

ABOUT FACE

Angela de Rosette

Painter Angela de Rosette keeps the secrets of her subjects. Her first solo show, "Don't Get Too Close," which ran this spring at Galeria Ramis Barquet in New York, consisted of self-portraits in luminous acrylic against an obsidian background. On the canvasses, de Rosette, a petite, amber-eyed blonde, is shown close-up and seemingly in motion, as if captured under the long shutter speed of a camera left in a dark room. What she's doing in the images is both intimate (screaming, moaning, looking nakedly out of the frame) and unclear. What she feels is, likewise, both communicated and kept beyond the viewer's reach.

Even sitting in her Brooklyn studio, de Rosette, who was born and raised in St. Petersburg, Russia, measures out doses of information about herself and her work with care. Today, at 27, ten years after arriving in the US without any English, she searches for her words but has only the slightest accent. De Rosette works from photographs she digitally manipulates so that faces resemble a landscape seen from far above, mapped topographically in painstakingly coated acrylic. She works beside a long table lined with plastic cups of paint, since a single canvas can require up to 180 distinct colors. She mixes every color herself, using a discrete formula for each and obsessively notes the ingredients with a black marker on the side of the cellophane-covered cups, or on a large piece of paper taped to a nearby wall. Circles of each pigment are captioned in shorthand, with each shade recorded in an abbreviated series of letters and numbers. "It is almost a mathematical system," de Rosette explains. "I have so many rules."

Her process has become increasingly technical, but at its core, her work is a rendering of her subjects' emotions, converted into color and form. "When I look at an image of someone, the most important thing to me are the facial expressions," she explains. "I translate them into little pieces of color. All of my subjects are both beautiful and disturbing because that's my experience in life."

As de Rosette paints, laying down the dark shades first and the lighter ones later, she will often use five to six coats per color, letting each one dry overnight. In the end, she sharpens the edge of each color with a razor, leaving distinct elevations that protrude off the canvas. Each image simultaneously conveys silence and sound, stillness and movement, and feels exasperatingly familiar – like a map without a legend. **SQ**

