



Factual Nonsense

DAVID TABORN Some notes on the viscera of painting.

Born in England in 1947, David Taborn was educated at Birmingham College of Art and the Slade School. In his abstract paintings of these apprenticeship years, his ambitious combination of a post-painterly process, oblique use of the formal grid and sensitivity of touch earned him recognition.

His work of the 1970's shifted through a gradual and organic process of disintegration and examination of the means, structures and support of painting 'as such'. Rope and plastic grids would be applied to the picture to be worked over, in and under with a mixture of oil, pumice powder and acrylic. By the end of the decade some paintings conceived in 1974 had been so extensively repainted that all foreign matter was buried deep beneath the surface. Out of this exacting work ethic came the salon scaled paintings "Mantle" and "Fohn". These densely worked sculptural images, approaching a state and presence of 'objecthood', mark a decisive moment. Delicate, lightly-hued glancing forms, furrows and ridges allude to a protean whole but do so on their own terms thus satisfying the requirements of an image (through suggestions of depth) rather than that of a mere gesture, but permitting the paintwork in itself to achieve much of the discourse. From this point on Taborn's work increasingly refuses to subscribe to the literalness of modernist denial. During and after his fellowship at Nottingham University (1979-1982), a personal summarising of a sublime nascent mythology of landscape and desire creeps in from the side, reaching a culmination in the 1982 painting "Cyclades".

Aware, however, of the potential banalities and moral troughs of neo-Romanticism, the period between 1982 and the late eighties is characterised, at least in retrospect, by an extended 'variation' of the classic promulgation: thesis, antithesis, synthesis. Thus it transpires, after an organic fashion, that Taborn began to veer sharply away from a sombre, earth-laden palette and an impasto feast towards, at least in the mid-eighties, almost Turner-esque veils of washed colour, hidden forms and allusions to stepped planes of the mind. Meaning and form within his abstract idioms were not so much re-presented as implied or faintly echoed. Distillation was of the essence.

To permit the word synthesis is to imply a 'solution'. Taborn is not a formalist, though it can be said that from late 1987, nearing the completion of "Crystal Palace Agape" or "Between The Cold Moon, The Earth and Crystal Palace", his paintings, in the words of the art historian Nicholas Alfrey, "combine a whole gamut of painterly marks and traces. . . carried on a loose linear armature of arcs and ribbons, discs and streamers. The paint is poured or dripped, applied wet or dry, thick or thin, varying constantly from soft-edged to sharp focus". If this is the case then it means that Taborn learnt and absorbed from the exercises and fruitful solutions he had discovered earlier but with some remarkable and fundamental new modes of lineage and concept. As his numerous solo shows since 1988 have demonstrated, most notably at the Grob Gallery, London and at his retrospective in Dormagen, Germany, the essential difference between his work prior to 1987 and his recent work lies in its ushering in of complex metaphors, historical allusion, philosophical linguistic systems and a tortuous relationship with certain aspects of popular 'urban' society. Thus, for instance, such works as "Invitation Only", "A Guide For The Perplexed" or indeed "Factual Nonsense" operate according according to a syncretic system of multitudinous convictions. The power of the image may achieve a suspension of disbelief but simultaneously the mass of information about the act of painting, the erasure of simplistic understandings, the codified presentation of "found objects" and the sheer exuberance of the mark-making mean more than a mere spectacle, more a principle of generous discharge.

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Spring 1994