



**THE CULT OF UGLINESS – A NEW
ART EXHIBITION BY GEORGINA
GRATRIX**

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The UCT Irma Stern Museum is delighted to host the celebrated painter Georgina Gratrix as its second artist in residence. As part of the museum's 50th anniversary year, Gratrix is working in the museum residency-studio from July to September 2022. Artworks produced during this residency will be exhibited in the UCT Irma Stern Museum from 28 September 2022.

Born a century after the renown South African artist Irma Stern (1894 – 1966), contemporary artist Georgina Gratrix (1982) is likewise a dedicated colourist testing the limits of oil painting. Many of Stern's works are reflected in Gratrix's pieces – compositionally, in their colouration and in their subject matter – making both direct and indirect references to Stern's work.

Shortly after Stern's first exhibition in South Africa a century ago in 1922, she was lambasted in the local media with one critic referring to her work as a "Freak Picture Exhibition" in a review titled "Art of Miss Irma Stern – Ugliness as a Cult". 100 years later Gratrix takes this sentiment as her point of departure to examine the ways in which Modernism, and in particular German Expressionism has made an impact on her own work and whose historical influence continues to shape the various twists and turns of contemporary art today.

The Cult of Ugliness has a long precedent beginning with the German philosopher Karl Rosenkranz who wrote "The Aesthetics of the Ugly" in 1853, whilst the poet Ezra Pound again used

the phrase in 1913 to distinguish artwork that differed from what he described as belonging to the "Cult of Beauty". Most recently Umberto Eco deployed the phrase in his book "On Ugliness" in 2007 where he questions why through the centuries have there been so many theories of beauty but none devoted to what the public generally considers "ugly".

"You can't have one without the other" says Gratrix who has had similar accusations levelled at her own work. Interested in the gaudy, the obvious and the banal, her paintings playfully investigate the boundaries between desirability and the grotesque. "All painting is a conversation with the history of painting" says Gratrix describing her intentions for her upcoming show at the Irma Stern Museum opening in September.

During the residency Gratrix will spend time painting both her own collection of objects as well as the rich and varied archive of Stern's personal trove which brought her endless inspiration. Coupled with these studies Gratrix will include previously unexhibited paintings from her own collection that will find new meaning in the context of the UCT Irma Stern Museum.

