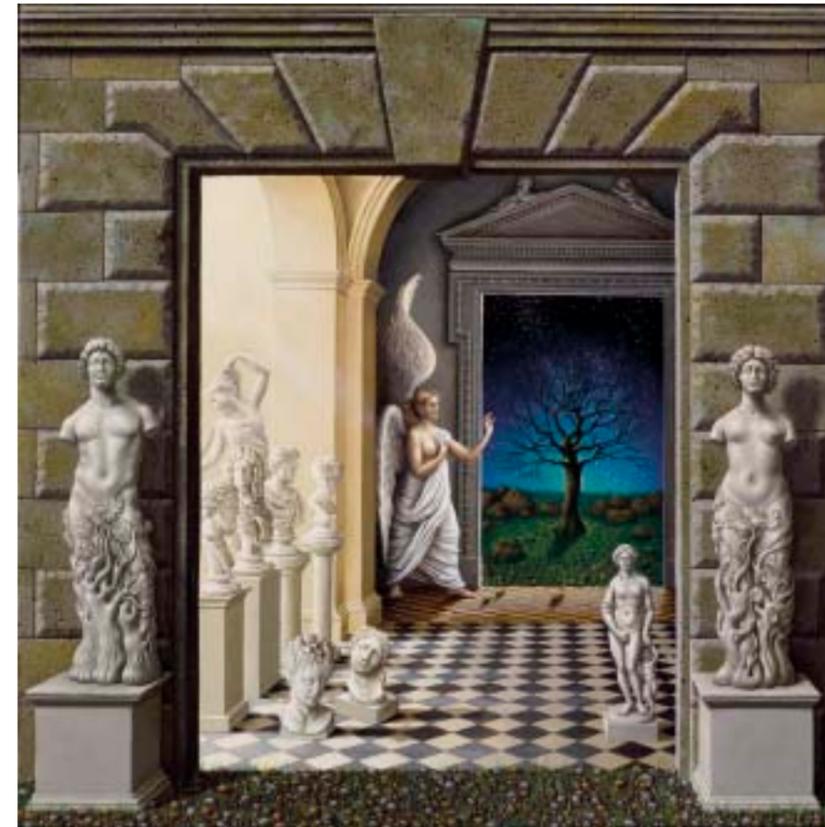
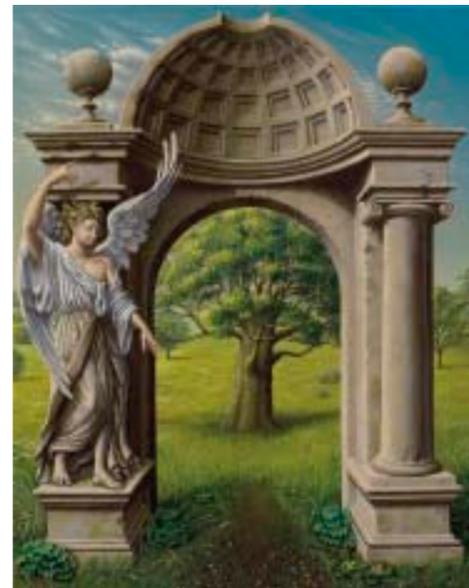
JD In respect of *The Portals* shown on pages 10 and 11, this triptych obviously has a distinct narrative. Can you talk us through this...

ME Alongside my love of objects and sculpture I am also fascinated by architecture, especially sacred architecture. I have looked at many architectural drawings which can be beautiful works of art in their own right. They also reveal the thought processes and ideas that are explored and rejected in the design process and I find this fascinating. I have many books on architecture and at one point I became really intrigued by the gateway designs of Inigo Jones with all their Vitruvian classical proportion.



The Fairy
Oil on canvas 51 x 46 cm, 20 x 18 in

I can't explain why but I saw something mysterious and almost hermetic in them. This triggered a thought process around the idea of the gateway, arch or doorway being a point of transition. This is not just from one physical space into another, but also from one psychic space into another. It is no coincidence that many entrances to buildings are marked by caryatids and columns, or crowned with pediments, like sentinels that protect the building and mark the point of entrance. I think we all feel a slight sense of altered state when we walk from one space into another. In *The Portals* I am exploring these ideas and possibilities. I think I also had in mind Cocteau's wonderful film *La Belle et la Bête* which is such a great work of art. The scene in Bête's castle where the caryatids in the fireplace come alive and start to breathe out smoke is visual magic. I think that visual reference worked its way into the stone angels in *The Portals* which are coming alive.



JD I haven't seen Cocteau's film *La Belle et la Bête*, so I must do something about that. I can identify with you over the thoughts stimulated by walking from one space into another, at least when one is not rushing through a location or building, and the role of a gateway, arch or doorway contributing to an altered state in one.

In respect of your conception of *The Temple*

The Portals (Triptych)
Oil on canvas
Central panel 36 x 36 cm, 14 x 14 in; left & right panels 25.5 x 20.5 cm, 10 x 8 in

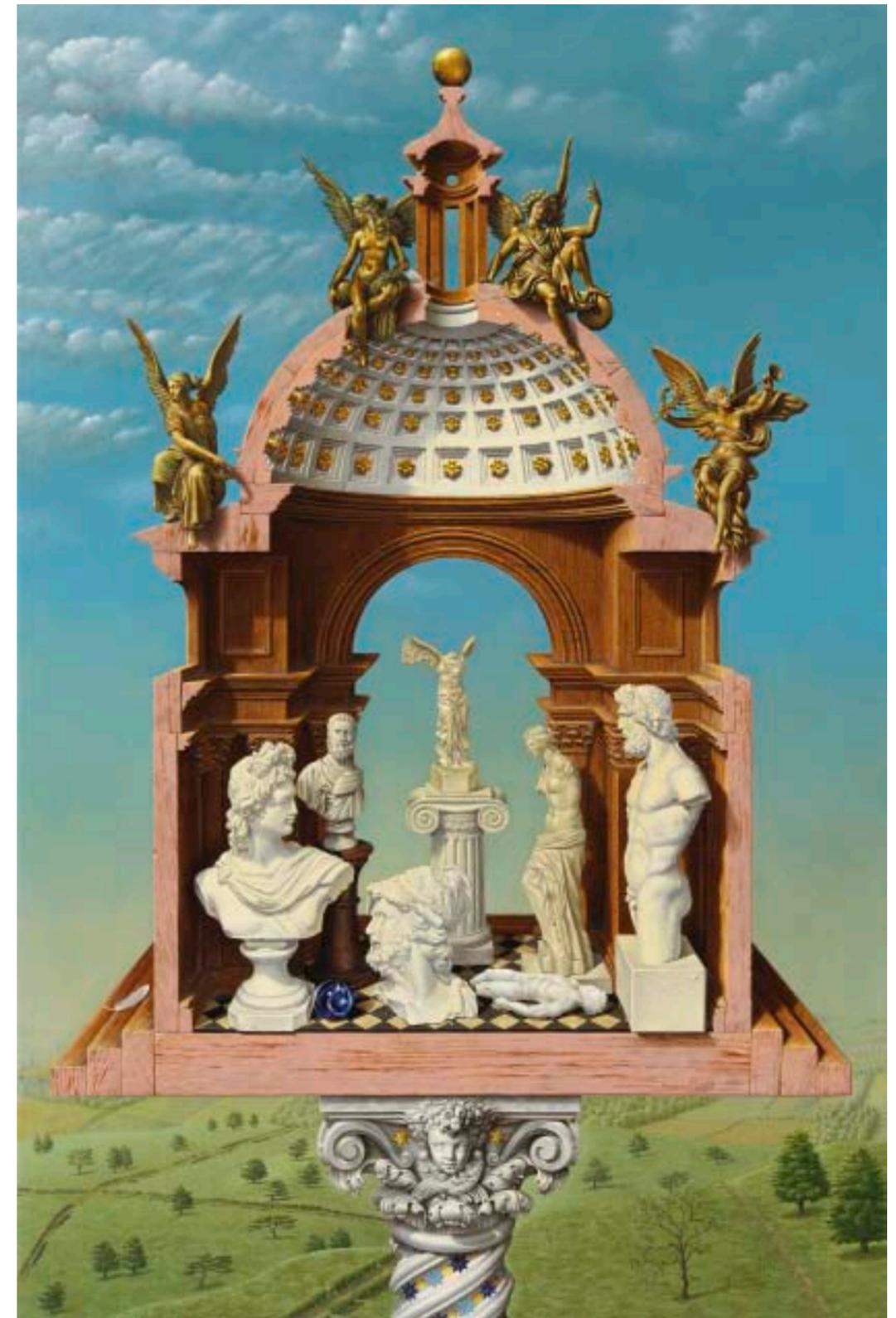


shown on page 13, I understand that this has connections to the tradition of the English folly and its role in the grounds of English country homes. I also know that you are intrigued with the Palladian ideal and its effect on English architecture...

ME Yes, there is something so wonderful about the English folly which provides no function other than as an architectural eulogy to an arcadian classical past. Most follies are based on classical Greek and Roman temples, or on the wonderful villas designed by Palladio. Palladio was so incredibly influential on architecture. They become visual punctuation marks in the landscape, bringing a wonderful mix of the profound, the sublime and the whimsical. In *The Temple* I am paying homage to the idea of the folly in a slightly surreal way, my structure floating over the countryside in an unexplained way. It is filled with classical sculptures, much in the style of English country houses being filled with sculptures collected on 'the grand tour'.

JD Before we move on from *The Temple*, please could you identify the figures inhabiting the interior?

Again your painting *An Allegory of the Gothic Ideal* illustrated on page 15, is quite obviously full of symbolism. We observe an arch, a



The Temple
Oil on canvas 76 x 51 cm, 30 x 20 in

distinct feminine presence, precious stones, all set in a distinctly biblical landscape. Can you take us further into the story...

ME Inside *The Temple* we have from left to right a bust of the Apollo Belvedere, the Emperor Hadrian, a classical bust of Menelaus, the Winged Victory of Samothrace, Venus de Milo and Zeus. I cast these from figures that are in my collection and I wanted to evoke the atmosphere of a plaster cast gallery.

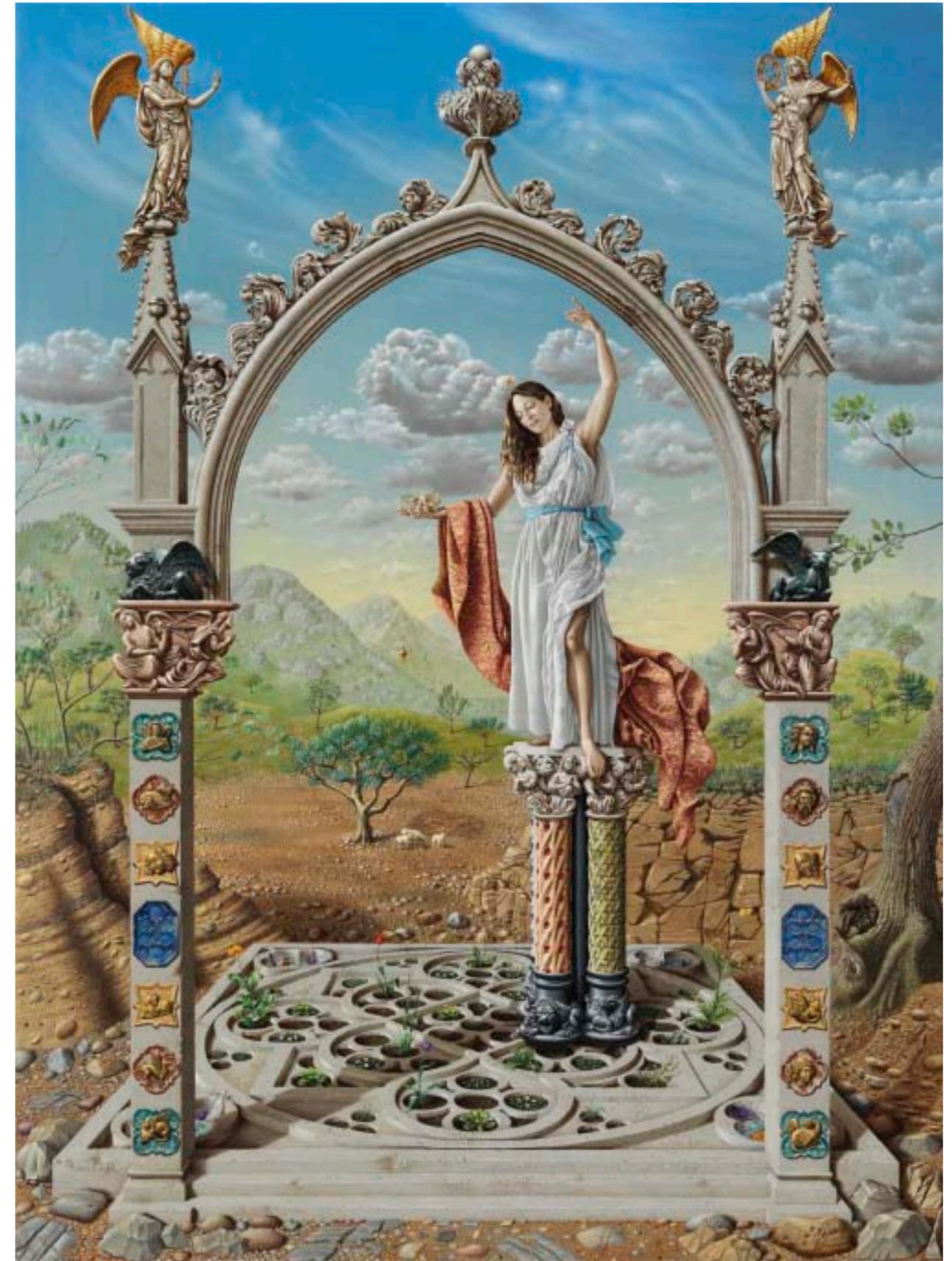
An Allegory of the Gothic Ideal is in some ways a difficult painting to talk about; there are so many ideas that came together within its inception I can't rationalise most of them. I look upon it as a turning point in my work. It was the first piece in which I introduced the human figure in any significant way, and it was the first time I experimented with perspective in a slightly surreal way. The floor area of the painting is the pattern of a gothic rose window but turned into a 'sacred garden'. Upon this stands a gothic arch which I based on details of gothic architecture in Barcelona. There is a particular arched doorway through which I passed many times as a child; it remained etched in my mind. The figure is deliberately ambiguous, she could be an angel or a saint, but she does represent the feminine principle that was so important in Gothic architecture. Most cathedrals were built in the name of the Virgin Mary. With one hand she points to the heavens and in the other she holds objects associated with geometry.

The landscape was partly inspired by the meticulous landscapes one sees in Gothic Altarpieces, except it has a more arid feel. My inspiration for it came from a recent trip to the Sinai desert. I incorporated the precious stones as a nod to Dieric Bout's 'Paradise of The Symbolic Fountain' with its lovely depiction of the river bed from the fountain of life encrusted with precious stones; this I think is based on Ezekiel's description of paradise.

JD This is fascinating.

Moving on to your next composition "*And Do We Not Live in Dreams*" a line drawn from Tennyson, can you talk us through the conception of this composition and how you arrived at the title?

ME The idea for this painting evolved as I was working on some ideas around the theme of the Chalice. I wanted to create a rather grand romantic painting, drawing quite liberally from historic mythical and romantic imagery. A chalice is an intriguing, romantic, sacred and mysterious object that can be a work of art in itself. I am interested in the way it has been used symbolically



An Allegory of the Gothic Ideal
Oil on canvas 96 x 71 cm, 38 x 28 in



throughout history as well as in stories and in legend. In addition to exploring these aspects of the chalice, I also wanted to bring together and reference works by other artists. I based the figure of the maiden being rescued by St George, on the foot of my Chalice, on the figure of Angelica in Ingres' painting *Angelica Saved by Ruggiero*. Ingres' female figures have such a wonderful sensuousness to them and I find this one very sculptural in its pose and form.

I have always been fascinated by this rather psychedelic dragon in Paolo Uccello's *Saint George and The Dragon* in The National Gallery. In my painting it transforms into part of the stone relief at the foot of the niche. In this same relief I based my St George figure on the Donatello St George from his marble relief of *St George and the Dragon* from the Orsanmichele in Florence.

The Baptistry doors in Florence, especially the Ghiberti doors, are one of the masterpieces of Western Art. Each frame is a jewel of expressive sculpted storytelling. I based the female figure in the stone relief at the foot of my niche on the figure of Mary in the Annunciation subject of Ghiberti's doors. I also borrowed the idea of the gilded quatrefoil panel for my panel above the niche depicting the 'Adam and Eve' figures. The idea of setting this Chalice in a niche or window really served three purposes. Firstly, this was to accommodate a view into an Arcadian landscape. Secondly it was to act as a compositional device in which I could



"And Do We Not Live in Dreams"
Oil on canvas, 90 x 60 cm, 35 x 24 in

reference architectural imagery that I had in mind. And thirdly it was to allow me to indulge my love of architecture and perspective. Perhaps I should point out that every element in this painting is invented, formed in my imagination, apart from the marbles and the apple blossom.

It took some time to find the right title for this painting, but in the end the second part of this quote from Tennyson seemed to fit very well, “Dreams are true while they last, and do we not live in dreams”.

JD Your painting *The Nymph* appears to be a relatively straightforward but charming depiction from legend and your imagination. This painting and the *The Witching Hour* both remind me of Victorian fairy painters such as John Austen Fitzgerald (1832 - 1906) and Richard Dadd (1819 - 1887) but please tell us more about your examples...

ME *The Nymph* explores the same ideas employed in *The Witching Hour* (pages 20 & 21) and is loosely inspired by Victorian fairy paintings. However, unlike a fairy she is in proportional scale to the woods around her. In this instance we view her world through a tiny archway of cherry blossom, which sets up a strange and surreal disconnect between her world and ours.

JD You certainly take us deeper into this mysterious and magical world in *The Witching Hour*. Can you please illuminate further...



The Nymph
Oil on canvas on board 40 x 30 cm, 16 x 12 in

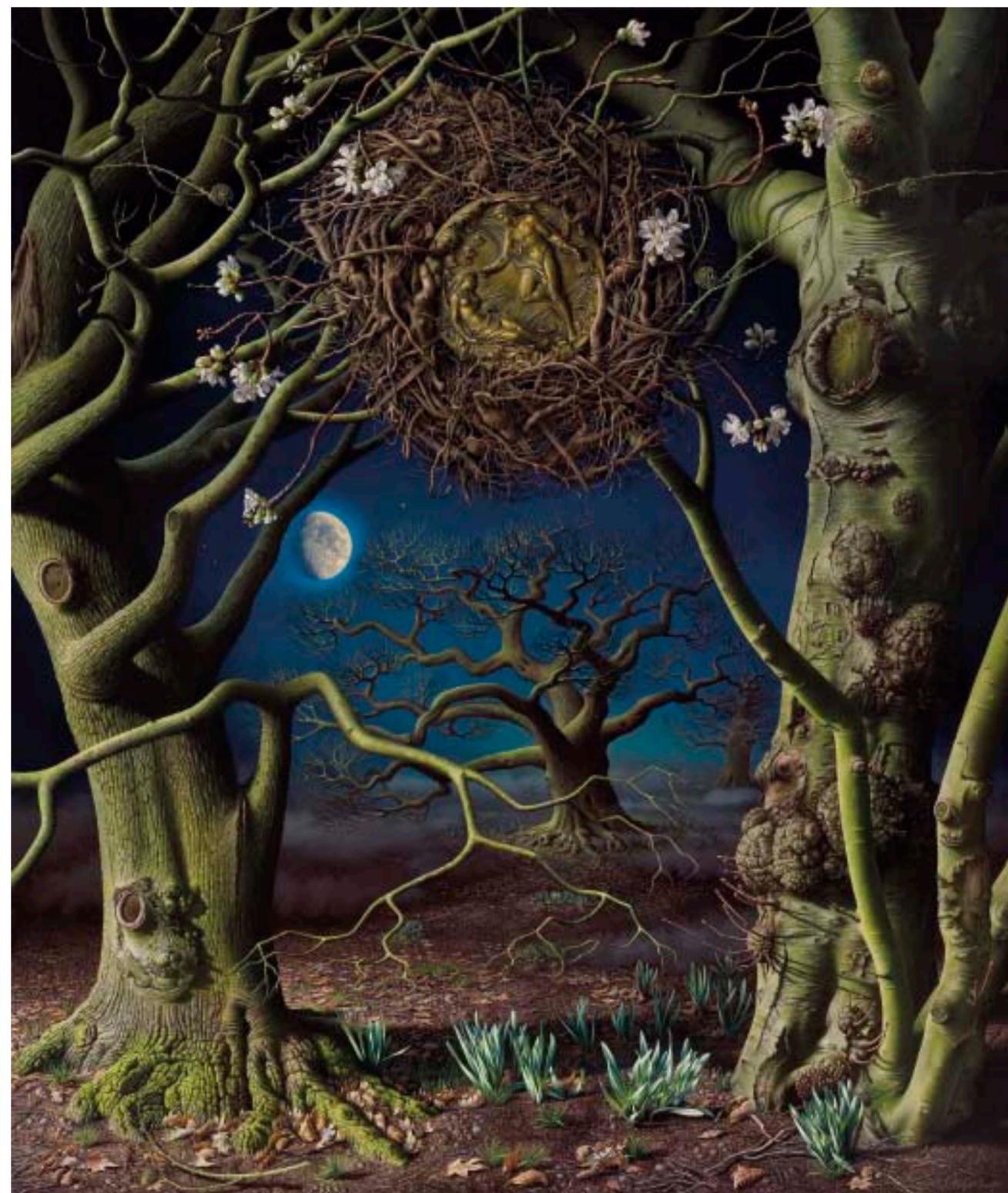


ME In the *The Witching Hour* I was exploring ideas of magical forests, which as we know is a very common theme in most folklore and tales. Trees are the great edifices of the plant world and like architecture they have a powerful effect on the landscape. They can feel benefit or malevolence and the woods have always been a place of ambivalent morality in fairytales as well as in the collective unconscious. Woods can become a place of threat, of encounter, of revelation and of transformation. No doubt these associations are a residue of old pre-Christian animistic faiths, where man felt he inhabited an earth in which every element had an inherent spirit that could manifest itself as a being. How wonderful, strange and frightening it must have felt to perceive the physical world one inhabited as truly alive and powerful. I think it is hard for us to conceive that nature of feeling in our modern day, omnipotent relationship with the world around us. I can't help but feel that this loss of a mystical connection is a psychic loss for us.

Consequently, in this painting I wanted to explore this sense of mystery and express it in a meticulous way but without any specific narrative or story; just simply to create an image that would convey a feeling of enchantment. The relief plaque placed centrally at the top, embedded in the wreath and entwined in branches, shows Oberon waking Titania. I wanted to include blossom because it signifies renewal and transformation. I include blossom quite a lot in my paintings.

JD Illustrated on Page 23 we have your extraordinary painting *The Heavens*. I understand that the conception for this composition and its execution took a full twelve months. Please tell us more...

ME The sky, the stars, the planets (the heavens) have always



The Witching Hour
Oil on canvas 95 x 80 cm, 37½ x 31½ in

held the ultimate mystery for us. Stars have done so throughout different civilizations, and have been given divine status. This applies especially to the planets in our solar system which appear to move like wandering stars against a backdrop of fixed stars. The word planets comes from the Greek 'planetes' which means *wanderers*. The planets and constellations have found shape in the human imagination as beautiful heroic gods, incredible monsters and even as abstract concepts. Some of our most beautiful artistic expressions have been representations of these divine beings and the re-telling of their myths. This painting is my attempt to synthesize various depictions of these celestial divinities drawn from Greek and Roman mythology and pay homage to them. In my mind this composition remains very playful but I hope it also projects a mysterious atmosphere while being faithful to its theme. It is playing with the idea of earth and rootedness, our relationship to the earth, as well as its relationship to the heavens and abstraction, in other words what is beyond us.

The composition took some time to resolve. The idea of using classical busts of the Gods, where available, to represent the planets was quite straightforward and was the starting-point of the composition. But how to depict the sky was more problematic. I finally became resolved to use celestial charts and thus construct a backdrop in this way. In the event I composed a whole chart of the skies by amalgamating copies of the plates from John Bevis's *Celestial Atlas* of 1789. I have to thank the British Museum for this. It is a point of pride for me that this collated celestial chart is absolutely precise and to scale. Bevis's celestial charts strike me as some of the most beautiful that I have ever seen and it seemed only fitting to use them.

I wanted to incorporate the idea of Atlas holding up the heavens above the earth and decided to marry that with the still-life treatment of the painting by enabling him to support a surface on which my gods would be arranged. The earth is obviously represented by the ground of the painting, with references to time and gravity. The figures on the table surface represent the gods associated with the planets in our solar system, some obviously so, such as Apollo, and others less so, such as Uranus. I have, wherever it felt pictorially right to do so, brought into the painting some of the associations that are attributed to these gods. The myths pertaining to each of these gods are fascinating, managing to encompass explanations for natural phenomena such as the seasons; keen observers can find subtle references to these in the painting.

© José Escofet and John Davies.

The Heavens
Oil on canvas 147 x 102 cm, 58 x 40 in



José Escofet

José Escofet was born near Barcelona in 1930, and spent much of his early career working as a graphic designer whilst painting 'fine art' in his own time. He moved to England with his British wife and three children in 1979. The softness of the northern light brought about a substantial change in his work. With a deep awareness of both Spanish and Dutch still-life and flower painting from earlier centuries, Escofet progressed from the late 1980's into a highly productive period painting impressively refined, sophisticated flower subjects of great richness. He has had numerous solo exhibitions in both London and New York, and his work is in many important Private collections in the USA and Europe. This exhibition includes some twenty works which can only be described as world class.

A conversation between José Escofet & John Davies

JD Your flower paintings convey your chosen subjects with such great naturalism, but also such accuracy, that observers might assume that you are very knowledgeable on every species that you depict. Yet, as an artist, such knowledge is quite superfluous to procuring a result of quality. An analogy would be that an artist who paints a convincing image of a beech tree may not have any idea of the species that he is depicting. Yet there is something about your paintings that does suggest that you have a good knowledge of flora – would this be true?

JE The honest and immediate answer to that is no. I have neither disdain nor lack of interest, but it is just not my priority. I have never considered my work as botanical, I am just fascinated with all flora and all the mystery it invokes in me.

My real fascination is how the plant arises from a patch of soil and bursts into such beauty as a flower. That is why I painted what I call "small landscapes", to be able to express this mysterious and very intimate little world. Hence my "landscapes" are not of this world but of my imagination.

JD This is very enlightening, and your answer provides an engaging window on to your creative process. For your source material, your subjects, do you buy flowering plants or grow them or just use photographic material and morph them into the soil?

JE I bought a lot of plants, and my wife, Alma grew many varieties as well. At that time we had a decent sized garden and I could afford generous reference documentation around me. Also we potted many plants for ease



Old Flames
Oil on canvas 71 x 61 cm, 28 x 24 in

of movement in and out of the studio. In addition I took photographs of details of plants, their leaves, stems, flowering heads, petals etc., so that I could work on paintings out of the flowering season.

Many big gardens were visited such as Wisley and we attended all the Royal Horticultural Society exhibitions in Vincent Square. We went to the Chelsea Flower Show annually, and I was a member of the RHS. We often researched and sought out particular flowers and plants, obtaining them from particular specialists. Garden centres generally proved little use in this respect, beyond the ordinary well known garden varieties.

For some years, and every year, we would travel all the way to Wakefield to visit the English Floral Tulips Society exhibitions of rare Old Tulips. The morning after the shows we were invited to the home of the principal organizers, James and Wendy Akers, to see all the collection together. They were extremely hospitable and allowed me to photograph at will. They also sent us home with wonderful exhibits of these old, rare flamed tulips.

JD Indeed, which we see depicted in your painting *Old Flames* illustrated previous page.

I understand that you purchased rare narcissi from plant specialists, as well as many other varieties. Would these be the narcissi in *Early Risers* depicted opposite on page 27, with the crocus in the same painting?

JE They are a mixture of narcissi – ‘Tête-à-Têtes’ which are the yellow and orange ones, and those with the white petals and red eyes are specials, which are often rather vulgarly referred to as ‘fried eggs’; I am unable to recall their specialist name. The crocuses are common varieties.

One point that might be of interest to viewers and readers is that I have mostly depicted my flowers and plants life-size within my compositions, although latterly I have tended to depict blooms larger than life size in some of my more imaginative arrangements.

JD They are delightful, and I am sure that they have a rich, exquisite aroma. In *A Poetic Moment* illustrated opposite, the primroses are easy to name but can you help us with the identity of the delicate pink blossoms and the cream flowers with a slightly green tinge in the same painting?

JE The group of lovely pinkish flowers are called Habranthus and the other little group in the background are Tulipa Polichroma. Both of these are real hybrids and they were sourced at a Royal Horticultural Society show



Early Risers
Oil on canvas 51 x 61 cm, 20 x 24 in



A Poetic Moment
Oil on canvas 50 x 60 cm, 19¾ x 23¾ in



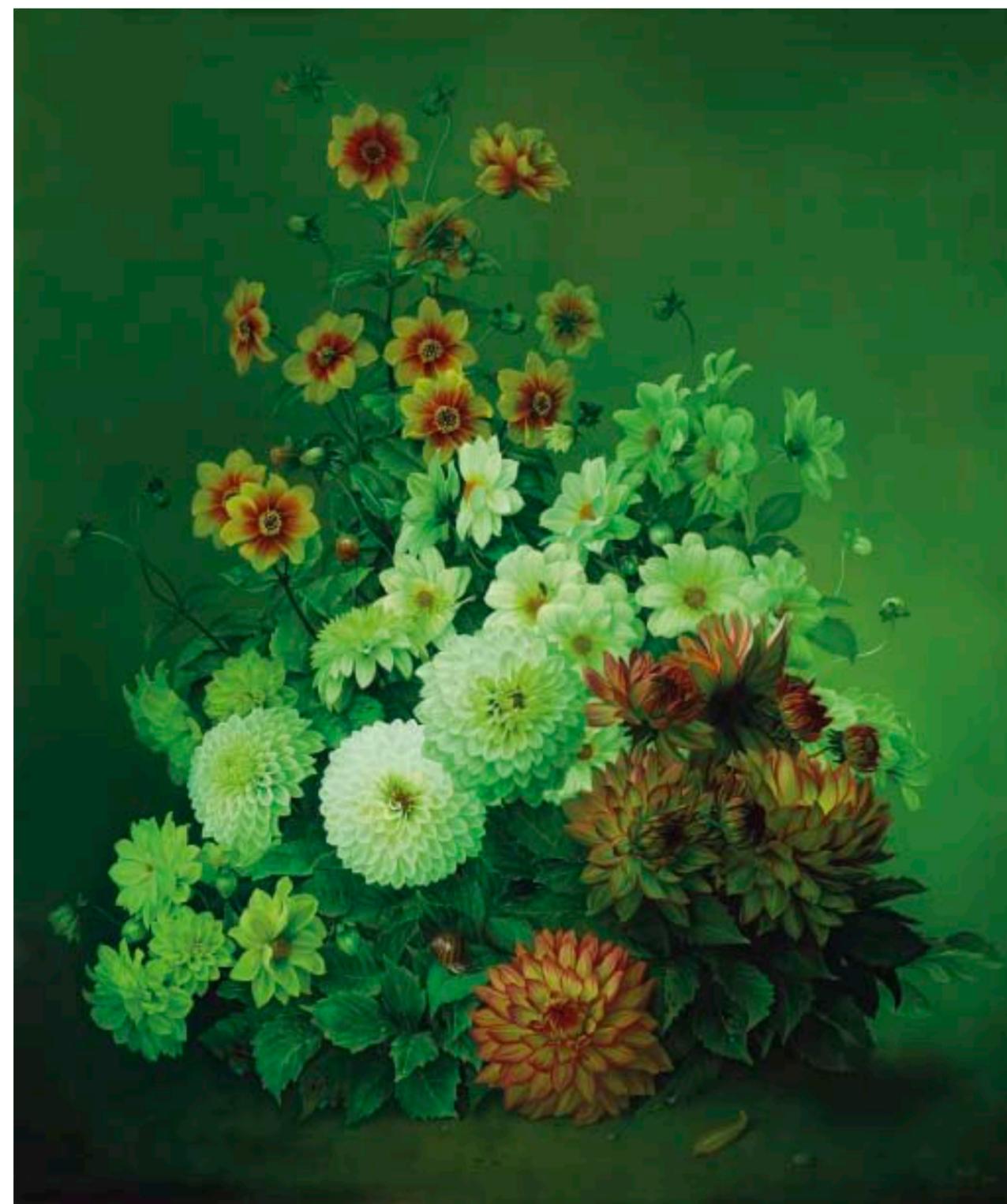


of small spring plants. They are tiny, delicate plants sought by collectors and avidly keen gardeners. My wife and I have always been attracted to this kind of little flowering gem; they are so magical and lent themselves so well to the direction my painting was taking.

JD Illustrated across the centre spread of this catalogue (pages 28 & 29) we have your 'tour-de-force' canvas *A Symphony in Blues and Whites*. I understand that your reference to the delphiniums was facilitated by a specialist grower who allowed you to pass the day in his garden. In addition we have roses, and is it a handful of poppies in the composition? Not to mention a couple of snails and several moths or butterflies, as well as a beetle. Can you tell us more about how this painting came together?

JE *A Symphony in Blues and Whites* was realised thanks to the specialist who grew the delphiniums. Our contact with him came through our gardener, who was also a grower of dahlias. They knew each other as fellow gardeners and met at the shows. Our gardener was also a judge for dahlias. Thus, I had the perfect documentation for a large canvas with these huge stately 'spires'.

When I contemplate a new painting I never make a preliminary sketch. I have an idea



The Dahlia Pyramid
Oil on canvas 96 x 81 cm, 38 x 32 in

for one and let it develop in my mind. When ready, I start the painting following the said idea. However, at some stage of working, the painting itself comes alive and starts to dictate to me the direction it wishes to go. Therefore sometimes my first idea gets changed considerably. This is how the painting evolves and how plants, insects and flowers appear together on my canvases, regardless of whether they are in or out of season.

As for the insects, I see them as a vital presence among the flowers for the simple reason that one would not easily survive without the other. They are essential to each other and play a major role in their respective evolutions. This is how all my paintings develop. The composition is a harmony of colours, shapes, forms and movement. That is what I am after.

Yes, there are old fashioned roses in the foreground and the poppies are the big cabbage style poppies (they have cabbage like leaves) and are like opium poppies. In the right hand bottom corner is a variegated hosta.

JD Your paintings have a very smooth finish and I suspect that you prepare your canvases with great care. Am I correct in thinking that you apply at least one layer of gesso over your canvases before starting on the background of your subjects?

JE First I choose a fine linen canvas already prepared with an acrylic gesso. Once this prepared canvas is stretched, either on stretchers or glued onto a wood panel, I apply a further two or three more coats of gesso, fine sanding the surface between each coat.

My final preparation is to cover up the hard white colour of the gesso with a colour. The colour depends on the painting in mind.

JD I am sure that this gives a very fine surface which aids the finesse of your brushwork.

Featured on the previous page is your magnificent, very full *Dahlia Pyramid*. Can I assume that the dahlias featured were indeed grown by your gardener? Also, are the blooms exclusively dahlias in this composition?

JE He supplied the rhizomes (roots) and then helped Alma plant them in pots. They are normally grown in the ground but I had the need to transport them to and from the studio. They have large roots, big stems and enormous heads and are very top heavy when in pots.

Once painted, they were planted in the ground and picked up before



Dreamy Summer Begonias
Oil on canvas 71 x 91 cm, 28 x 36 in



Rhapsody in Blue
Oil on canvas 71 x 81 cm, 28 x 32 in

frost, then kept in the shed protected by straw. They happen to be one of my favourite plants with their architectural heads and geometric patterns.

JD Back on page 33 we have two lovely arrangements, *Dreamy Summer Begonias* and *Rhapsody in Blue*. Are the flowers depicted in *Rhapsody in Blue* begonias too?

JE No, the *Dreamy Summer Begonias* are show begonias and not the little garden border ones. They have been painted life size. The flowers in *Rhapsody in Blue* are called lisianthas. They come in different colours but the blue and white ones are the most dramatic. They are not special hybrids or show flowers but they have a very dramatic colour pattern which drew my attention.

JD *Symphony of Flowers*, here on pages 34 and 35, has a lovely atmosphere to it, a great sense of calmness. I think the panoramic, stretched landscape format helps promote this, but naturally the juxtaposition of the individual flowers contributes to this as well. The tulips at the centre



Symphony of Flowers
Mixed media on canvas 81 x 122 cm, 32 x 47³/₄ in



give me the opportunity of mentioning Anna Pavord's extremely erudite book "The Tulip" that brought the extraordinary history of this Persian variety of flower to a much wider public.

It is revelatory to realise that the tulip made great fortunes for people, as well as a corresponding volume of bankruptcies. Nowadays the flower paintings of 17th Century Dutch Masters such as Ambrosius Bosschaert and Jan van Huysum are widely acclaimed and highly valued. As a consequence it comes as something of a surprise to learn that while van Huysum rarely sold painting for more than 5,000 guilders, a single red and white tulip bulb 'Admiral Lieffkins' was knocked down for 4,400 guilders at an auction at Alkmaar in Holland in 1637.

Please can you tell us something more about the flowers in this composition and how it came together?

JE I don't have an answer for all the flowers, but the tulips are normal pink and white striped examples; they are not hybrids or from the English Florist Tulip Society. The lupins are common garden lupins but they did come from the Chelsea Flower Show. In the lower left of the painting are auriculas from Brenda Hyatt and upper left are small hybrid gladioli.



Early Blooms
Oil on canvas 66 x 91 cm, 26 x 36 in



Burst of Spring
Oil on canvas 56 x 76 cm, 22 x 30 in

To the right of the composition is a single tall white member of the chionodoxa family.

Indeed this painting is of these flowers on a quiet summer's day. I aimed to create this mood by including numerous summer insects sharing life with the plants. I tend to title my paintings as moods rather than giving them specific plant titles, so as to differentiate myself from a botanical painter.

JD Indeed, *Symphony of Flowers* does possess a lovely quietness, and the composition makes it a delight for the eye to wander over the whole.

On page 37 we have *Early Blooms* together with a *Burst of Spring*; obviously the latter is a spring subject, and I imagine that *Early Blooms* is as well, unless the title means that the flowers depicted were flowering early for their species and later than spring. Am I correct in thinking that this is a spring painting too, given that I think primulas bloom early in the year?

JE Yes, they are both paintings using spring plants as the subjects.

JD Here on pages 38 and 39 we have your very dignified and classical composition *The Old Rose Garden*.



The Old Rose Garden
Oil on canvas 102 x 137 cm, 40 x 54 in

I already know that you acquired these roses from a specialist in Paris, which indicates the lengths to which you go in the preparation and documentation for your paintings. Please can you expand on the background of this painting; I know that there will be a number reading this who will be very keen on roses, and particularly the old varieties...

JE This has to be one of my most personally felt compositions because I particularly love old fashioned roses. Having acquired these particular plants and successfully grown them in our garden, I produced this painting in homage to the old fashioned roses that I love. It is in honour of them.

JD Well I think you have achieved a highly distinguished painting in this example. Can you remember the four varieties (it appears to be four) that are featured?

JE The tall main tree is a very beautiful single rose from France, *Roses du Temps Passé*, a soft and subtle pale yellow. The dark wine coloured is very old and Tudor like. It has a heavy velvet texture and hangs precariously on thin twig-like branches. The white one was a David Austin old rose and the stripy one from a specialist rose grower outside Kingston-upon-Thames.

JD They are beautiful. That velvety texture, particularly on the old deep wine red roses is amazing is it not, and the fragrance is heavenly; indescribable really.

Moving on from the roses, we go from the sublime to what seems to be a lower order with *Nasturtium Thicket* and pansies in *Delicate Summer Gems*. I suspect that these are easier to grow and prolific, but both have enormous charm and delightful colour. Have you anything particular to say about these very pretty flowering plants and your depictions of them?

JE I love nasturtium and the bright explosion of colour that comes from the heart of the flower. I chose them for their movement and energy and rampant growth. I chose them for their particular leaves which act for them as cups and saucers. They have very variegated bright patterns. The plant wriggles with vine like stems and freely crawls in and around and over everything. The seed pods are like large peas that roll everywhere. In any



Nasturtium Thicket
Oil on canvas 61 x 91 cm, 24 x 36 in



Delicate Summer Gems
Oil on canvas 61 x 81 cm, 24 x 32 in

garden they are most prolific and can reseed and pop up anywhere.

I have always loved pansies unreservedly, for no particular reason. They are like little faces looking back at you. They have enormous variation even in one strain; by that I mean that all differ slightly because the colours bleed into one another. They are small, delicate and very dainty and dance in the wind; yet they are as tough as trees in their own way and withstand all weathers thrown at them. They certainly merit and receive my respect.

JD It's lovely to hear your enthusiasm for nasturtium and pansies.

The *Summer Haze* composition on pages 42 and 43 bears some similarity to a *Symphony in Blues and Whites* because of the leaning 'spire' but in this case I believe it is a composition of mainly lupins and hyacinths. Hyacinths are another flower with great pungency, so much so I find that potted examples can be detected as soon as one enters a room in which there might be a bowl of them. Were these examples amongst the potted plants that you brought into the studio for painting?



A Summer Haze
Oil on canvas 71 x 112 cm, 28 x 44 in

JE Yes, in fact the entire painting in this case. Hyacinths were always potted showing the tops of their bulbs deliberately. We kept the lupins in pots because they were such victims of slugs. I would have brought them in at different stages of growth and then archived them for my documentation. At the time I conceived a new idea for a painting I would combine and compose at will, ignoring whether these plants were in or out of season together at the same time. I hope this explains a little how I operate in the studio, using the plants as subjects for my compositions.

JD Turning to page 45 we have a riot of colour, particularly with the tulips in *A Colourful Day*; are the other flowers a special variety of poppy? Illustrated below this we have the extremely elegant composition of *Pink, White and Yellow Hibiscus*. I feel that these are such classy flowers. Please can you tell us more about these two paintings?

JE The tulips are all parrot tulips and the other plants are not poppies but anemones. They are not the normal small, natural ones but large variegated flowered ones and they are called De Caen Anemones. I enjoyed putting together such colourful and playful plants to create a small colourful landscape.

As for the hibiscus painting, this was a study of the plant as though it were a portrait. In this case three hibiscus plants were used to form my usual little landscape format. They are beautiful exotic flowers and lend themselves perfectly to the composition.



A Colourful Day
Oil on canvas 66 x 86 cm, 26 x 34 in



Pink White and Yellow Hibiscus
Oil on canvas 56 x 66 cm, 22 x 26 in

JD Finally, with the exception of the delightful original prints of tulips on page 49, we have another one of your tour-de-force canvases *A Vision in Blue* on pages 46 and 47. This composition is immensely deep, full, and rich - a tremendous orchestration of colour, form and detail. I think for the first time in this catalogue we see lilies in one of your paintings. Please tell us more about how you got this magnificent painting together...

JE The principal subject is the group of majestic and fantastic peonies (which I love to paint) accompanied with old fashioned roses, trumpet lilies and campanulas... All the ingredients for this canvas I had in our garden. I wanted a quiet harmony and the result of this composition, is I hope the same as its title, a vision in blue.

JD It certainly is.

This has been a most enjoyable conversation, José and I am really looking forward to seeing your wonderful paintings hanging on the gallery walls for visitors to enjoy.

© José Escofet and John Davies.



A Vision in Blue
Oil on canvas 102 x 137 cm, 40 x 54 in



A Symphony in Blues and Whites (detail)
see pages 28 and 29



Portrait of Parrot Tulips
Original silk screen print 35 x 48 cm, 13¾ x 19 in



Portrait of Striped Tulips
Original silk screen print 35 x 48 cm, 13¾ x 19 in



José Escofet
Oil on canvas on panel 50 x 40 cm, 20 x 16 in
Miriam Escofet

José Escofet

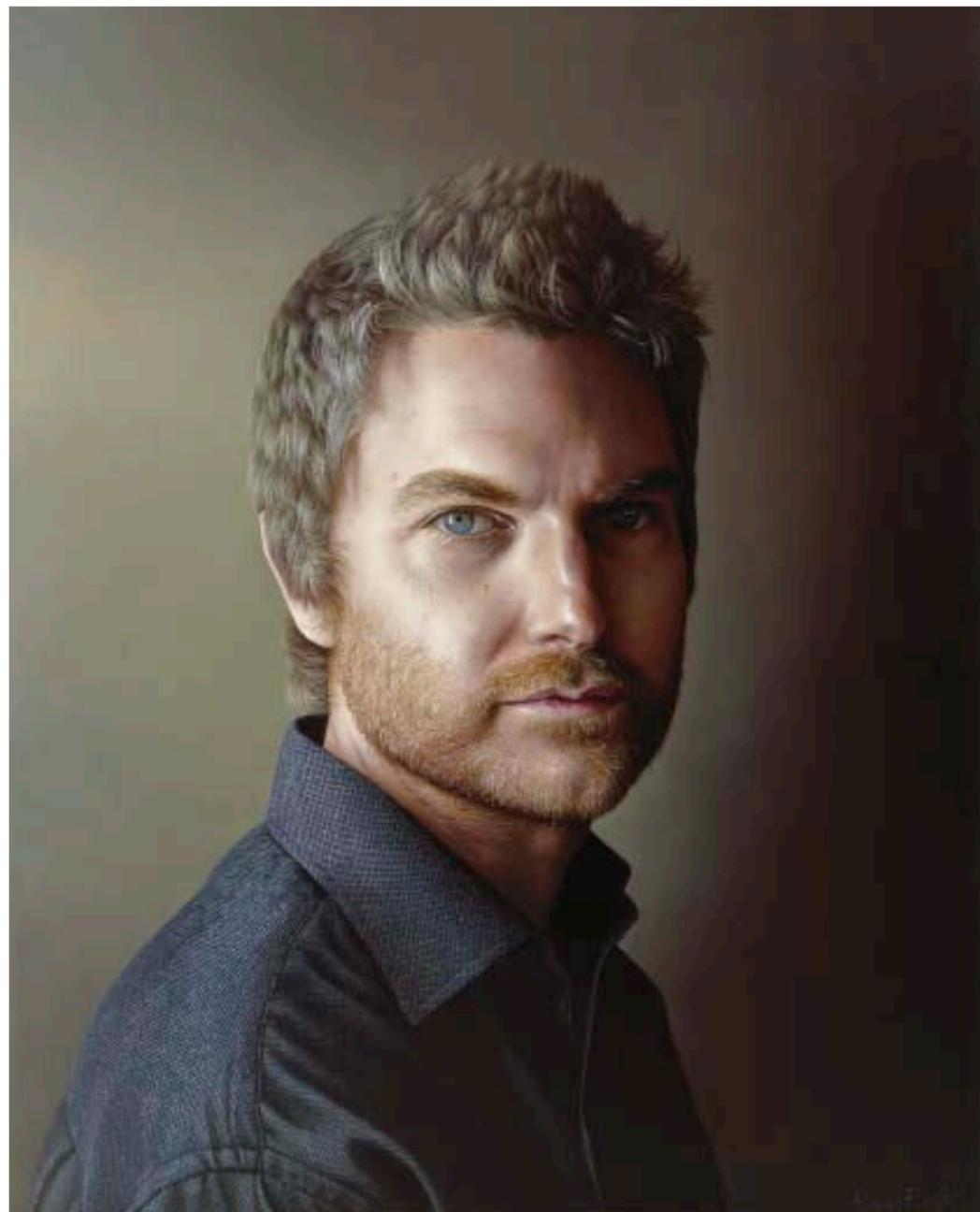
- 1930 Born in Terrassa (Province of Barcelona), Spain
- 1952 Moved to Barcelona and worked for the next 25 years as a free lance graphic artist, while developing his paintings in his studio at home
- 1979 Moved to England with his English wife and three children where he currently lives



Solo Exhibitions

- 1987 Stephanie Hoppen Gallery, London
- 1987 Janis Aldridge Gallery, Nantucket, USA
- 1987 Garrick C. Stephenson, New York
- 1987 Stephanie Hoppen Gallery, London
- 1988 Mallett's of Bond Street, London
- 1989 Coe Kerr Gallery, New York
- 1990 Mallett's of Bond Street, London
- 1994 Saanen Gallery, Gstaad, Switzerland
- 1994 Ebury Galleries, London
- 1997 O. Kelley Anderson Fine Arts / Jensen Fine Arts, New York
- 1998 O. Kelley Anderson Fine Arts / Jensen Fine Arts, New York
- 2001 Hollis Taggart Galleries / O. Kelley Anderson Fine Arts, New York
- 2004 Hollis Taggart Galleries / O. Kelley Anderson Fine Arts, New York
- 2005 Beth Urdang Gallery, Boston, USA
- 2007 Albemarle Gallery (Summer Group Exhibition), London
- 2010/2011 Retrospective Exhibition at Villa Bertelli, Forte dei Marmi, Italy
- 2013 John Davies Gallery, Moreton-in-Marsh, Cotswolds.

José Escofet's work is in many important Private Collections in the USA and Europe.



Guillem
Oil on canvas on panel 50 x 40 cm, 20 x 16 in
Miriam Escofet

Miriam Escofet

- 1967 Born Barcelona, Spain. Moved to England in 1979
- 1990 Graduated (BA Hons) in 3D Design at Brighton College of Art
- 1990 Started watercolour paintings for commission and for the Stephanie Hoppen Gallery, London
- 1990 Exhibition of watercolours at Mallett of Bond Street, London
- 1991 Set up a ceramic workshop in London and started working in clay for commission and galleries
- 1994 Exhibition of watercolours and ceramics at the Saanen Gallery, Switzerland
- 1994 Exhibition of ceramics at Pulbrook & Gould, London
- 1996 Solo exhibition of watercolours at the Christopher Wood Gallery, Mallett of Bond Street, London
- 1996 Group exhibition of trompe l'oeil paintings at the Rafael Valls Gallery, London
- 1997 Solo exhibition of watercolours and ceramics at the Rafael Valls Gallery, London
- 1998 Solo exhibition of paintings at the Albemarle Gallery, London
- 1999 Exhibited as part of the 'Annual Still-Life and Trompe l'Oeil Show' at the Albemarle Gallery, London
- 1999 Exhibited as part of the 'du Reel a l'Imaginaire' exhibition at the Galerie Michelle Boulet, Paris
- 2000 Exhibited in the 'Millenium Exhibition' at the Albemarle Gallery, London
- 2001 Solo exhibition at the Albemarle Gallery, London
- 2005 Solo exhibition at the Galerie Michelle Boulet, Paris
- 2005 Exhibited in the 'Maître Contemporaines de l'Imaginaire' show at the Galerie Michelle Boulet, Paris
- 2006 Exhibited at Vent Des Arts (du Rêve au Fantastique) Sanary-Sur-Mer, France
- 2006 Exhibited in the Albemarle Gallery 10th Anniversary Show, London
- 2007 Solo exhibition at the Galerie Michelle Boulet, Paris
- 2007 Selected for the BP Portrait Award 2007 at the National Portrait Gallery, London
- 2009 Solo exhibition at the Albemarle Gallery, London
- 2009 Selected for the BP Portrait Award 2009 at the National Portrait Gallery, London
- 2010 Selected for the BP Portrait Award 2010 at the National Portrait Gallery, London
- 2010 / 2011 Exhibited alongside José Escofet retrospective at Villa Bertelli, Forte dei Marmi, Italy
- 2012 Selected for the Royal Society of Portrait Painters annual exhibition, Mall Galleries, London
- 2012 Selected for the BP Portrait Award 2010 at the National Portrait Gallery, London
- 2013 Selected for the Royal Society of Portrait Painters annual exhibition, Mall Galleries, London
- 2013 Summer Exhibition 2013, Royal Academy of Arts, London
- 2013 John Davies Gallery, Moreton-in-Marsh





Madison Triptych
 Oil on canvas on board, central panel 50 x 40 cm, 20 x 16 in
 Left & right panels 40 x 30 cm, 16 x 12 in
 Miriam Escofet



Vanitas
 Mixed media on watercolour paper 70 x 50 cm, 27½ x 20 in
 Miriam Escofet



Gillian
 Oil on canvas on panel 70 x 50 cm, 27½ x 20 in
 Miriam Escofet



Anthony
Oil on canvas on panel 70 x 50 cm, 27½ x 20 in
Miriam Escofet



on back cover
Terra
Gouache on paper 70 x 58 cm, 27½ x 22¾ in
Miriam Escofet

Symphony of Flowers
detail
see pages 34 and 35



johndaviesgallery
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