

Selected Paintings

MW PROJECTS, LONDON, UK

The work in 'Selected Paintings' is all torso-sized (ranging from toddler to beefcake) and runs the gamut of genres, ideologies and execution. So, there should be at least one work here that would appeal to a prospective buyer and could hang unobtrusively within a domestic setting. The selection represents a Calvino-esque set of possibilities for arrangement - there are so many similarities and differences between the pieces that any permutation or arrangement would make some sort of sense.

What this selection reaffirms is that, after the vicissitudes of the figuration/abstraction tug-of-war, the distinction doesn't really exist any more - the two approaches segue smoothly into one another. Practically all the work here is figurative, yet much of it hovers on the threshold of abstraction. Merlin James' contribution is so ambiguous in scale that it is difficult to tell if the central, scrubbily painted structure is a pier or a window latch fixing. The micro-macro switch scotches mimetic precision. Varda Caivano's still life of a hanging basket takes a long time to present its realism. The brown, cursory drawing and cross-hatching are more an evocation of earthy essence than an outright depiction. It is only the anarchy of Herrero's pictorial fragments, his blobs of bright paint and sections of felt-tip outlines, that refuses to settle into definite figuration.

Jean-Frédéric Schnyder's Reynolds: The Praying Samuel (1999) is an obliterated copy of an Old Master; an accompanying piece is a brownish monochrome with inverted swastikas scored into the paint as a repeating pattern. It is difficult to tell if Schnyder completed the Reynolds copy and then painted it out, or if there is no infant Samuel kneeling at prayer beneath the red-brown blob that nearly fills the canvas. We glimpse only the corner of a turbulent sky and shafts of heavenly sunlight. Schnyder's reason for abutting an obliterated Judeo-Christian image next to the Hindu symbol of the circle of life is not clear, but perhaps it is sheer roguishness.

Lawrence Seward's Hawaiian Village Hotel (2002) is diametrically opposed to **Christian Ward's Waterfalls (2003)** and Uwe Henneken's *Breit aus dein Schlafgewand* (Spread out your Nightgown, 2003). Henneken's cliff top, framed by a swooping rainbow of dynamic



paint, and Ward's neon pools connected by foaming waterfalls, are both made with a palette that is bright and halcyon, while Seward's holiday resort scene is rendered in the most drab greys. Like fairgrounds in winter, this drab depiction of a scene that is usually represented in achingly high-key colour has a poetic melancholy.

Anna Bjerger's *Surfer* (2003) revels in pictorial cliché to create a beach atmosphere that is more reassuringly recognizable. Her surfer is silhouetted against a white setting sun that radiates oranges in a graphic rather than naturalistic style. In sumptuous imagery such

as this it is good to see an unbridled self-indulgence in paint. Yet there is little here, besides Richard Wathen's *Grace* (2003), that is about control of the medium. And Wathen's portrait of a sinister-looking young girl holding a lop-eared rabbit is actually more about deadening feeling than control. The fuzzy, just-out-of-reach focus places the subject in the realm of dreams and apparitions, and the intentionally badly executed right eye compounds the discomfort.

Bernhard Martin's *Unterholz* (Undergrowth, 2003) is a peculiar orchestration of elements in which paint is at times allowed to behave like itself and at others harnessed into a graphic medium. A house in the wilderness sits oblivious to the cloud of painterly mayhem hovering over its roof and the dervish of swoops and spatters beyond some neatly delineated bulrushes. Martin's narrative is fragmentary: the moment before the real event, perhaps. The atmosphere that surrounds the sweetly rendered figures snaking in mirrored formation through Xiomara de Oliver's green diptych is also pending. One of the paintings is inscribed with the words 'fuzzy wool blankets', a tantalizing clue to an errant meaning.

Every piece here is doing its own thing; there is no curatorial over-reaching, no ground-breaking moments of radicalism - the paintings are lined up like sweets in an aisle. But perhaps it is time we stopped being embarrassed by the consumable nature of art. In 'Selected Paintings' there is no pretence about high-blown intentions: the work is desirable, which is, quite simply, why it was chosen.

Sally O'Reilly