

BIGGS & COLLINGS 24 MARCH– 27 APRIL 2016

THEY SHALL BE MALE AND FEMALE

VIGO 21 DERING STREET LONDON W1S 1AL

Vigo Gallery presents *They Shall Be Male and Female*, the third solo show by Biggs & Collings at the gallery.

This new collection from the husband and wife team once again shows that an intensely narrow field of enquiry can yield rich results. The intricately painted 50 x 50 inches works are informed by a deep interest in the history of colour organisation in modern and pre-modern art –whether it's the melded colour of Impressionism and Abstract Expressionism, the intricate hard-edge arrangements of Byzantine icons and mosaics, Islamic applied art, or the various approaches to colour, from luminous to misty, of the Renaissance and post-Renaissance tradition. In their work the mind is engaged through sensuality – Biggs and Collings' intricate diamond patterns shimmer and glint, forming and reforming in new configurations.

"At first glance colour seems simple enough" Matthew Collings says, "As if it might just describe the difference between one thing and another, but a minor change of tone or application can throw an entire painting out of kilter." By reducing visual options to a simple diamond grid, what the viewer sees becomes heightened, and the ramifications of the tussles involved, the multitude of decisions made by the artists – what goes where and how is it applied – are all there on the canvas. It's not just an attractive object; there are many of ways of reading it.

Why do they use Genesis for their titles? They see it as a work of psychology— experience is distilled into a comprehensible form. Strange as the Biblical text appears, it's actually about explaining reality. They think their work does something similar. "As with Genesis," says Emma Biggs, "with our work something is made. It takes a certain amount of time to do it, it takes a particular form, this is divided from that, we think certain things are good, and forbid ourselves others. It's not an art of total freedom; it's an art of restraint. We make rules, and they are there to create something teeming, but also harmonious." "The thing we're creating in the studio is like life," adds Collings, "There's the peril of chaos, but you're capable of creating a structure, you're always trying to, anyway."

The title of the show (from the story of the Ark and the Flood) slyly refers to the artists themselves. It is not unusual to see installation artists collaborating, but painters rarely do – and certainly not ones who are married. Unsurprisingly, it is not a straightforward process. "We have a strict division of labour" says Biggs "I choose and mix the colours and decide where they go, and Matt paints them. Everything else is improvisation and argument. Colour is never disembodied – how you paint it is crucial to what it actually is. These arguments might include our individual perspectives on our paintings – how do you make an image work when you harness such variety – of colour, application, tone, transparency, opacity or thickness of paint? Everything gets contested – from the size of brush we use, to the choice of music in the studio – but there is a single, simple aim – a pulsing, reformulating, unity."

Emma Biggs and Matthew Collings are globally renowned for their works on canvas and in mosaic. A rare husband-and-wife team, their oil paintings are about colour, light and perception. They use a series of triangles in a grid to capture gradations of colour. It has been described as 'landscape painting without the landscape.'

Emma Biggs studied Fine Art at Leeds University 1976–80. She has worked as a mosaic artist for over 25 years, setting up Mosaic Workshop in 1987, a craft-based mosaic company. She has worked in cathedrals and mosques, in the UK and abroad. She is Senior Tutor in mosaic at West Dean College. Matthew Collings studied painting at the Byam Shaw Art School 1974–78, and Goldsmith's College 1990–92. He edited *Artscribe International* and was the art critic on BBC2's *The Late Show*. He has written many books on art and won a BAFTA for his Channel 4 series, *This is Modern Art*. He began collaborating with Emma (as Biggs & Collings) in 2001.

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