

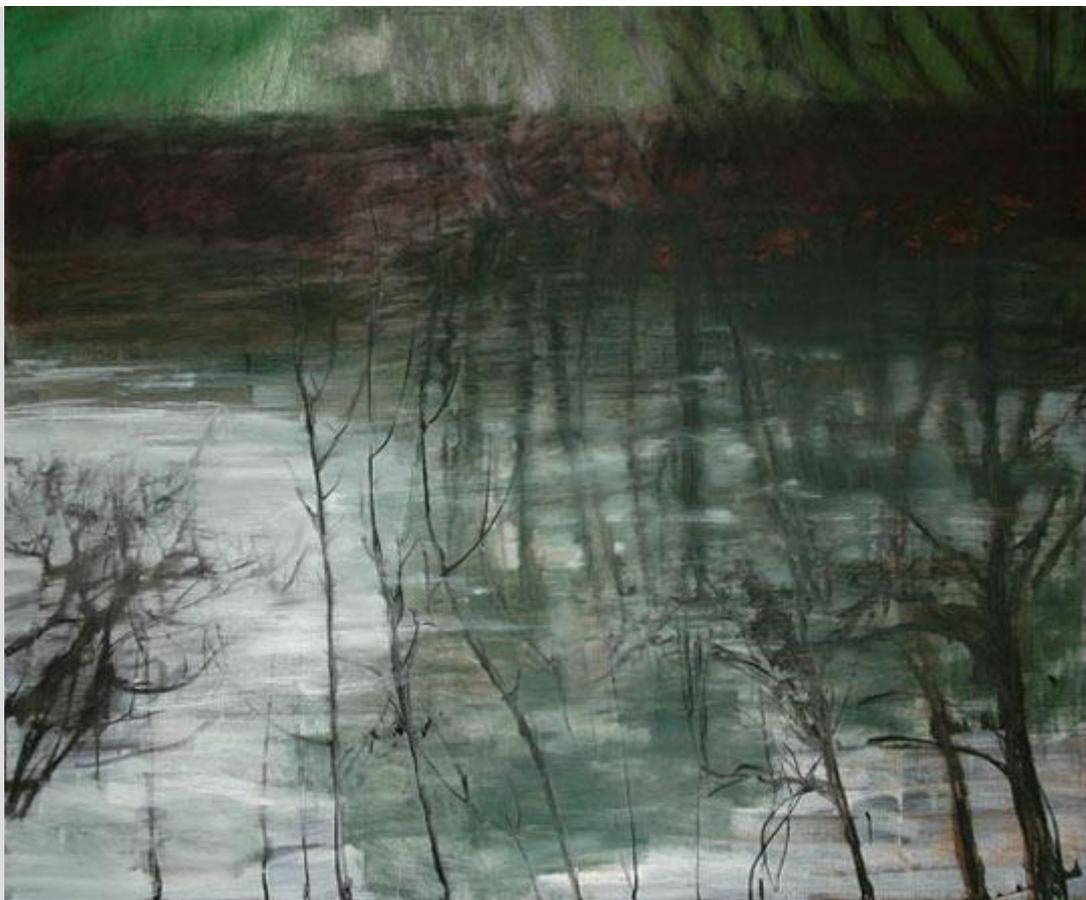
# Eugenia Vronskaya: a river runs through

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**Kilmorack Gallery, by Beaully, until 3 September 2011**

**THREE years in the making, this latest solo show of drawings and paintings by Eugenia Vronskaya is distinctive for its emotional resonance and unflinching exploration of technique.**

Diverse paint handling on canvas and slate, exceptional draughtsmanship and multi-layered investigation of the painted surface make this an absorbing and insightful show. The theme of the river is a powerful and unifying theme running throughout the exhibition, reflecting the artist's physical perspective overlooking the River Glass and as an expression of humanity, vulnerable to time and change.



Eugenia Vronskaya - A river runs through

In many ways all of Vronskaya's images, whether landscape, still life or portraiture, are meditative reflections of this interior world. It is the inner landscape of her work beyond appearances that is most compelling and self-reflexive, altering our perception of the everyday and potently illuminating the difference between looking and seeing.

The artist's self portrait *Which is it?* (Oil on canvas) is a fascinatingly fractured composition, full of ambiguity. Two images of the artist emerge, one confined vertically to the far left of the composition, the other inhabiting our main view, an interior semi-abstracted by a dominant block of red, a view of bare trees from a window, dead bird on the sill. The armour-like design of the artist's scarf and the contrast in paint handling between these two selves, particularly the looser handling of the main frame of visual reference, causes the viewer to question what is the reflection and what the truth of the image – and of self. Use of mirrors within Vronskaya's self portraits are multidimensional not just in relation to reflections of self, but in the act of seeing.

Another self portrait, *Reflection* (Oil on canvas), displays the artist's ability to depict play of light, not just as an optical effect but in the service of illumination. The artist's early training as an icon painter has actively informed her understanding of the painted surface throughout her career, and this treatment of light permeates all of her work in unique and subtle ways.



Eugenia Vronskaya - Reflection (Oil on Canvas)

The exquisitely shifting palette of translucent gold, ochre and umber reflected in glass, mirror and brass presents interplay of surfaces from bare canvas to rich pigment, seeing through and beyond objects or surfaces and going within. Every element of the composition is structurally balanced, successfully directing the eye into the work and encouraging us to remain there in contemplation. Like many of the artist's best works the raw energy of sketched elements remain in the composition, and the variation of paint handling and mark also communicate the elusiveness of painting and capturing self. In this image the artist's self-portrait is held within the mirror, golden, fleeting and ethereal.

Akin to the canvas itself, windows and doorways are also threshold spaces in many of Vronskaya's works. *Self Portrait* (Oil on canvas) is a potent example, the figure of the artist dominating a grey interior, her direct gaze in shadow. Colour and light are deftly controlled in this image which is as bleak as it is beautiful. The modelling of the face and the stance of the figure, shoulders rendered in just a few spare lines of ultramarine, are absolutely masterful. While the tree outside lies bare, beyond it is a door of iridescent cadmium yellow, suggesting the possibility of an entirely different psychological and emotional state beyond the confines of the room, a statement of resilience and hope. Painting is a witness but also the source of transformation.



Eugenia Vronskaya - A Few Of My Favourite Things

Vronskaya excels at portraiture, actively expanding the genre and *A Few Of My Favourite Things* (Oil on canvas) is a good example, an assemblage of the artist's own personal iconography with the figure just visible as a line of the back and a pair of hovering eyes, separated from the body beneath a high horizon line. The artist is present and absent at the same time within an accumulation of everyday objects upon a white ground.

Part still life, part landscape of the soul, the image is rendered with all the immediacy and energy of a sketch. Use of colour serves the structure of the composition extremely well; three accents of red in the base of a lamp in the foreground, a bottle top and the inside of a shoe, opposed by acidic green and emerald, with flesh tones around the blue eyes, in the conch shell and colouring a pair of disembodied feet balancing the overall design.

A portrait of national importance which ought to be on national display, Vronskaya's magnificent painting of the fashion designer and couturier Sandra Murray conveys the stature and dignity of the sitter, not merely in her costume but in her presence. Painted on a pure white ground the elegant line of Murray's hat and gown, a silhouette of darkened purple, presents an image akin to an earlier century of society portraits or high contrast black and white fashion photography.

It is however the strength, determination and humanity in Murray's face which provides a counterfoil to the artifice of dress and of portraiture. Like the subject's adornment, the portrait conceals and reveals the sitter and the artist. Intriguingly within the contours of the lower half of the gown the profile of John Singer Sargent's *Portrait of Madame X* sits beautifully as a seamless element of the design.

The designer's hand is placed protectively in relation to the figure as if it were a child, the head of Sargent's muse in a womblike position. It is an image of an extraordinary woman and of creativity which reveals the inner beauty of the subject beyond a world of appearances.

*The Morning After* (Oil on canvas) illustrates the way in which Vronskaya invests still life with human presence. The window view with its arrangement of glass objects spaced apart from each other are rendered in greys, emerald green, purple and lemon yellow, the shadows of glass in green clashing with blue in the foreground. Light in this work sharpens the edges of the glass and fine vertical white marks feel as though they have been cut into the surface of the painting. There is a sense of stillness and isolation in this work with the river beyond bearing silent witness to the interior scene.



Eugenia Vronskaya - The Morning After (Oil On Canvas)

The dynamic of human life within the still life, in light and in shadow can also be seen in *Before The Storm*. (Oil on canvas). The horizontal composition and placement of objects upon the window sill is divided by shifting light, effectively halved midpoint with a figurative statue. The cool blue and green with accents of red in the comical fake teeth and pink interior of the conch shell create tension, conflicting temperatures of hue which are subtly echoed in the landscape outside. The gathered fabric to the left of the painting feels like a cloud unfurling,

contributing to the emotional unease of the image. The atmosphere of the scene stands on a knife edge and the viewer is held in anticipation by inanimate objects and elements of colour and form.

There are many smaller works which also beg closer inspection such as the beautifully fluid self portrait *I meet My Shadow in The Deepening* (Oil on Canvas), the dialogue of anthropomorphised objects in *Three Kings* (Oil on slate), *Your gift from the sea* (Oil on Canvas), reminiscent of the dreamlike pastels and watercolours of Odilon Redon, and the deeply personal, softly textured and symbolically loaded *The Expectation of a Miracle* (Oil on Canvas).

The diversity of paint handling and varying scale of work is both fractious and essential in this show, displaying a range of enquiry that will shape and distil future work. A series of images in particular that beg further exploration are a suite of female nudes on canvas and slate – *Trusting the river*, a semi immersion of the figure in the natural element of water.

*A river runs through* is a significant milestone in the artist's life and oeuvre, displaying her command of the medium of oils and sustained commitment to the art of painting. The finest works in this exhibition convey extraordinary intensity and emotional depth, created by an artist possessing a deep understanding of pictorial elements and of the human condition.

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