

ORDA:

future-retro portraiture

WORDS: sarah jayne fell

Kilmany-Jo Liversage is part of the band of diverse young Cape Town artists working from the old Bijou Theatre art studios in Observatory, alongside names like Christopher Slack, Norman O'Flynn, Liza Grobler, Barbara Wildenboer and Chris Swift. Her latest series, *Orda*, is a collection of oversized, brightly coloured portraits symptomatic of the 'traditional fine art-meets-contemporary street art' approach of those who possess rigorous technical training liberated by exposure to the flair of urban street.

Kilmany-Jo Liversage was born and raised in Bloemfontein, South Africa's 'City of Roses'. Completing her Fine Art degree at the Free State Technikon, she moved to Cape Town in 1995 to pursue her career. She worked at a gallery and then taught high school art for eight years – an experience that inspired *Orda*.

"I was fascinated with the messages that kids scratched onto desks, and my inner rebel returned. I also became interested in graffiti and how it spoke to the public in such an authentic way.

I received a bursary to complete an artist residency in Colombia, South America. I was fascinated by the powerful images and messages the street artists were conveying in such a volatile country. I did a lot of large-scale street art with aerosol sprays and fell in love with this spontaneous medium. I started using sprays on my canvases and it gave the touch of 'urbanism' that I was searching for in my art."

Kilmany's street artist moniker in South America was 'Orda' – the name she would later adopt as the title of her first solo exhibition at Erdmann Contemporary in Cape Town in September 2010. She explains the name's relevance:

"I have always been drawn to an 'ordered' element in my art... be it in my mark-making in my paintings or my ribbon-constructed pieces. *Orda* was created as an association to this element. My inspiration for this show was using the style of graffiti-tagging to create large-scale portraits."

Kilmany's subject matter draws on the millennia-long tradition of portraiture, but is selected because it complements her preference for large-scale work – and because she feels her 'tag' style "connects with urban

identity". Social networking also inspires her paintings; these portraits are the images of people's Skype and Facebook profiles: the faces that they choose to show the world. No longer commissioning artists to memorialise their wealth and beauty in ornately framed oil-on-canvas, the rich and powerful of today require little more than a cellphone camera to immortalise their existence. Smiling, serene, poised or pouting headshots – these are the portraits of the new millennium.

The difference in today's age is that portraiture has become available to everyone. And Kilmany captures the essence of this fact in her ability to render the expression and emotion of her subjects so well. Her vivid use of colour, the energetic mark of the sprawling spraycan offset by precise underlying brushmarks and the massive scale of her canvas all contribute towards an image that is as iconic and constructed as advertising but as defiantly free and unhindered as an inner-city graffiti mural on an old wall.

Kilmany also uses the innovative medium of ribbon on canvas, where individual streams are folded and pinned like pointillist brushstrokes or Ben Day dots. Largely socio-political in nature, these artworks focus on particularly South African social crises: the AIDS pandemic, child and woman abuse, drug addiction and crime. The ribbons evoke the coloured silk of awareness ribbons.

Kilmany's technique stems from her pragmatic approach to art and its ability to influence. She creates far more than social-awareness campaigns; her mastery of the ancient art of portraiture and her single-minded passion for what she does elevates her work to its own level of visual compulsion. Combining retro urban art styles with future-driven concepts, Kilmany captures a quality in her creations that she likes to call 'visual funk'... and which we think fits perfectly into the future-retro.

OPPOSITE PAGE
Hoodra





THIS PAGE
Transia

OPPOSITE PAGE (CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT):
Infectalicious
Orda
Sugar Girl
Spectra

