

Seline Johns on Robert Fry

Robert Fry's work is a refreshing interpretation of figurative painting, expressed with a striking and audacious command of his primary media, acrylic and oil. This series of nineteen paintings further develops critical themes within Fry's earlier etchings that illustrate the internal conflict of existential identity manifested through the depiction of distorted perspective and sexed yet faceless, human form. In each of the works, the juxtaposition of two conversing beings, fuses boundaries between conventionally inanimate structures with anatomical extensions that strain to communicate against backgrounds suggesting tumbling infinity and omnipresence.

The etchings of Robert Fry are precision manifested; a set of works intrinsically controlled by the very materials of their production, extending beyond technical effort to the minutely ordered intricacy of the content. By contrast the paintings, often employing harmonious colour combinations and alluring opaque contours are far from the linear clarity of their monochromatic precursors. Unwieldy brushstrokes of heavy impasto imbue the paintings with a sense that one must wade through repeatedly evolving thick acrylic layers in order to breach the sensory gap between our visual and emotional understanding.

Fry does not limit the act of painting to a single medium however, a comment itself on the canonical mode of painterly production, preferring instead to utilise pigmented liquids as varied as an ordinary pen to glossy enamel. Nor is the work a simplistic committal of creative thought to canvas; the materials and manner of their use is as much a part of the final piece, as the relationship between artist as creator and artist as subject, of and within the work. This is most evident in Fry's etchings where an element of self-portraiture may be understood although no works are formally titled as such; amidst lines describing the or perhaps 'an' artist in the process of 'making work' and without explicit statement Fry's audience is invited to redefine where one begins and the other ends.

Sexual dialogue runs throughout both sets of figurative work, awakened first in the etchings where scratched outlines of male genitalia appear perfunctorily, with humility and without emphasis against identifiably masculine bodies, apparently clothed and with tangible facial expressions. The form of 'woman' surfaces perhaps only as a section of obscure fleshy leg, stiletto ended, coquettishly crossed.

The deliberate obfuscation of and surrounding essential civilised components such as the human face creates a marked unease in the identification of the paintings' predominantly female bodies. One is reminded that on removing a visage only the most primitive animal functions are immediately evident. Uneven breasts are placed on spongy melting faceless women with rough anatomical truth. Fry's visual explanation of 'man' is reduced to no more than a suggestion by a discreetly hovering erect penis and scrotum or perhaps none at all; masculinity is defined here by notable absence.

As whirling armchairs align, pause and lock horns, we witness the internal dialogue of one who questions just how compelling personal sexual perspective is, in the context of discourse. Fry's paintings seek a resolution to such concerns; a preoccupation with this search finds a new manner of expression, canvas upon canvas, each like the very next sentence in a

soliloquy, a cogent example of the psychological rigors of an Obsessive Compulsive existence.