

Jocelyn Clarke

the structure, at least, holds together and the mind is reminded not to ask. Etching, engraving and academic drawing have the same result. The thin line brought across the surface till an apparently natural break means also a disjointed relationship to outline. Clarke delineates through the infinite build up of method, making the end of something abut with something else to play an equal game.

The faint colouring seems to come from the back, to just about hold and at certain points, at the edge, for instance, the drawing reaches a greater intensity. Look at 'La Toilette' 1862 by Manet in the Courtauld and the hatching of the ground illuminates the figure of the woman who projects, naturally as the subject, forward from the front. Other randomly chosen pieces from the Courtauld collection; 'Summer', 1570, an engraving by Pieter Van de Heyden, after Pieter Breugel the Elder, and William Hogarth's Etching 'The Bruiser', show how automatically and for how long, the eye has been trained to construct a picture, any picture, whether printed or first hand. To a very simple

extent pixilation, pointillism and cross-hatching also achieve the same result. It is hardly surprising that Jocelyn Clarke, a contemporary painter, uses, consciously and unconsciously, every method of two-dimensional reproduction to say what she has to say.

Sacha Craddock

Image overleaf shows a detail of 'Boundary', 2001, acrylic on canvas.

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Look hard at these paintings to almost hear sporadic patches of life, partial silence, then talking in the street as a couple walks by. But then the relationship between place, life and painting became somewhat over done and over stated years ago. Artists apparently stopped all that anecdotal stuff. It would anyway be an insulting cliché to suggest that a woman, especially a woman who works at home, is therefore dealing with the situation at home. These paintings are no illustration of life. But there is something fascinating, however, about the relation between work, place and subject. As a painter working now, Jocelyn Clarke is highly qualified to understand the powerlessness of any direct claim to subject. Her pursuit as an artist has anyway always been discrete.

'What is it of?' they ask. But it is not really of anything. Still life is the ultimate Modernist genre. There is no actual subject to still life unless of course you are the art historian seeking symbolism, the botanist mourning the passing of a species, or the chemist checking the

pigment. As well as the reaction to the grand subject, the cups, saucers, cloths and table corners of Cubist painting are about a formal investment in something to say. Morandi painted the same ledge, the same space outside, the same bottles inside, repeatedly. He wanted the paint itself to make life exist, to bring something separate to life. So his paintings may not have been strictly striving in terms of subject but they do carry the urgent compulsion to record in time and with time. A strange and separate process, a sort of mindful mindlessness about Morandi's repetitive compulsion produced work which is nonetheless a truly powerful vessel of atmosphere.

Everything in Clarke's paintings is covered or cloaked. The surface is extended and distended across the whole illusion till it seems the image is somehow submerged beneath the familiar covering of interior and exterior; a bed-cover, fall of snow, roller blind, or carpet. The paint itself covers the canvas, claiming territory but the point is further cloaked by a layer of muffled understanding. This whole

'Fold', 2002, acrylic on canvas



'Boundary', 2001, acrylic on canvas



'Yellow slip', 2002, acrylic on canvas



'Stair', 2003, acrylic on canvas



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relation between what is seen and what is there in that very corner, for instance, is caught perpetually for an extended second. 'Why is that there?' the artist asks, as if seeing it for the first time, as if within a normal continuous process of holding something still, Clarke is hoping for something to speak back. For a number of years she has extended this somewhat hands-off observational process by using a video camera. The stills of something so very familiar provide a sense of wonder at what is already there as well as an unwittingly vivid memory. The relationship between the covering and cloaking and the actuality of life is interesting. Not unlike brass or pavement rubbings they recall that exact moment when an artist discovers that beauty and possibility lie very close, just about everywhere in just about everything.

The painting process is intensive. Small strokes mesh together to weave a fabric of sight. The paint is moved across the surface by fine brush making fine lines and the effect for both artist

and viewer is a sort of halfway-house of before and after vision. The artist works from the ground of the canvas to build understanding. Everybody else stands on the other side and tries to make sense of imagery that looks restrained, and held back, and appears to have been there in the first place. The relationship to photography and film is strong.

At least two layers of language are being used; by drawing across the surface like this Clarke places the whole practice and pursuit outside any striving for expressive composition. It is impossible for Clarke to 'go back into a painting' in order to make it say more. The process is total, mapped out in its complexity. The first layer of structure, the build up of fine lines, make this almost an artisanial play which mimics the duty of domestic work in another era. Polishing the silver, cleaning the step, rubbing away until the metaphor comes amazingly close and full circle. The Edwardian sense of the interior is mirrored in Clarke's affinity with the tonally muted found footage of the early work of Douglas Gordon with its play on

an ambiguous relationship between art-work and documentation.

With almost parental care, Clarke pushes the work to be on its own and truly independent. She separates herself from the outcome. The paintings look as if they have either been found ready-made or at least charmed into existence by the artist through an intensive restorative process. Caught in a state, both intelligent and automatically unknowing, the artist here does not really want to express much at all. As a result the work looks as if it just had to be made and is not the result of an expressive need to shift direction and make sudden decisions. This has a lot to do with print and photography. The whole component of imagery carries the integral relation to photography that has been part of all painting since Daguerre. The warp and weft of manufactured image, the possibility of print, the look of the early photograph with muted colour tipped in, builds up a mass of detail making an all-over image. The all-over painting holds tension within a language that carries

also a sense of finding something that is already known. Sound and vivid memory are stored not so much in the selection and execution of the image itself but also in the atmosphere that surrounds its making.

The almost un-definable image of a snowy corner just there outside carries with it that ennui, the tired recognition of the familiar seen through the half-light at a particular time of day. Clarke is even interested in what she calls 'dreary' non-descript light. Much of Clarke's painting has light against dark, a kind of negative/positive play reminiscent of the photographic negative. Looking through the drawn transparent blind towards the light, the paintings look light-sensitive and remind also, at a really simple level, of wallpaper which seems faded in contrast to the darker patch left by a picture removed after a very long time. 'Swing' has the image sitting out there, cloaked. We are trying to understand it but at a certain point comprehension mixes so unconsciously with other forms of two-dimensional representation that

'Threshold', 2003, acrylic on canvas



'Five o'clock Sunday', 2000, acrylic on canvas



'Despite the snow', 2002, acrylic on canvas



'Swing', 1999, acrylic on canvas

