

Lydia Corbett: *La Danse de la Vie*

4 – 29 November

Coinciding with a major exhibition of portraiture by Pablo Picasso at London's National Portrait Gallery in November, this exhibition shows the paintings by one of his models, Lydia Corbett, or Sylvette David as she was then known. Featuring some forty paintings in pen and ink as well as oils, this collection showcases both new paintings of figures and English and French landscapes as well as previously unseen work from her studio. A selection of her ceramics will accompany this show. A biographical book on Lydia Corbett's life and work will be launched at the exhibition.

Lydia Corbett, née Sylvette David born in Paris, 1934, was famously introduced to Pablo Picasso in the 1950s. This chance encounter was a very important moment for both Picasso and for Sylvette. For Picasso, Sylvette became the subject of a large and significant body of work, including more than sixty paintings, drawings and sculptures. The distinctive profile of her head, long neck and high ponytail was a constant source of subject matter for him. He also created a series of sculptures of her in steel, which was a very important development in his work. It was also one of the most concentrated bodies of work inspired by a single woman that he ever created. For Sylvette, not only was her innocent, youthful beauty immortalized but she would be remembered as a particular muse of the great artist – 'The Girl with the Ponytail'. Picasso's work and their friendship would become a constant source of inspiration for her own painting many years later.

Lydia Corbett is a prolific painter, working in an organic way whether in pen, ink and watercolour or with oil paint. Her compositions very often comprise still life, landscape and portraiture all in a single piece of work. Within this complex structure she tells a narrative very often relating to motherhood and the cycle of nature. Lydia Corbett's work is in her own distinctive style showing influences from Picasso and Chagall. Her vibrant colour palette runs freely within each painting with figurative forms defined by her initial drawing. Sometimes you will see the figure of 'The Girl with the Pony Tail' in her work – a memory of her early, formative years as Sylvette. Lydia Corbett's work is always joyful to look at and this latest exhibition of her work shows new paintings, as well as previously unseen earlier works from her studio. The daughter of a potter, she also creates ceramic figures and vessels of exaggerated perspective, as distinctive in style as her painting. A range of these ceramics will be displayed alongside the paintings in this exhibition, which also coincides with a book launch – a comprehensive biography of Corbett's life and work by Isabel Coulton. November also sees the major exhibition of Picasso's portraiture in London's National Portrait Gallery.

Artist's Biography

Lydia Corbett was born in Paris in 1934 to an influential art dealer based in the Champs Elysees, and his wife, a studio potter. At the age of nineteen Lydia had moved to Vallauris in the south of France with her mother who worked at a pottery studio in the town. It was here that she had a chance encounter with Pablo Picasso nearly sixty years ago, in 1954. Sylvette was chatting with friends while smoking and drinking coffee on one of the terraces of the town's potteries. Over the wall of the neighbouring studio, Sylvette spotted Picasso holding up one of his pictures. It was a simple image of a young woman with a fringe and a ponytail; it was a portrait of her, executed from memory. One day she knocked on the door of his studio, he was delighted to see her and welcomed her in. 'I want to paint Sylvette!', Picasso exclaimed. Sylvette had started to wear her hair in a very unique manner, after her father saw a ballet Greek drama and was enchanted by a woman with a ponytail worn high up on the crown of her head. He told Sylvette that she should wear her hair like this. Sylvette did this and loved it – it was such an unusual look ahead of fashion that lots of people commented upon and it was this feature that caught Picasso's eye, fascinated by Greek mythology as he was.

'Picasso was a comic, he liked laughing and joking and behaving like a bit of a clown – a clever one.' 'I love to paint figures quickly. He taught me a lot without saying a word'. She would sit for him in an armchair while Picasso painted her in his simple studio, surrounded by many pots. Francoise had left Picasso by this time and he was lost without his wife and two children. He told Sylvette that he found her company as a model of great consolation to him and gave her a portrait of her. She would not accept money to pose, as she realised this would make her obliged to be nude for him. She never posed naked, although he did paint a couple of paintings of her imagined unclothed. Picasso gave Lydia a huge amount of confidence in herself as a painter, although it was not until she was in her forties that she started to paint, once her children had grown.

Corbett moved to England in 1968 where she pursued her own painting career, presenting twelve solo exhibitions in London. In 1991 she exhibited in Japan, and in the United States of America in 2004. In 2014 an exhibition of her watercolours were shown at Theater Bremen, concurrently with a major exhibition of Picasso's work inspired by her, 'Sylvette, Sylvette, Sylvette' held at the Kunsthalle Bremen. These two exhibitions were the subject of a film produced by ARTE broadcast in England and Germany. First exhibition with David Simon Contemporary 2016.

Visitor Information:

Opening Times: Monday – Saturday 10am – 6pm, Wednesdays 2pm – 6pm.
David Simon Contemporary, 3 – 4 Bartlett Street, Bath, BA1 2QZ 01225 460189
www.davidsimoncontemporary.com , gallery@davidsimoncontemporary.com

Press Information:

For further press information, images, interviews, etc, please contact David Simon on 01225 460189 / 07736 505360 or email gallery@davidsimoncontemporary.com

A Private Invitation:

Press representatives are warmly invited to join the Directors and artist at a special Private View to launch this exhibition on Thursday 3rd 6-8pm.
RSVP: gallery@davidsimoncontemporary.com

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