

< In Pictures | **Dorothy Iannone: Innocent and Aware** >

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Dorothy Iannone, *Let The Light From Your Lighthouse Shine on Me*, 1981 *Courtesy of the artist and Air de Paris, Paris*

To enter into the world of **Dorothy Iannone** is to travel into a kaleidoscopic explosion of colour, poetry and flamboyantly erect penises, vaginas, breasts and bottoms. This is an artist whose artistic epiphany came through meeting a sexual partner who awoke her carnal desires, an encounter that shifted her painting into the realm of gilded Klimt-esque iconoclasm, luridly coloured canvases depicting figures engaged in ecstatic congress, daubed with poetic and heartfelt titles.

Dubbed the original bad girl of art, she began painting in 1959, and created an artist's book naming all the men she'd ever slept with decades before Tracey Emin began stitching her infamous tent. Her 1975 video work, *I Was Thinking of You*, is a close up of the artist's face as she masturbates, a work pronounced the most transgressive piece on show when it featured in the 2006 Whitney Biennial. Yet for Iannone, it was not designed to be a strident comment on female empowerment, rather an exercise in personal exploration, finding a glimpse of the soul on a face at the height of physical pleasure. She is clear that her women are equal participants in the sexual acts

performed, but not to the detriment or debasement of the men who partner them. ¹
Indeed, these works are love letters to the men – such as artist Dieter Roth and Pastor
Erick Bock – who have played key roles in her life.

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What is clear is that Iannone is a passionate romantic; a sexual celebrant, affirmed convivialist and an open-hearted naïf revelling in the height of a moment, rather than playing out the torment that is, so often, the occupation of the artist recording sexual affairs. And it is striking that, in a society where nudity and sex has become an accepted if bemoaned constant in advertising, television and culture at large, Iannone's rainbow jungles filled with protruding genitalia and entwined bodies deal with sex without recourse to hard confrontation, taking individuals on a candid personal journey to celebrate the joy of uninhibited sexuality.

Dorothy Iannone: Innocent and Aware is at the Camden Arts Centre until 5 May.

Text by Tish Wrigley

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