

COLCHESTER ART SOCIETY

Founded in 1946 for the promotion of the visual arts



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newsletter

London Art Fair 2017

On January 19th about 16 of us went to the London Art Fair.

As usual it was a large and varied show with something for every taste.

The pictures I came back to, and found fascinating were by Gustavo Diaz Sosa, born in Cuba in 1983.

His large monochrome paintings, made to look rather worn and sketchy, show crowds of people, dwarfed in comparison with huge buildings. .

“The paintings of Gustavo Díaz Sosa convey his perception of The State, The Power, and anything that involves human submission. More than serve as a social or explicit protest manifesto, Díaz Sosa’s paintings are an existential projection of our looming future, in light of modern history.

“He portrays society’s thirst for liberty in a poetic manner. Humanity seems to be shaped at the whim of those in power, but we now live in a time in which we must cut the threads of the puppets we have become.”

(Quoted from exhibition pamphlet)

JMG



De Burócratas y Padrinos / 150 x 220 cm / / 2015

Simon Carter at The Minories

The recent exhibition at The Minories Galleries, *Approaching the Remote*, by our President Simon Carter, was the result of his obsession with a stretch of coastline close to his home and studio in Walton. The exhibition was hung to give each individual canvas its own space but close enough for each painting to relate to the others in the show, and to make a visual connection to the smaller studies in an adjoining room.

Through many rapid and flowing drawings Simon records the water, seawall, estuary and marshland (hinterland) with occasional references to human habitation. He uses these elements in looking through these countless studies for “those moments of revelation, opening up new ways, seeing something noted hundreds of times before”; to extract an image that sparks the imagination with its perceived potential.

Working in acrylics, he draws roughly and paints quickly, reducing waves, sandbars and cliffs to semi abstract shapes and rhythms, contracting the riotous nature of the landscape to a more orderly representation through shape and harmonising colour. The effects of light can be fleeting and elusive but the paintings are an attempt to fix that transitory image. The high horizon line creates both the flatness of the subject and preserves the integrity of the picture plane. On close scrutiny the paintings are a myriad of marks, drips and paint laden brushstrokes that define the journey. His is an art which is both vigorous and intellectual where harmony is achieved through colour and the linear edge. Shapes appear and recede and there is an acceptance of unplanned marks when the paint is applied quickly in gestural strokes, animating the picture surface. Continuous assessment, scraping back, further drawings and even using collage techniques are all employed in the organisation of the visual elements to discover that elusive definitive composition.

The viewer is witness to the process of painting where the first impulses of thought leave traces in the finished work; where colours are cut back, leaving a ghost of a line; where the plane is tilted and the shapes become blurred and then hidden in veils of overpainting. The act of painting is by instinct, an intuitive response where the shapes are pushed around until, with an educated guess, the design clicks into some final shape.

In looking at the work it was difficult not to be reminded of the work of the American Abstract Expressionists and there were certainly some equivalents in the gestural brushwork and the use of a certain colour palette. But I was reminded too of the work of Matisse in such paintings as *Open Window at Collioure* and *A View of Notre-Dame*, the pared back images where Matisse was painting more out than painting in. Taking out the unnecessary and the irrelevant, where less is often more, removing unnecessary references and leaving the viewer a more holistic view of the world in which we live. I think that Simon’s work has something of that element, that the painting describes more than just a patch of coastline but is a metaphor for a more universal experience; beyond documenting what can be seen and transforming sea, sky and land to reflect our perception of the world in a more all-encompassing way.

I personally have found that viewing Simon’s blog is an excellent way to engage with the process and see how the painting develops from that embryotic state, through a sometimes radical reorganisation of the elements, to a complete pictorial statement.

Bryan Whiteley



High Tide at Hipkin's Beach, 2016. Acrylic on canvas.



Creek Cottages, 2008-09. Acrylic on canvas.



Flood Tide, Beaumont, 2016. Acrylic on canvas.

Colchester Art Society Spring Lecture

Friday 7 April 2017

Mali Morris at Firstsite Gallery, Colchester

By Wendy Bailey

I booked my tickets early for the Colchester Art Society Spring lecture at Firstsite. All I knew about artist Mali Morris was that she is an RA, a member of the Royal Academy, one of my favourite London Galleries, and that is good enough recommendation for me! For forty years Mali Morris has been exhibiting and selling her multi-coloured abstract art worldwide since her first show opened at London's Serpentine Gallery in 1977.

I need to admit that Abstract Art is mostly a mystery to me. So it was with an open mind and inquisitive heart that I sat attentively to listen to this smartly dressed woman who spoke to us whilst showing slides of her work. It was a fascinating revelation to hear how Mali creates her compositions.

Her latest serial work '*Back to Front*' literally describes how she builds a piece which size wise are either very large or very small. Mali begins by painting a random grid of coloured squares with rainbow colours red, blue, yellow, orange, pink etc using pure Golden Heavy Body acrylic paint, which fill the entire canvas. Each square is painted to be of final finish quality. When it's completely dry, Mali covers the squares with a her favoured purples, or browns of varying hues. Then she rubs away circles in the wet paint revealing the underpainted colours beneath. She does not keep a plan of what she painted originally, so the colour of the circles which emerge are always a joyful surprise. It is almost as if the painting paints itself. The final image is literally 'Back to Front'.

Mali spoke with sincerity and intensity about colour and it's vital role in her work. I was totally absorbed by her ideas and methods. Some artists are not at ease explaining how they work or why they make those marks but Mali delighted in sharing her thought process in making her work. I now see her paintings in new light after the lecture, which before had only been paintings of lots of colour. Now I understand Mali's art and what it means to her.

The one thing I learnt from Mali Morris?

That *colour* is not just about life. It's more important than that.

Wendy Bailey

Vanessa Bell at Dulwich

I have long been an admirer of the work of the Bloomsbury artists and so when I heard there was going to be a CAS trip to see Vanessa Bell's work I jumped at the chance. Judging by the full coach I am not alone in my admiration. We were dropped right at the door of the Dulwich Picture Gallery with time for a quick coffee before going into the Exhibition. I have seen reproductions in books of several of the paintings on display but they looked so much more vibrant in real life.

Vanessa Bell was the central figure of the group of creative people who lived and worked at Charleston Farmhouse in Sussex and she was also a founder of the Omega Workshop. In the past her work has sometimes been overshadowed by her famous sister Virginia Woolf and the unorthodox relationships and lifestyles of the Bloomsbury Set, so it was good to see VB's work considered in it's own right. There was a mixture of portraiture, still life and landscape paintings. In all three types, Bell's rich sense of colour and bold composition shone through. Broad blocks of colour were laid down, which close up looked quite crude but from a distance gave the paintings a wonderful depth. I thought that considering many of the pictures were painted around a hundred years ago they felt surprisingly modern. I particularly liked a portrait of her sister, Virginia, in which she was seated in an orange armchair. There was a lovely feeling of warmth and intimacy and the whole picture seemed to glow. I would have liked to have seen a few more of VB's ceramics and textile designs included in the exhibition but overall it was excellent and a thoroughly enjoyable day out

Jo McGilloway

MARTIN FIDLER and MELVYN KING
NORTH HOUSE GALLERY

4 March - 25 March 2017

Martin Fidler and Melvyn King are showing together at North House Gallery in Manningtree until March 25th. The Show is entitled 'Red Crag Project', and some of the interesting story of Red Crag itself, and of both artists' response to their shared subject, and the project, can be found in John Bevis booklet 'Red Crag Project', which accompanies the exhibition.

Whilst Mel King seeks to reject the notion of horizon as a necessary component of painting from the land, Martin Fidler relishes and exploits it...he also speaks of being "inside & outside" realistic expression, which strikes me, on looking at Fidler's work here, not as a dichotomy, but as the co-existence of both states, in balance. The 'reversibility' of some of his images is delightful and it is clearest, or most obvious perhaps eroded hulls.

Fidler's painted wooden constructions push and pull in and out of the implied surface, whilst the shadows they create move and change across a suggested picture plane.

In contrast Mel King sites 'the often problematic placing of the horizon and the division between land (or sea) and sky' and it struck me that this is symbolic of his need to bring the 'abstract elements.. (of the landscape) to the fore.

But in many of King's paintings that horizon line and other horizontal division lines assert themselves tentatively across a much surer application of paint. They (the lines) hold their own.

And then, in 'Crabknowe Fleet' the horizon line firmly asserts itself, grounded in oxide; whilst the three quarters of the canvas above are light as air. In this painting it is as if King has allowed himself to give way to the figurative core of his instincts and to relax, or recline into the landscape of his subject matter.

Martin Fidler and Mel King share a preoccupation with a framing device. In Fidler's case, essentially, as the frame, or box sometimes physically holds the work together. Interestingly, when released from this requirement, he enjoys using panel with torn edges as a support. In the Ocean Stripe, Irlam Beach paintings the painted torn edges themselves, in their difference in texture and colour, and (inevitable in the tearing), the breakaway from the 'straight' of the horizon lines, simply read as different, alternative strata, and hark back to the reversibility in the 'Waterlines' photographs of hulls.

In 'Jewel Carriageway', 'Geology Has Its Faults', and 'Rock of Ages' the torn edge functions in a completely different way. Being coloured consistently with the ground and with textural differences minimized, it simply asserts the lightness of 'the top'....'This Way Up', whilst the actual 'horizon line', (or tabletop? In these cases), grounds them firmly

Mel King's use of the frame in the paintings 'Middle Earth', 'Middle Prussian' and 'The Crossing' is different. In terms of King's painting, the painted frame here is a static, though ambiguous device. In these painted near its paintings it is figurative, existing as a deeply recessed window or open ended box, containing landscape elements whose much more urgent energy is confined within it. As you switch your attention from the frame to the more painterly elements inside it, the frame can seem to be either the recess or a smaller, proud, square above a larger square with sloping sides' like looking down on a pyramid trunase.

In the paintings 'Red Crag, The Origin', 'Bronze Age,' 'Moraines of the Day', 'Harwich Bore', and 'Mersea Beat the frame is simply a long sustained brushstroke along the edges of the painting which, initially seeming both uniform and pedestrian, on closer examination, reveals variations in treatment and texture, slippage off the straight and narrow into subtle slopes and occasional disappearance. In other paintings these 'edge lines' sometimes almost suggest the presence of

curvilinear lens. Especially in these of King’s paintings unframed by fairly thick, oxide coloured , battenings, these framestrokes draw you to and across the edge, outside of the paintings, where you become aware of their physical depth. This is less deliberate than Martin Fidler’s torn panel edges, both artists make work which engages intelligently in the formal possibilities of image making, and their mutual concern for framing, edging and containing is a good example of this, but whereas Martin Fidler seems to be working with more than one vernacular, and alludes with visual metaphor to areas beyond the Red Crag; Mel King is deeply absorbed in the language of painting, using it almost as a conduit and a means of exploration into the Red Crag itself.

Kitty Reford



Martin Fidler, *Waterlines*, photographic panels



Mel King *CrabKnowe Fleet*, oil on canvas

Ian Hay, Landscape, Town and City The Minorities, , Feb 2nd–25th

COLCHESTER artist Ian Hay is far too modest to agree he's as important a part of the town’s artistic landscape as his own painting heroes.

But it’s an undeniable fact that he has left a lasting legacy, not only on Britain’s oldest recorded town, but the students who have studied here

Born and brought up in Harwich, Ian showed early signs of artistic promise even at secondary school.

“I was 14 at the time and not particularly academic,” he smiles. “But the school must have thought I had a genuine talent because they sent me to the Colchester School of Art every Friday to do plant drawing with Dickie Chopping.”

Richard Chopping, along with partner Denis Wirth-Miller, spent most of their lives in Wivenhoe, and while they were perhaps most famous for bringing Francis Bacon to the estuary town, Richard was also well known as the illustrator of the first James Bond books.

“Dickie was a terrific influence on me,” he adds. “My father had always been at sea and it was expected that I would follow him in the Merchant Navy but Dickie persuaded me to think about taking up art full time. I think my parents’ main concern was income and making money from art but they relented. I knew I had to work hard to make it possible, and I did.”

Ian ended up at the School of Art for five years, under the tutorship of such great local artists as John Connor and John Nash, and after he graduated he got a place at the prestigious Royal College of Art,

“I

Ian says: “My contemporaries were people like Ridley Scott, James Dyson and David Hockney.

“After that I taught part-time at St Martin’s, where I stayed for the next 14 years.”

Ian used to commute to London from Colchester sitting next to another great Colchester-based artist, Henry Collins, who along with his partner, Joyce Pallet, created the iconic concrete friezes which continue to brighten the town’s subways.

“He was like a father figure to me,” Ian tells me. “I learnt more about art and design travelling up to London with Henry than I did in three years at the Royal College of Art.”

Eventually Ian got a job at the Colchester School of Art himself, where he taught for more than 30 years until his retirement at the age of 60 in 2005. Four years later he was awarded an honorary doctorate by [Essex University](#) for his contribution to art education. While at the school students included Eighties pop singer Sade, as well as Wivenhoe artist Jamie Dodds and the current President of the Colchester Art Society, Simon Carter.

Now Ian is back at his spiritual home, The Minories, where his current exhibition, Landscape, runs alongside a show by former student, Simon Carter.

“I’m very pleased to be showing my work at the same time as Simon’s,” he says. I’ve been a member of the society for a long time and he’s now president and although our work is very different we are both deeply influenced by the landscape around us.”

For Ian’s latest show, the cities of Venice, Amsterdam and London are all represented but it’s the vibrantly colourful, almost romantic, depictions of his home town that really stand out.

“I won the landscape prize at college,” he reveals, “so it’s always been something that I’ve enjoyed. I think it helps I’m from East Anglian. My thing has always been about light and low horizons. The big skies that dominate this area that we live in. It’s been a huge influence for many of the artists who have lived here.”

I suggest may be that’s why he was so attracted to painting in Amsterdam and Venice, because the water’s reflection extends the vistas, creating a wider landscape to draw from.

“I think you might be right,” he agrees. “But I do love architecture and the urban aspects in a landscape as well.”

With Colchester, Ian is not ashamed to admit there’s also a huge dose of nostalgia running through his paintings.

“I have my favourite places,” he smiles. “High Woods, Old Lane and Cymbeline Meadows, even Albert Street, which is almost like a street that time forgot with its lovely Victorian feel to it. Being a student here and walking every day up to North Hill, I think these places have become part of the fabric of who I am. May be there is a bit of sentimentality and nostalgia to my work but what’s wrong with that.

“I used to take students out to these places just as John Nash did with me.”



Ian at work



Colchester landscape

Thanks to Neil Darcy-Jones for permission to quote from his article in Colchester Gazette
