

# HECTOR DE GREGORIO

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**Andrea Allan: The first time I saw your work I was studying Joel Peter Witkins' photography for my degree. I was struck by the parallel themes of religion and the grotesque that feature in both of your works. Would you say that Witkin has been an influence?**

**Hector de Gregorio** It is easy to draw parallels between some of my work and Witkins' in terms of style and perhaps initial impact but I think Witkins' discourse is political and carnal, he plays with his sitters from and within theirs and our reality whereas my discourse is metaphysical (abstract reasoning), spiritual if you like, my sitters become and inhabit a mythological plane as part of an extended reality.

**AA: It's clear that there are historical references in your work. The images draw you in because they have that exotic quality of being contemporary whilst at the same time being steeped in history – both in terms of composition and printing. I'd like to ask about your printing technique, and the way you've worked on canvas. Could you tell us a bit about how you go from taking the photograph to ending up with the final product?**

**HdG** Photography is essential in my work as a point of departure to then convolute it with the magical, music has that very quality. The photographs, which are very rough, get doctored with a computer graphic program to create the image that then will be printed on canvas or archive paper. Then it follows a long process of hand finishing i.e. oil painting over it, adding texture (wax, gesso, ash, gilding, craquelure varnishes, it varies). This process enhances and supports the image creating an "object" as a whole. Sometimes this "object" goes even further with embellishments such as embroidery or incrustations or whatever suits so creating a material three dimensional piece. Being trained as a painter I aim to achieve a "painting" (or illusion, transcription of nature, etc.) but I also want actual reality (by photographing it, and being inspired by it) to be part of it. Photography and print is essential in my work in both practical and conceptual terms.

**AA: You do seem to have complete control over each element of your print – even down to the clothes that your models wear. There are also references to a variety of fashion styles and trends. I've read that your mother was a dressmaker, and that she taught you how to design and make clothes when you were young. Has this been a big influence on how you approach composing an image, knowing that you can alter any detail at whim? Does this affect your creative control – that is, knowing when to stop, or what changes to make?**

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**HdG** The garments are custom made to the sitter or rather the character a bit like the costumes in Japanese Noh theatre, they are part of the narrative and symbolism within the image, and it is difficult to find it ready made. A good example of this is "Prayer 2/Michelle Occelli" where even the fabric was sourced from India (hand span, hand woven hemp) all materials in that garment down to the thread was organic or unbleached, there is coral, hand carved ox bone Tibetan rosary beads as part of the concept for the project (Monastery) and it was exhibited in Bassel together with another garment of similar approach in the Bassel 2011 Art fair.

**AA: Your works have been described as a “seduction” – the viewer is drawn in by the style and the subject, as well as your techniques of construction. Was it your intention to seduce the viewer, to draw them in? What reactions are you trying to elicit in the viewer?**

**HdG** By creating an alluring, attractive, somewhat recognisable first encounter with the image it is then possible to introduce a narrative, a character that might be abstract or complex to follow or understand. The "style" capsule in which the image appear may help to establish a stage where the viewer can come back to and get deeper into it whatever first impressions.

**AA: Religion plays a big part in your work, and it’s been the background of many other successful and imaginative artists. The Bible is full of fantastical images – serpents and wild beasts – and is also an instruction of discipline and sin. Do you think that being brought up in a religious household perhaps gives some artists an edge over others?**

**HdG** I was exposed from an early age to the theatre and paraphernalia of religious events not at home but through the general culture in my home town. Religious imaginary in general is aimed at the general public to show and explain in fanciful and direct and also in other than non-verbal form points and characteristics of whatever the creed. My visual imagination was initially informed by this type of language and tradition which is highly effective in conveying a story at many levels from the obvious to the symbolic and religions had for a long time an almost monopoly on the arts in general but anyone can get equally inspired and inquisitive by other means of observation, so the answer is "no".

**AA: There is a distinct blend of art history mediums and styles in your work: portraiture, elements of realism, the grotesque, the overindulgence of the Baroque, and the elegance of the Renaissance. This is without mentioning the blends of fashion, from punk/bondage to Gothic and Renaissance-era outfits. You pull these cultural threads together very well; your images become filled with references without diluting them or being over-cluttered. Is it a conscious effort on your part to include as much as you can in your images? Are you mimicking or referencing portraits and other artworks you’ve seen?**

**HdG** All the elements you point at are very European as a whole, I would include the tarot cards, the comic vignette, even advertisement posters in terms of first 3 seconds impact and all of them are popular art; with that am saying is that my work is decisively a shared experience between

me and the viewer and for that I make use of references that are already out there and are somehow recognisable. without the need of being specific in my references I attempt to find an ensemble of elements that help me to come as close as I can to interpret what I have imagined or experienced or been requested to convey which sometimes can be really abstract or complex to start with so by using elements that are fairly easy associated to some of our memories the work can deepen its narrative.

**AA: You include other known artists in your images, such as Ernesto Tomasini, Lee Adams and Michele Occelli. Do you find that it helps to use models who are also artists themselves, even of different mediums? Was there anything in particular that prompted you to include these people in your work – any artistic connection? Do you feel their inclusion in your type of work lends extra depth or weight to your images because of their own creative backgrounds?**

**HdG** Working with other artists is generally and absolute pleasure, it gives new and different angles to an original idea. The work I did with them has always been something of a portraiture of them, they do not "model" for me, they are the initial inspiration and the theme in itself, I first met Othon (Mataragas) who fascinated me from the very first second I ever saw him on the stage. The latest work has been with Ernesto Tomassini who is described by the critics in his own filed as a contemporary embodiment of a Castrato.