Cave Paintings of our Time

One of the artist's featured in last year's *Marshwood Vale Magazine* Arts Awards exhibition, **Fernando Velazquez** talks to **Katherine Locke**.

FERNANADO Velaquez is keen to talk about his adopted homeland. Although he grew up in a small village near Seville, he has lived in the UK for many years. 'This is a fascinating country', he says, 'You celebrate the individual and nurture creative talent here'. He loves the way the British are constantly finding opportunities, where others see problems and how Brits relish devising solutions. 'For such a small country, it is extraordinary how far the British influence reaches', he says, 'The British go all over the world sharing their ideas'. As an artist, with an interest in solving problems and cultivating creativity, he feels very at home here. 'It is not about where you are from, but embracing where you are', he says.

According to his mother, Fernando Velaquez may be distantly related to the (Diego) Velaquez, one of the most important and noted painters of the Spanish Baroque period. Even if it is true (and it may just be family legend), Fernando wouldn't want to be known as an artist of his generation. 'I don't believe in artists being a reflection of our time anymore', he says. 'Art should be able to communicate to anyone, anywhere, anytime'. Fernando thinks that in this post industrial, post digital world, there are some things that remain constant—most importantly the human condition.

'Everything has changed in the modern world', he continues, 'we live in a time where travel from London to Sydney in three hours is becoming a real possibility. The concept of international has shifted and the fact that we can change the culture we live in with record speed has changed us.' However Fernando is interested in the constant—what art can show us about ourselves. He asserts that great art is work that elicits an emotional response and is therefore beyond time and place. 'Art should stir the emotions', he says. 'A painting doesn't move or talk or entertain. It's sole function is to speak to us at a visceral level'.

He is supremely grateful to the great artists, Turner in particular. Velaquez was sixteen the first time he came to London. 'I was amazed by Turner', he says, 'blown away. But when I looked at his work when I was twenty-six it was different. Equally strong and compelling, but what I was bringing to the work had changed. Now I am forty seven I am finally getting it!'.

Surprisingly, Velaquez says he wasn't particularly artistic as a child. 'I didn't draw or paint', he says 'nor did I have much interest in it'. The youngest of a big family, he was surrounded by music. 'My family were creative, but tended to be musical', he says. Both his mother and sister played the piano and his brother has gone on to play in a symphony orchestra. Fernando only discovered his passion for art when he started law school at eighteen.

'It became on overwhelming need', he says, 'I would stay up all night drawing. The world of lawyers and law school was so stifling to me. I could see my life stretching out ahead—being a lawyer in a small town—and it created a powerful yearning for self-expression. I was a young man, not entirely in control of my emotions, and it hit me suddenly—this amazing passion for looking'. Art, he thinks, helps people focus on what actually matters.

He is also passionate about encouraging creativity in others, and teaches art at Sherborne Prep School. 'Teaching is wonderful', he says, 'inspiring confidence in others to have a go, to make a mess and really look at something'. Not only does he inspire amazing work in his students, but he loves to get the parents involved too. 'It's important for children to see their parents challenging themselves and valuing the creative process', he says. 'Adults can be wary about trying new things, particularly if they are already successful in their chosen field. Starting to paint or draw can make us very vulnerable'. However, he loves how proud the children are of their parents' work. 'It gives the children more confidence to take risks', he says.

Risk taking is a very important part of the creative process, for Fernando. He paints everyday and says for every one painting that makes it to an exhibition, there are five he takes straight to the tip. He also believes that investing time in nurturing our creativity is fundamentally important.

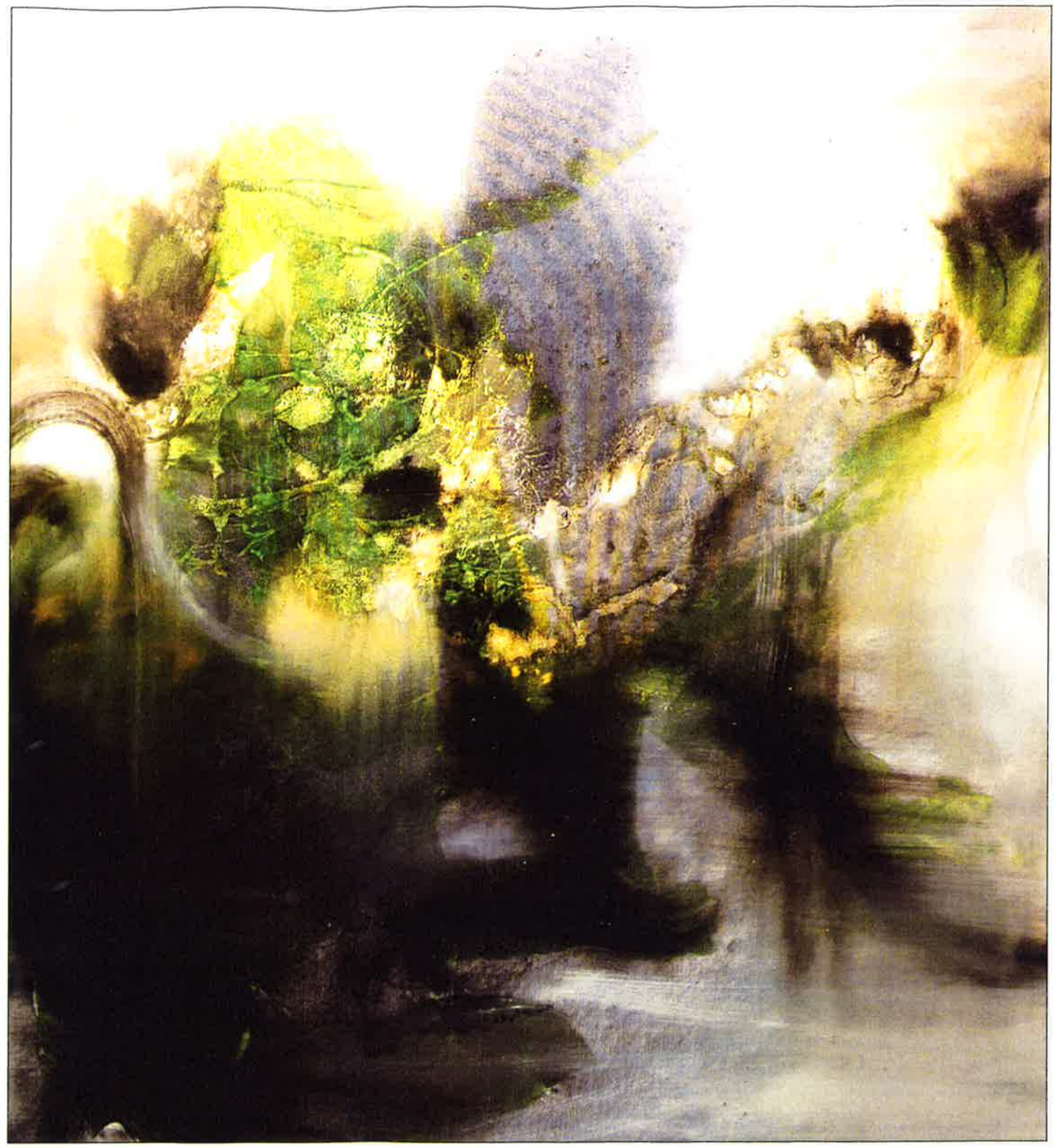
'Sometimes think we are too busy to be creative', he says, 'but instead of driving to work listening to a rubbish radio programme, take the opportunity to focus, to be silent, to listen'. He believes that observing, having quiet time away from screens and telephones is essential. 'It is all about giving ourselves mental space', he says. 'Don't just talk about beauty—do it. I have to paint a lot to get a painting I think the viewer deserves'.

His advice to young artists, who are serious about art, would be 'get a job'. Creativity can flourish if you want it to and having to provide for a family or pay the rent, sharpens, not diminishes, our creative minds, in his opinion. 'Creativity is an ever flowing river', he says 'it never stops'. It is a natural thing, but it has to be nurtured. He believes that it is impossible to teach students to be curious about art, if he isn't full of curiosity himself.

His new work, about to be exhibited at Dorchester Arts Centre, has been described as 'unpredictable and mysterious'. He wants to take the viewer through a range of emotions. The work is beautiful and abstract and requires the viewer to slow down and look. He tends not to give his work a title, as he doesn't want to lead the viewer. 'The painter should step back and out', he says. 'It is your business what you do with the work'.

He uses oil on canvas and makes the gold himself in order to get it to the exact consistency he needs. The idea is to open questions, never to patronise and engage the viewer in the work on a deep level. The work is bold and works differently according to distance. Close up, the viewer can see every brush mark, from a distance, the work take on a different, almost ethereal, sense.

The latest exhibition is entitled *Cave Painting of Our Time* and refers to the fact that we have access to fragments of ancient art that tell us something was happening, but we don't really know what. In a world that is changing so fast, he is sending a message to the future about our inner lives, which might be discovered but never fully understood. 'Ultimately', he says, 'my work is about things we used to know, but forgot'.



Musgo, 123 x 112 cm, oil on canvas 2014 by Fernando Velazques

Fernando Velazquez
Cave Paintings Of Our Time
24 May – 7 June
at Dorchester Arts Centre for the Dorchester Arts Festival and Dorset Art Weeks
Daily 10am – 4pm
Except Sunday June 1st
Free admission.