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## Tibor Simon-Mazula: Interpreting Intimacy

October 30, 2019 | Julia Debski

Tibor Simon-Mazula has worked with the idea of intimacy for years, presenting his understandings across the world, including White Walls, Marin Museum of Contemporary Art, Art Next Gallery, and more. After spending over five months working to put together a [book titled 'Pure Beauty'](#), I was able to ask him to share his experience on the topic.



Tibor Simon-Mazula in his studio. Photo courtesy by the Artist.

### How do you use your source material to depict different types of intimacy?

I believe Art and Intimacy are closely related, both cross those barriers, which separate people. Through painting, the viewer, the subject and the artist share a special intimate reality... The closeness makes the basis of all my work and real scenes inspire me. Intense connection with the subject is important; however, I give minimal instructions to the model. Many ideas come from her and/or are born from my instinctive reactions to her acts. Often the set and my guidance are calm, but the surface of the painting is rough as a result of a wild brushwork. The layered diverse texture on the canvas is an imprint of many emotions.

I always find a quiet figure in a still setting more appealing than an extreme stage with an unusual character. The exceptional, the big, or the powerful — like a political or historical figure — as a subject aren't as exciting for me as a woman, when she is combing her hair. Intimacy allows me to capture and depict pictures, which are free from distortions or preconceptions. A single gesture or captured motion could define the whole composition, like the directions of brushstrokes or the size of the painting. On the other hand, I believe, portraying intimacy is one of the biggest challenges for a contemporary artist. Boundaries seem blurry and uncertain today; signs could be opaque or confusing. I don't want to rebuild cultural, spiritual or intellectual walls, but want to open their doors.

### How has your relationship to your wife evolved by painting her?

Painting is a really focused and totally bidirectional act. I understand her better now; she became an artist. Our relationship is deeper and stronger today.

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Tibor Simon-Mazula and his wife. Photo courtesy by the Artist.



In Greek mythology, Clio or Kleio, is the muse of history.

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**How do you choose what to hide and what to reveal in your work?**

Art operates as a language for me. I don't show things in the canvas just as I don't use certain words in a particular sentence. My paintings are closer to a poem than to a novel.

For me, gestures, silhouettes, lights, and shades say more than facial expressions. I rarely depict faces, but I always take close attention to portray and detail hands. I'm really interested in describing three-dimensional spaces on the canvas and I'm always serious about showing the structure of a room rightly. However, I render only a few objects fully, mostly those, which are related to the figure or to my intent.

**What is hidden and what is exposed is often central to your paintings, why do you often choose to focus on the relationship between these elements?**

From a personal perspective, our lives are unique and different. However, my simplified figures show that essentially we face the same challenges in different forms with similar emotions, such as loss of home, quest for security, expectations, and delusion carried by excitement and calm. Reading characters in a room, a singular bather, a stretching woman, or a couple at the coast may be my subjects, but neither the exact locations nor identity of the figures are what is important.

Colors, sizes, and relations of forms communicate rather than an illusionistic scene. The story of my paintings could start with a real situation in California, Hungary, or anywhere else, but I want it to end at a point, wherefrom the viewer can be admitted to an experience, which is born from impulses of another human being. I try not to be literal and want to leave room for the viewer's fantasy.

**How did you get into painting and what appeals to you about it?**

Like many artists I started drawing at a young age, then I failed and started over to paint again and again. For me being a painter never was a dream which is waiting for fulfillment. I'm thinking about it as a role, with which I have to deal with if I am serious about my life.

Everything appeals to it. A process is a lively act when happiness occurs, I am a lover of color and texture, I want to leave a sign, and it's important for me to create something appealing to others. However, most importantly, painting is a real mystery on many levels for me. It is a series of unpredictable happenings. My marks on the canvas are never defined by only ideas that I am aware of. They are born at a particular time and echo my varied experiences regardless of what they are caused. I feel my paintings always meet with something unknown.

**What are your plans after the book? Any new projects?**

The book project took me away from painting for almost 5 months. It was an adventure, from which I learned so much; now I can't wait to spend more time painting. My head is full of images, I want to see them on a canvas. Together with my writer friend Zsolt, I am planning to do a unique audio-visual performance in Hungary (at American Corner Szeged). On a 13 by 40 feet screen-wall we will type texts and navigate real-time in a 3D virtual gallery space with my paintings.

## How has your background influenced the work that you make and having it be popular internationally?

I wasn't born into an artist family; I had to discover art by myself. Longing for knowledge and experience made me move from one continent to another (Europe, Western Asia, USA), to learn various arts and live in different cultures. Travel is good for building connections, but more importantly — if you keep going — they force you to shift viewpoints, stay open, accept and integrate different impacts. For example, in Hungary, art education was really serious but rigidly uniform. It only mentioned Modernism and was mainly about (social) realism and history. In the Bay Area of California, it was a big hit and a lifelong influence for me, when I saw Jay De Feo's Rose and Richard Diebenkorn's paintings and drawings. I was shocked by the strong real experience of variety. Insecurity, enthusiasm, and ambiguity of the 1990s of my home have also made a life-long impact on me and my art. A strong social and ideological system just collapsed in a moment and while many of us were glad for independence, we were only 40 miles from the horror of the Yugoslav war. If my art is somewhat popular internationally, it could be because it is a heavy image of a common and perceptive quest. While I pursue something general, Diana and I are always on the move and my paintings report that sensitivity is one of the keys to making it through.

