



ART

MYTHS IN THE MIST

Veronica Smirnoff's evocative works conjure up shifting, fantastical tales *By FRANCES HEDGES*

At first glance, the Russian-born artist Veronica Smirnoff's dreamlike paintings have an allegorical quality to them. Yet Smirnoff's art turns out to be far more complex than the figurative style it recalls. She may draw on the tradition of Russian icon painting – a period of art history with which she has a deeply personal connection – but she elevates an essentially imitative style to one that is intuitive and open-ended. By stripping her figures and objects of symbolic meaning, she invites an emotional, rather than an interpretative, response. In this regard, her artistic narratives are closer to folk stories than allegories. 'The language of fairy tales entralls me,' she says. 'It has the scent of novelty and mystery, a reminder of the fact that the miraculous is ever closer than we know.'

That sense of mystery is palpable in Smirnoff's latest body of work, on show at London's Jessica Carlisle gallery next month. The choice of water as a unifying theme for the new pieces reflects the artist's preoccupation with the ideas of displacement and metamorphosis. Her paintings are 'fluid', she explains, not only in their tendency to elude definition, but also because of the unpredictability inherent in their physical construction. Smirnoff's egg-tempera technique, which involves applying ground pigments combined with a yolk emulsion to wooden panels, is a laborious process she describes as 'difficult to control, like water'. Thus, even the most painstaking act of craftsmanship entails an element of chance, reflecting what Smirnoff calls 'the arbitrariness of nature'. □

Veronica Smirnoff: the Greater and Lesser Ways is at Jessica Carlisle, 4 Mandeville Place, London W1 (www.jessicacarlisle.com), from 8 February to 4 March.



Left: the artist Veronica Smirnoff. Her works, clockwise from top left: 'Eternity is the Most Dangerous Ruler of All'; 'Chronicle of Peril'; 'Here be Dragons'; 'Crossing' (all 2013). 'Atlantida' (2009)

