



More than Skin Deep

Estelle Lovatt meets Kerry Brewer and finds herself drawn to the intrinsic beauty of the artist's work

Let me begin by saying photography does not do Kerry Brewer's art justice. What you see on the page seems dull, tedious; that's what I first thought, but seeing the paintings in real life, I saw the beauty and technique of Brewer's work. With layers of colour, the camera cannot capture the subtle nuances - the heavy varnish sucks up the light, making the works look flat, dark and totally unappealing in reproduction. I dreaded going to her studio, based on the jpegs I'd seen, but, once there, I had a paradigm shift and ended up staying longer than planned, drawn to the magnetism that is uniquely Brewer's canvas.

It's not surprising that her exhibition, *Where no bird can fly nor fish can swim*, (inspired by Nick Cave and the Bad Seeds' record *Tupelo*) is motivated by Brewer listening to music. In fact, it is key. Synesthetic art, either created by synesthesia or art created to elicit a synesthetic experience in the viewer, makes the canvas resonate in much the same way as musical notes rely on the scale to vibrate and reverberate. Hence, Brewer's canvas pulsates a heartbeat.

The belief that music is linked to art goes back to Ancient Greece, with Plato talking about tone and harmony in relation to art; Synesthesia reacts to colours like the musical scale. If you 'hear' Brewer's oils, remember Kandinsky heard his paint box hiss, while Schubert saw E minor as "a maiden in white and rose-red".

Brewer's 'time-release' paintings release at various speeds. Revolutionary in technique, what makes them interesting, and unpredictable, is that they adhere to the whole tradition of art history, benefiting from a Medieval Fra Angelico way of painting light emanating from the canvas to a Flemish use of oils; Renaissance traditions of illusionistic space and a Rothko-mystic luminosity through a polychromatic-Reinhardt-black. Though not adhering to any one particular art, Brewer follows the lineage of all types of art, science and culture, "...starting eighteen years ago with a classically good, formal, exacting art training, before moving on to colour".

Brewer starts "...with a narrative, photographs it and montages it together using Photoshop - as if sketching on the computer". This multi-step process gives two effects: firstly, a blurred photographic appearance and testimony to Brewer as a painter; and, secondly, the plastic nature of paint itself, making it the most elegant picture you're ever see. Enormously spiritual, perhaps Biblical, quiet-time in front of the painting is for confession as much as blessing, such is its power and compassion. A soft, out-of-focus, possibly quasi-religious presence, with a supernatural godly presence, not representative of any object or symbol of faith, is heavy with touches of heavenly riposte - an amazing place for reflection.

When Brewer says she was "...taught by nothing more complicated than thorough observation", it's a clue as to what to do with these paintings: look! A study of

the soul and mind, psychologically each painting's huge space consumes you. Mischievously, the more light it casts, the bigger the space looks, as in *Garret*, an otherwise intimate interior. Open to David Lynch-type interpretations, Brewer's bizarre images are meticulously crafted. Interchanging mirror for cave, the picture is about more than the physical space. Offering an almost out-of-body experience, they bounce you around, pull you inside and make you feel a little inebriated, at the very least.

Constantly changing appearance, transcending time and emotion, each super-size canvas responds to the slightest movement of light. Standing in front of it, physically a part of it, you'll notice the smooth surface of the canvas disturbed by forms emerging through each meticulously painted layer. Gently hovering in the foreground (under a glow powerful enough to attract moths) you question its link to figurativism and abstraction.

Sumptuous under heavy glaze, the beauty of the whole, reflected on the picture surface alongside your reflection, makes you everything, then nothing. Brewer refers to the mystery of her imagery - the unknown and the familiar - as being equally convincing results of "circular thought", incorporating theories on the mechanics of the brain, "loop holes in perception", which she has been working on for the last seven years.

Meticulously taken from life, nothing is arbitrary. Everything is thoroughly, carefully thought out in *Dead*

Dancing, the sentiment of a sinister encounter possible. Open to interpretation, the energy and tension emanating from the jewel-like colour combinations are characterised by brush strokes of rich hue shimmering against a velvety-black ground. Like sitting in the cinema, waiting for the story to unfold across the big screen, brightness surfacing from the darkness - the "multi-levelled theoretical and technical aspects of the process not understanding the force that drives them down their own certain path".

Colour-strewn scenes unsettle as they reassure, as in *The Start*, possibly of an athlete waiting for the start gun, making waiting part of Brewer's game. Having been painted very slowly, instinctively, Brewer has no real idea as to how her paintings came into being. All I know is, the longer I stared waiting for answers, the less I knew and the more affected I was becoming. Unfathomable, Kerry Brewer is as much altruist as artist. Painting and showing for over fifteen years in England and Paris, this, her third London solo, proves beauty is more than skin deep.

The exhibition, presented by Sam Fogg Ltd, runs 1 - 14 March at The Gallery in Cork Street, 28 Cork Street, London, W1S 3NG, Monday - Saturday, 10am - 5.30pm. A publication 'Where no bird can fly nor fish can swim: Stills from painting' is available ISBN: 978-0-9553393-2-5.

Visit www.kerrybrewer.net and for enquiries please contact Gemma Allen on +44 (0) 20 7534 2100 or gemma@samfogg.com

opposite left: Garret (detail)

opposite right: A God Awful Small Affair detail

below: The Start

