

PHILIPPA BLAIR OUT OF LINE

1st June - 19th June 2010

Warwick Henderson Gallery





Escapement - (Diptych, Detail), Oil on Canvas, 2008, 152 x 244cm

PHILIPPA BLAIR - OUT OF LINE



Close Encounters, Oil on Canvas, 2008, 152 x 122cm

The last time I was in Philippa Blair's studio, it was in Venice, close to the Beach with its paradoxical turns of character. Staying near-by, I had been struck by the beauty of the early hours of the day when the mist softens and blurs the horizon of the Pacific Ocean. Equally, when the sun was up, I had been intrigued and swept along by the spectacle of human activity on the promenade with its surf culture, roller-blade dancing, body-builders, buskers, souvenir shops and ad hoc vendors. It was edgy, scruffy, and unpredictable.

Both personas were echoed in Blair's paintings of the around 2005. The high velocity brush work, the swiveling lines crossing those that were ruled and measured, the spiral circles squeegeed to embed their own track marks on the canvas like a dancing dervish, the throws of diluted oil paint leaving a wake of drips and run - off. I found all this drama was leavened by subtle nuanced passages of colour and the ever-present armature of black as though for every vibrant hue and soft cadence, the discipline of drawing was not far away.

This time, the studio was in a new location, in a homely (on the surface at least) neighborhood near the port of San Pedro. Blair has been living there with her architect husband John Porter, for the past three years. From the windows of her working spaces she can observe a line of container cranes. In the distance, their linear trajectories pierce the sky of Southern California and in a dream-like sequence could easily morph into railway tracks, intricate Polynesian latticed river and sea rafts or ideograms from some ancient civilization.



Daylight Saving, Oil on Canvas, 2008, 122 x 122cm

Looking at her recent paintings, I see their stylistic similarity to the works I saw at Venice Beach. But also some departures to what is now the practice of an artist in her prime. Once again there is the admiration acknowledged of De Kooning and also that of the abstract vocabulary of Kandinsky; when he first committed his work to exploring the spiritual dimension. There is also recognition by her of newer talents: Terry Winters, Philip Taaffe and Albert Oehlen. For this artist, like many others, creative expression is the summation of a maelstrom of influences brought about by a change in living situation, which provides a new iconography, but also memories (familiar, almost as though fixed in the periphery of vision), travel undertaken, encounters made, and all the sensations involved in engaging with early 21st century life. The paintings coming out of the San Pedro studio during the period 2007-2009 are hence predictably dynamic and challenging.

There is the strong linear pulse to Blair's compositions nowadays as though the painted sweeps of squeegee, the fine lattice webs and the spare spray-gun tracks, work as a dense journey. Whether single or in diptych form, these canvases take you into a terrain



Piano Tree (Diptych), 2007, Oil on Canvas, 91.5 x 183cm

that simultaneously evokes the senses, not only of sight but of music and sound, of the crackle of electronics, or the brute force of industry piercing the air. Then more clandestinely, there is imagined evidence of the sole graffiti performer with his spray can, the totemic figures of Jung's unconscious coming forth and the palimpsest - like layers of colour that contribute to refiguring times past.

During my recent visit over several days to Los Angeles I had the chance to become immersed again in this artist's imaginative world. Not only topographies of place, abstracted to give the viewer much more than mere mimesis, her paintings also counterpoint mood through colour and tonal range and they increasingly reference music as an energizing, transporting and transformational force.

Dr. Anne Kirker April 2010



Aerialista, Oil on Canvas, 2008, 152 x 122cm



Landfall 123, Oil on Canvas, 2007, 51 x 41 (x3)





Warwick Henderson Gallery

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Work on Front and Back Cover - Phoenix (Diptych, Detail), Oil on Canvas, 152 x 244cm