

Simon Callery - "Open Body"

28.10.-25.11.2017

Opening: 27.10.2017, 6pm

EG: In connection with your upcoming solo show at annex14 you said: „I want to create a strong and physical statement using specific colour relationships". Reading the statement and remembering your earlier paintings two terms attracted my attention immediately: "physical statement" and "colour relationship".

This means for me that on one hand the physical experience is very important for your work. Does it also mean that your intention is to give the painting its body back. Could you tell me what experiences and thoughts as an artist make the physical aspect so important for you?

SC: Yes, I have said that I work to give painting its body back. I do this because I want to give the viewers their body back. I make physical paintings - because I am interested in the viewer as a physical being - a fully sentient, inquisitive, perceptive and thinking being. I want the paintings to involve and engage the full attention of that person and not just the eye.

This approach to painting grew partly from my collaborations with archaeologists in the field. Landscape is an important theme in British art and I was interested in how to work with landscape (and recently with the urban environment) without resorting to the established image-based tradition. One important lesson I learnt from archaeological excavation sites is that if you have serious questions about landscape, and about our relationship to it, then relying solely on what you can see does not take you far. The landscape is a multi-sensory and multi-temporal environment and we experience it in motion with all our senses. These were the characteristics I wanted as qualities for my painting. To some extent the works reveal the impact of landscape on contemporary painting rather than how painting serves to represent landscape. This is an inversion of the tradition not a rejection of it.

Tangled amongst my thinking on landscape was a growing awareness of the relentless mass of images we consume in contemporary urban life on a daily basis. Our emphatic visual culture does not come without a cost - which is clearly a suppression of our other senses. As a painter I am very aware of how complicit painting has been historically in the development of image/picture making from the very first day. It seems perfect that painting could be the medium best placed to critique our current use of image in everyday life and perhaps to offer an alternative experience. What I wanted to do was to bring the body back into the painting equation, not as image, and to recalibrate and rebalance the sensory range. It has been liberating to question all the conventions of image-based painting and create physical equivalents: line as a cut or a thread, image as a puncture, rip or aperture, colour soaked in the canvas instead of on it. When the primary function of the painting is not about communicating through image then the works need not be hung at eye level or even flat against the wall. These paintings for annex14 do not depict the body but reveal their own 'open body'.

EG: You talked about specific colour relationships. Do you mean the relationship within a painting or between different works, you install in a site-specific way?

SC: I was thinking that the way I wanted to use colour in these works was an opportunity to reveal how we can think of colour as a material - to be perceived physically. The installation of the works and their formal relationships is designed to support this idea. In restricting the works in the show to two colours I am hoping that $1 + 1 = 3$.

The annex14 works are made with aluminium acrylic soaked into the fibres of the canvas and cadmium lemon yellow and cadmium yellow middle soaked in with rabbit skin glue as medium. Both these pigments are metals and we perceive them as such. I am using colour here as a choice of material, not for their depictive value but as specific materials along with the other specific chosen materials of painting; canvas, pencil, wood and thread. Personally, I am aware that I perceive the colour optically but also as physical materials that I sense in my fingertips and my back teeth.

Interview: Elisabeth Gerber