



DAMIR SIMIC

A MASTER IN THE MAKING

BY PETER HANCOCKS

Damir Simic was born in Sisak, Croatia in 1966, and his rise to artistic fame has been both remarkable and rapid.

While he showed some artistic promise as a child it was not until 2001 that he was convinced, ironically by his wife, that he had any real artistic talent at all. That same year he enrolled in a drawing course in Zagreb and was so successful that he was accepted at the Angel Academy of Art in Florence in the following year. This decision was to prove a massive turning point in his life, taking him from businessman to full time professional artist.

Success and fame were to follow rapidly. Over the last few years he has won a string of awards and honourable mentions in many competitions and has become a celebrity in his home country. He often makes radio and TV appearances and obtains fees of an incredible 150,000 Euros for his life size portrait commissions.

This then sets the scene for my interview with this latest star in the Buckingham Fine Arts stable.

Q: Tell me a little of the years leading up to your enlightenment as it were!

A: It's not really overly exciting. In 1984 I finished Technological Secondary School and in 1985 I got a job in an oil refinery in Sisak where I worked as a chemical technician for ten years. In 1995 I started my own business and although successful I felt that something was lacking in my life, I felt unfulfilled and so in the autumn of 2001 I enrolled in a drawing course in Zagreb. By that one act I set in motion an unstoppable process of intensive education. In 2003 I entered the Angel Academy of Art in Florence where Maestro John Michael Angel who was himself taught by the famous Italian painter, Annigoni, taught me. It was from there that I graduated in January 2006.

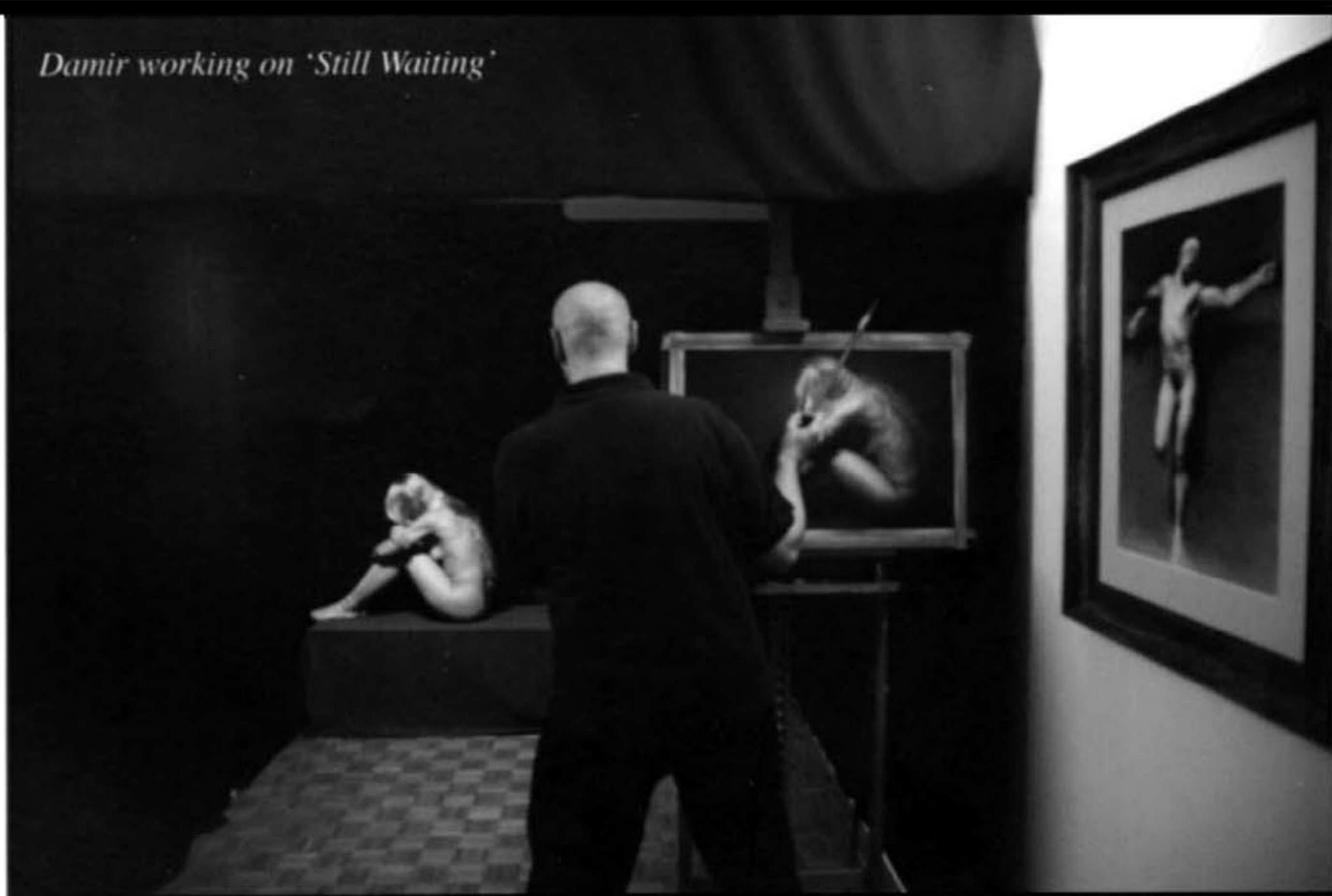
Q: Although you must have realized that you had a talent, why did you wait so long before exercising your gift?

A: For the whole my life I have felt different. I admire old masters and I respect traditions. I was bound by impossibility of utterance and I saved my energy and my breath until the moment when I realized that I had enough strength to show something to the world to my complete satisfaction. In the mean time I was searching for an academy that could give me a good base and impart knowledge on the techniques used by the old masters. For all that I also needed the support of my wife.

When I look back to my former life I can finally understand my internal restlessness. My passion toward drawing and painting and my tendency toward creative work were always trying to rise to the surface.

In order to achieve my goals it became necessary to sell our big house and our luxurious cars. We moved to a smaller apartment and used the money to further my education without really knowing what future would bring

Damir working on 'Still Waiting'



Q: I understand that your life-size portraits command a high price. Your rise to fame appears meteoric. How did this evolve in what must be considered a short period of time?

A: I achieved a first place award in the 2004 Art Renewal Centre Student Competition in the USA and that put me in limelight. I staged an exhibition in Zagreb in 2005 and this gave me access to the circle of Croatian art lovers and collectors. They loved my work, so much so, I am currently fully booked for the whole next year and that is why you would find it impossible to view my originals in any Croatian gallery.

Q: Have you an inclination to extend your interests into other areas and perhaps other mediums?

A: Currently I have three major directions. I work on charcoal drawings (male and female), portrait and still life commissions and I am working on a very big project for Croatian cultural heritage that will take 3-5 years to complete. As for new areas of interest, I have an intention to combine a series of landscapes with figuration and in the far distant future I plan to work on mythology themes. Regarding mediums, I will stay loyal to charcoal and oil because I like challenges.

Q: Ray Loud, Managing Director of Buckingham Fine Art has described you as 'A Master of Life Form'. How do you view this comment?

A: I am very honoured with his statement. It is very difficult to talk about my own work but I will tell you Maestro Willem Dolphyn said of it: "Charcoal is one of the most demanding techniques in the world and only a few people can work with it because it doesn't tolerate mistakes. You have to be in complete control and cannot skip any phase of the work. Simic is a charcoal Master in this regard."

Although it is nice to hear such great things about my work, I still feel I have yet to reach my zenith.

Q: Tell me about the days/weeks leading up to your representation by Buckingham Fine Art. [i.e.], did you approach them or did they approach you?

A: During a visit to London in May last year my wife saw a Buckingham Fine Art brochure. It impressed us both to such an extent that, via an acquaintance in London, we contacted the company to find out if they would be interested in publishing my work. Two weeks later I received an e-mail from Mr. Loud and that was the beginning of our collaboration. From then on we were in constant touch developing our mutual

project and finally met in December last. I didn't just find an associate, but a friend who possesses the same passion for art as I do.

Q: It is understood that you work in only the 'very finest of French charcoal' on extremely rare 'Florentine Cotton Paper', but was this always so, or a more recent development?

A: My first touch with that particular kind of charcoal and paper was during my education at the academy in Florence.

The characteristic of the paper is that it doesn't tolerate mistakes and

[allowed] corrections are minimal. It demands sensibility and at the same time, without the strength, is not impressive. It is like the touch of the fire and the water.

Charcoal has perfect granulation and leaves a silky touch on the paper if precisely guided. It is like a woman, gentle and demanding, although without respect, it won't return its love to you. As to the rest, that will have to remain my little secret.

Q: It is further understood that your charcoal nudes are painted from real life over a period of four weeks with the model in continuous attendance. Why do you choose to work like this, particularly as the model costs [to some] would appear prohibitive?

A: I only know one method of drawing charcoal nudes and that is the way I was taught at the Academy. It is the same with oils. I believe it would be strange to spend years learning the techniques of the old masters and then not use them in my work. Although demanding and sometimes very frustrating I will continue using them because I like tradition and respect heritage, whilst at the same time, expressing my soul. As far as cost is concerned I never think that anything is too expensive when it comes to the quality of my work. I am guided by love not by currency.

Q: How do you view the future and is it your intention to remain in Croatia, particularly as your fame grows?

A: At the moment my wife is studying in Toronto so my family lives between Canada and Croatia. Although Canada is a very beautiful country I cannot see myself there permanently. I simply cannot live without Florence. After all everything important started there at the end of the 14th century! Then again, the first time I viewed London through a plane window I was so excited by the rhythm and complexity of its structures it

occurred to me that London too could well be the perfect place for us. That said, and regardless where the future leads, my connection with Croatia will remain strong.

In conclusion, I would like to share few of my thoughts with you. Maybe they will help someone who finds themselves in a similar situation to me a few years ago. I am living proof that it is never too late to fulfil your dreams. I changed my life completely when I was 36 years old. Of course there was a fear of what the future may bring, but it didn't stop me doing what I felt was right. I always believed that if I did something from love it couldn't be wrong.

The chances for success and failure are always half and half. We are the ones who make the decisions and choose in which direction we will go. It is not always easy but we must follow our feelings and intuition.

Art is definitely something that is worth living for and if you ask me 'what is art' I will answer: 'Art is neither too much nor too little, but exactly as much as it should be'.

Damir's work can be seen at Spring Fair on Stand F1 within Hall 12.

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Still Waiting



Secret

