

SYLVIA MARTINS

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Paintings

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Cynthia Bourne Gallery Limited

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Sylvia Martins. A sylvan martin. A Tantric Tinkerball. An Amazonian ambassadress. From Brazil to Borneo to Bahia to Britain, via the New Yorks, New Delhis and New Orleans of this world, Martins is all of the above and more.

Even her courtship with the tiny principality of her London studio has a charm both monastic and hip.

And the work is devout - a "patient, devotional act", as writer Adrian Dannatt puts it. Through the clawlike scratchiness of the surface, to the meditative hush of its overall effect comes symbol after symbol - animals, bodies, flowers. Images, in other words, tumbling from the ether like coins from the mouth of a clock.

And yet the work is timeless. And because of this timelessness the viewer doesn't walk away overburdened by the symbolism or exhausted by the various riddles - both intentional and unintentional - sweeping through the work. On the contrary, they might even feel atoned.

And the work is reverential. Like early Paleolithic art, in which the images serve as some sort of magical ritual to ensure a successful hunt, or the 22,000 year-old so-called Venus of Willendorf in lower Austria, whose bulbous form makes clear her significance as a fertility figure, this is difficult work done in earnest.

This is also work reassuringly unintimidated by art's usual preoccupations with mere fad. Indeed, fad to Martins is probably a slur on the good face of art.

And the good face of art is for all to see in this work. In Martin's earlier days as an artist, when close friendships with the likes of Schnabel, Clemente, and the late great Jean-Michel Basquiat, were not just about art but also about artisans, Martins never lost touch with her work - and always found either the time or the place in which to do it.

Just as there is now in Martins' work a challengingly fresh authority, a further link in the golden chain which began all those canvases ago when Martins left Brasil to study in New York, so too is there a greater appetite now in the world for the nonironic, uncynical statement.

And Martins is no cynic.

Peter Bach
June, 1995

1 MAGIC FEVER, 1995
127x127 cm
oil on canvas



4 BLUE ANGEL, 1995
127x127 cm
oil on canvas



10 ALL THE WOMEN, 1994
152x127 cm
oil on canvas

