**An interview with Lauren Printy Currie**

**By Julie-Ann Delaney**

1. **Within each of the three galleries the Usher collection has been hung thematically - with rooms divided into works of Portraiture, Landscape and Still Life. Art made now isn't often discussed or exhibited under these kinds of umbrella titles, so how did you go about considering where your work might best sit?**

My decision to make a piece for the portrait room was immediate, and as soon as I heard of the thematic rooms I was instantly drawn to the fact that the portrait room contained works that were solely paintings of women. I treated the room and the collection as one collective *she*.  I am interested in the positions of these women within the frame; the gaze of the sitter (most of them are looking away) the passiveness and the neutrality associated with figurative painting, and the imagined relationships between the artist and the subject.

2. **You have made new work for the exhibition - how much has this been influenced by the works on display from the Usher Collection, or by the thematic of the room you are within?**

My new work has been very much influenced by the works on display in the portrait room. After spending time pondering the works in the room, I was interested in creating a piece that reflects the time spent basking in museums, surrounded by the aura of old masterpieces. I spent a long time looking at the surfaces of the paintings, the construction of the images, and the meanings that I project onto them as a viewer. All of this also led me to consider how I could explore the enduring cultural value in the work of others.

I also began to think about the English poet and author Rosemary Tonks (1928 - 2014), who is my ‘collective she’ and an influence on my work. She disappeared in the 1970s and abandoned her literary profession for fundamental Christianity. She wrote poems about a stylised view of urban literary subculture around the 1960s. She wrote about loneliness in 1960s ‘high-living’; the backdrop in which her work sat. This ‘she’ in portraiture is often naked, solitary, sleeping, day dreaming, still and enveloped in a vague painted space, whether that be the painted background, the year of production, the context and so on. So really it was a melding of these two ideas - a poet and her cultural space - and a group of women, framed and depicted as objects of adoration, subjects of paintings, muses, loves etc.

Rosemary Tonks also experienced a temporary loss of eyesight, which was significant given her fixation on the gaze and observing culture.

3. **Were there specific works from the collection which you felt drawn to, and if so why?**

I was drawn to the woman in kimono gazing into the mirror because of the doubling of the figure; you see both the image of the woman and her reflection. Another influence was the removal of armour and folding limbs in *Atlanta.* This work gave the title to my piece; it was taken from the museum’s written description of the painting, something that offers a distinctive perception particular to the person who wrote it. The weight of the lean in *Girl’s Head* and *Portrait of Justina*, the tight drawn belt in *Leonline*, all provided further inspiration.

4. **Does the experience of exhibiting within the context of a collection - where the works of art span a range of periods, styles and materials - differ from working within a contemporary gallery space? If so, how?**

It is different…not in terms of the making of the work, but you do feel a heightened awareness that ideas are not isolated. I have thought about how art of the past reflects the historical, political and social realities of its time and how art made now does the same thing.

I think that exhibiting in the context of a historical collection highlights the fragmented shape of historical time. The experience of reacting to the work of artists who opted for a more theoretical approach, to the ways in which I have traversed and interwoven my work into their history. I believe my position is no different from what those artists of the past where doing. It highlights that history is a construct, and a way in which we process contemporary experiences of change.

5. **Can you tell us a bit about the materials and processes behind the production of the work?**

The materials in the work are plaster, steel, inkjet prints on paper and fabric. I crafted all of these parts from the paintings, so the plaster piece is a slab relief work of the profile of the face in Warrener’s *Mary Ann Carlton*.

The metal frame represents the reflection of the figure in *The Kimono*, the prints are details in Dunlop’s *Portrait of a Woman* zoomed by 1000%, and the fabric piece is from the ruff collar in Van Mierveldt’s *Maria van Wassenaer Hanecopswith*. These various details have been repeated and made into patterns. I hoped he individual elements would become unrecognisable from their original source.

Also significant was the fact that my experience of looking at these paintings was on a computer screen. The digitisation of culture and subsequent drive of image circulation has shifted representation of the image into uncertainty. I have used figuration to produce colourful abstractions, a move that helped me to make sense of the indeterminacy of digital material (images that can be downloaded, zoomed, deleted etc) to a tactility that belies its digital source.

I feel there is an ambiguity that can be created when showing something new within a historic collection. My work references many of the paintings and the women that they contain, but keeps them at arm’s length - detached and remote from the original.