

'In the Eyes of Each'

Each of these people, if indeed they are people, turns slightly to the side as they appear to and for us. Shy and questioning, caught in transition from back of stage, they move forward to a different consciousness with an asexuality that is quite other. Moving from naivety through to knowingness, perhaps, from childhood to puberty, they lack any normal front. Bashful, looking to the side, still and bold in mission, 'on message' perhaps, they do, in their quiet composure, seem without challenge on their way to somewhere else. Some hands have a fluttering, reassuring way of touching finger to thumb, while others rest on shallow hips; with each head is on one particular state while the body is definitely in another.

Instead of the figure represented in the landscape in traditional painting, it now becomes the vehicle and context for content itself; landscape seems to imbue everyone. All manner of spirits and states wash and waft across skin and surface to wrap themselves around thin thighs, narrow wrists, with head to one side, and hair held still stiff is moulded up high. These youngsters are swathed in fine and delicate detail with a wisp here, a clunk of flowers planted into a Renaissance hairstyle there. Wearing either a mask over the eyes or even completely covering the face they remind of unconscious and conscious avenues, riffs and shifts of painterly and graphic association. With eyes sometimes also framed by detailed foliage, they look away and rarely hold on to us.

Structurally and formally alike, they do indicate a collective logic, yet each one is also so very separate. Each of the finely outlined figures fixed against a flat ground, appears as a recipient of a projected atmosphere. Each, an individual vehicle with shape shifting powers of personal persuasion, is also held back by formal expectation and mores. Not a portrait, each is a stylised container of perhaps conflicting force. Hidden in camouflage at one point and yet ready to celebrate Carnival in Venice, at another, they appear in the uniform of just about any era. There is no rhyme or reason why each will carry such an atmosphere about their person. Of course, there are the conscious and unconscious motives of cultural association, even appropriation, with flowers reminding of those in a painting by Chardin, perhaps, and foliage like a turn of the last century response to early Japanese print. A

graphic suit of filigree is also a covering of cultural reference that alludes to the veil, to banishment, and to the way that fashion is able to cloak individual direction as well as be its saviour.

They do not, however, appear to have arrived in a natural manner. The image works with so many layers of decorative and painterly afterglow. With the representation of a monochrome shroud of undergrowth, the pattern of growth, perhaps even the full spatial illusion of distance and sky changes into a simple pull between natural and unnatural that merges painting with drawing, and knowledge with risk. The action is, as said earlier, a matter of arriving at a place without necessarily knowing why anyone has been summoned and by whom, each figure ultimately serves as an icon, held still as the central subject within the painting.

Each black, white, girl or boy on their way to being an adult, is able to provide a front upon which we can always project. The reference is one of almost all historical painting, with detail, moments, sparking instant but mixed recall of a layered and sometimes hidden creative language. There is strength. The formal mid renaissance Portrait, for instance, carries structural expectation of station. Research merges with understanding, and expectation clashes with surprise, in a process that allows shifts of emphasis and empathy. It is clear that these transparent beings might eventually grow up, yet they are also spirits who carry nature on their side, on their skin, painted across the boughs of their body. Each figure caught in a transition between self-knowledge, understanding and innocence, is a time capsule, within which a range of psychological metaphor and plain Freudian reasoning can be planted, or buried.

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