

# THE IMPORTANCE OF HAVING TWO EARS

AN INTERVIEW BETWEEN THE ARTIST KATHERINE SPINDLER AND NINA LIEBENBERG, CONDUCTED IN HER STUDIO AHEAD OF HER SOLO SHOW 'STILL' WITH BARNARD GALLERY AT THIS YEAR'S FNB JOBURG ART FAIR

Amidst the paint splattered surfaces and canvasses, one whole wall of Katherine Spindler's studio is filled with a neat grid consisting of 50 pieces of landscape-orientated A4s, each with a phrase, sometimes a single word, written in pencil and upper case, and positioned in the centre of the page: *ring true; radiant edges; drawing all breaths together; music stand; stereoscopically; play by ear; orchestral pit; conducting rod; membrane; the shorter the string the higher the pitch; clear as a bell; orchestra – to dance, to rage*, to name only a few.

**Nina Liebenberg:** I always thought the words came during your painting process – that they would present themselves somewhere mid-stroke and you would jot them down. So, it actually starts with them?

Katherine Spindler: I'll gather words and phrases and metaphors over a certain period. Whatever seems to resonate with me, whilst reading. Usually these are loosely associated thoughts and fragments without the bridging or connecting words

or conjunctions, that link one thought to another. It is about the look or feel of the word. They sometimes end up as titles. But it starts with these words and how they hint at an image...

**What was the first phrase?**

*The importance of having two ears.* Which links with *the importance of having two eyes.* And *stereoscopically.* And *periphery.* I was reading about how a bird understands the world. Since its eyes are situated on the sides of its head, it shakes its head from side to side to create a kind of stereoscopic view – marrying the one eye's point of view with the other. The movement creates something that is three-dimensional and that takes away from the flatness.

**The idea of the periphery seems to thread through all the bodies of work you've produced – that felt blurry expansion of the world at the sides of one's vision (radiant edges). You make us want to shake our heads from side to side in**

**order not to miss the tree leaning against the wind, or the handkerchief settling on the ground, or the triangle player rolling his wand during a performance.**

There is also a physicality to many of the musical phrases: *get your ear in* (take heed of tuning) or *nodding head* (keeping time), and within the entomology of many of the words: *melos* which refers to 'a vocal progression in operas', but also 'limb', and *orchestra* 'to dance' or 'to rage'. 'To dance' and 'to rage' seems very apt when considering my studio with all its paint energetically splattered, smeared and splashed on every wall and floor. And then amidst all this chaos, this somehow still and quiet image of an orchestra and choir emerging.

**There is a tension between all this depicted sound and the stillness. I remember playing in an orchestra for the first time. The feeling of expectation when the teacher tapped her baton to quiet everyone down (drawing all breaths together), and then the unexpected**



CLOCKWISE FROM BOTTOM: Katherine Spindler, *Ring true*, 2018. Oil on fabriano Tela, 50 x 65cm. *Still*, 2018. Oil on fabriano Tela, 50 x 65cm. *This is one moment*, 2018. Oil on fabriano Tela, 50 x 65cm. Courtesy of the artist & Barnard.

**force and physicality of all those notes sounding together.**

You experience the sound on a cellular level. We've spoken about my figures draped over their pianos earlier. They are not perched on the stools playing them in a traditional way. Draped across the top, they are searching (or waiting, or listening quietly) for the *felt* experience of the sound resonating through the material.

**Much like a deaf person would listen through vibrations. And how they would**

**communicate through the physicality of bodily movements, to convey their thoughts and emotions.**

And there is a link here with sound and the physicality of conducting. The conductor delivers a dual function. Standing on his platform he not only provides guidance to the musicians, but also translates the language of the music to the audience through these same bodily movements.

**The conducting rod becoming the instrument which translates one language**

**into another. Not very different from the paint brush.**

Nina Liebenberg is a PhD candidate at the University of Cape Town, where she has been teaching on the Honours in Curatorship programme since 2013. As a practicing artist, she has exhibited in a variety of shows, drawing on the expertise of individuals from a myriad of disciplines ranging from chemistry, medical imaging, physics, engineering and botany, to portray the intersection between the quantifiable and the poetic.