

**ELLEN HAUSNER**

For Ellen Hausner the mystical in art springs out of personal spiritual practice. Yet she in no sense views her art as a satisfactory expression of the mystical or transcendent. Art as it engages with mysticism is bound up with her personal attempt to live mystically – that is, to embrace life at a deep level, experientially. Yet for her art cannot express the transcendent. If it could, she argues, she would eventually cease to need to paint. It is not, in any case, such transcendence that she sees encapsulated by mysticism. Rather mysticism is found as one embraces the tension that lies between the transcendent and the material.

Her art critiques contemporary understandings of the mystical that too often prise the body from the inner world. Through a bold use of colour, Hausner attempts to show their inseparable unity – as much a lesson she seeks to learn as to convey. Indeed, she stresses that her best art arises from moments when she touches such mystical sensibilities. A great admirer of performance artist Marina Abramović, she believes that true art flows from almost trace-like states in which body-mind duality is momentarily overcome. Painting is one way she prepares herself for such encounters. The sense of tension, and the deeply embodied nature of the mystical that an artist like Abramović conveys, is something that she explores in detail in the pieces in this collection. We see this, for example, in her painting, 'The Heart of the Matter'.



'The Heart of the Matter'

This work belongs to Hausner's *Blue and Red Series*, in which she uses bold primary colours to draw together disparate parts of her own existence. Red symbolises blood, inner passion, desire, the world and the forms we assume and live in physical reality. Blue represents a 'mystic' side, the robes of the Virgin Mary, heaven, the sky, higher states of mind. The piece sums up the process of being blatantly honest about her own discomfiture with the physical world. It exemplifies her own striving to bridge the disconnect between her physicality and her inner self. The painting pushes against innate dualistic tendencies. It is part of an ongoing quest to discover the mystical in the solid and to express a deep love of the physical. Hausner connects on a fundamental level with the physicality of mysticism as it embraces the erotic, as when Hadewijch writes that she trembled in all her members as she understood the essential christological symbolism of the Eucharist she received. The symbolic as it interacts with the physical in Hausner's work is likewise an invitation to re-view sexual encounters with Christ or the divine wherever we find them and to consider what it means to meet God in and through the physical world.



In discussion, Hausner states that she admires the sense of the apophatic that Denys Turner advocates as he seeks to hold opposites in dialectic tension. Yet where images of light and darkness are concerned, her art points less to a God of transcendent light than to one who must be found in the darkness. In so doing she is seeking to rediscover a balance – one she finds lacking in much contemporary spirituality and its renewed focus on 'mysticism'. Such 'mysticism' seeks to eliminate the darkness and the physical from the 'spiritual'. As she paints, she works to uncover the mystical *within* the masculine and feminine, *within* the external and internal, echoing the mutuality of anima and animus proposed by Jung.

Hausner's art pulses against a shallow sense of the spiritual that would view spirituality as totally other-worldly, and as it does so it also poses a challenge to an individualism and materialism that rejects life's big questions. She stresses that she does so first and foremost for herself. For her, the key lies in delving into the material. She is strongly influenced by the Western Hermetic tradition and is attracted to the magicality of materiality that Aleister Crowley seeks to open up. Whilst she recognises that this perhaps runs contrary to much orthodox Christian religiosity, Hauser sees in such thought a greater sense of how the physical and individual are always bursting with something bigger; a trait which is embedded in the materiality of art itself. Art, for Hausner, allows one to move towards a grounded unity, one that refuses to lose sight of the materiality of the mystical.

Hausner stresses that for her art is deeply experiential. It is personal; makes one vulnerable. She hopes that those who likewise seek the transcendent in the physical may find in her work that which resonates. Art as it interacts with the mystical is, she states, about 'seeing oneself with bigger eyes'.

#### **Biography:**

**Ellen Hausner** was born in New York City in 1971. She was brought up in Asia and Africa and lived ten years in Stockholm, Sweden before moving to Oxford in 2011. Her studio is at Magdalen Road Studios, an artist's cooperative in East Oxford. Her interest in mysticism, so present in Asia and so often absent from contemporary Western life, led her to study ancient history and classics at the University of California. She also studied the arts at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, The Art Students' League in New York City, and Heatherley's School of Fine Art in London, and has been exhibiting since 2003. In the course of her artistic education, she was taught the use of oil, acrylic, watercolour, ink, charcoal, graphite, pastels, drypoint, etching, monoprint, aquatint, lithography, and linocut. She has also worked and been trained in several painting and paper restoration studios. Much of her artistic schooling has been in traditional technique, but she is interested in applying those techniques to create something personal. It is the mood of the artwork which interests her above all else, and different techniques can contribute to that as much as the theme. Her aim is to create work that appeals directly to the senses and the psyche.  
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