



# Elizabeth Dimitroff's Foray into Memory

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Elizabeth Dimitroff is a British-American painter based in London. She earned her BFA from the Rhode Island School of Design (RISD) and recently completed her MA at the Royal College of Art (RCA). Dimitroff's paintings are, to me, haunting in a way. They seem to convey the indelibility of memory, the irrevocability of time's passage; her paintings take us back to a place or moment we know we should not be able to go. The moment has passed, the season has turned, the person on the canvas is perhaps no longer the person painted. Time prevents us from transgressing these boundaries but Dimitroff's pieces afford us one last look.



My particular favorite is the piece *Field of Vision*, in which an older man with no eyes wades proudly through summer waters. He's flanked by two younger boys in the distance, their backs turned from the viewer and from the prospect of aging. The scene looks straight out of a postcard – tiny swimshorts and cragged rocks harken long since passed Italian summers. But Dimitroff's wielding of terracotta colors and severe outlines gesture towards a finality that both grounds the viewer in the present and launches them somewhere else entirely.

Dimitroff's work was most recently displayed at the 2023 ACS Studio Prize x Gurr Johns Exhibition in London, UK.



## **When did you decide that you would become an artist?**

It's always felt instinctual to me. Making art feels like a requirement or an obsession. The periods of my life when I was not making art are the periods that I've felt the least like myself - it's my centre of gravity and how I make sense of things.

**Your pieces focus on the human body, animal forms, and inanimate objects. I'm thinking particularly of "Severed Swordfish," in which a woman (as well as her severed duplicate) lounge beside a swordfish carcass that has been cleaved in half. What urged you to unite these figures in one composition?**

My work is influenced by the ways in which multiple versions of time exist in parallel when revisiting the site of a strong memory, or the way in which a sentimental object, image or piece of music has the ability to hurdle us back in time. The obscuring of the figures' eye sockets prevent tangible contact with one another or with the viewer. The eye of the fish in 'Severed Swordfish' acts as a focal point which brings the two versions of the figure to each other's company.



**Are the portraits you paint people from your real life, strangers you encounter while traveling, or completely imagined characters?**

It depends on the painting. If the painting is “about” capturing the essence of someone in particular, I will start there. If the painting is “about” capturing a feeling I consider universal, I find strangers better to work with. A lot of my earlier works were loosely self portraits, when the act of painting was more personal or “about” a conversation with myself, and the idea a viewer hadn't occurred to me.

**How does creating art help you to connect with others? Do you ever feel it isolates you?**

I think the work itself requires isolation. My brain sort of “shifts gears” while I paint, it is consuming and automatic so I don't notice the solitude like I otherwise would. Painting is form of communicating, and communicates in ways that words cannot. I appreciate that art can connect to a viewer on the artists behalf. The relationships in my life are deeply important. I do not consider painting and relations mutually exclusive.



**You spent the last few years working in London. You're mentioned a potential return to the US – can you speak to the art scenes in each respective city?**

As a transatlantic, I identify with London and New York equally. I'm lucky to feel at home and love two places, but it also comes with a chronic homesickness/anxiety to feel too “at home” in one or the other. I'm very excited to be spending the next month in New York and LA for the show and I hope I'll be better equipped to compare them with the London art scene. (But yeah... I miss New York a hell of a lot, which is a feeling I'm listening to).

**I tend to turn to art when I “need” it the most. How do you stay urgent / productive when art is no longer your sole lifeline?**

I feel like identifying as an “artist” sounds pretentious, but I do think that artists see/experience things through a lense that is not constantly dependant on production of work. I don't feel like myself when I go too long without painting. But when there are periods when I can't paint (travelling/between studios/working etc), I am still looking for paintings in those experiences or processing my experiences through paintings after the fact. Art/life are a “soup”, not a “sandwich”.