

Some notes on:

Andrew Browne 'Down by the river'

Tolarno Galleries 18 August - 15 September 2012

This particular group of paintings (as well as the recent photographic series 'Sixteen Figments' 2012) continue a focus on inner-city waterways, marginal spaces and the peripheral. Whereas typical scenes of riverbanks and suburban waterways are often presented as pleasant idylls and places of quiet reverie, the images here instead suggest a sense of anxiety, displacement and blurring of forms, of tranquil environs transformed by troubled and contingent relationships.

The title 'Down by the river' is both descriptive of the source material for these paintings, but also a reference to the early Neil Young/Crazy Horse epic of the same title, an evocative song of longing and tragedy - part great tune, part murder ballad and part meandering free-form rock-out...the Springsteen song 'The River' also thematically covers similar territory, mired in longing and sentiment: evidence of how particular places can draw out a myriad of emotions...and 'Rivers Edge' a 1986 film starring Crispin Glover and Dennis Hopper among others also dealt with the creepy and largely overlooked environs of a local watercourse, a place of nefarious and hidden actions - curious how digging into this subject in these paintings recalls such specific and personally evocative cultural references, along with of course acknowledging and internalising an entire history of visual artists attempts at broadly similar subjects...

The source material for these works (via photography generally but then manipulated and collaged through many generations of edited images into paintings) was gathered over a number of years, across many sites and generally the result of happenstance rather than design...while I constantly photograph specific places, I usually bide my time with this surfeit of images, waiting for their individual 'usefulness' to intuitively present itself - often, a single image will kick-start a whole new direction of focus...

In this case, it seems in the last year or two that a viable and gripping visual logic has emerged - relationships between the marginal and peripheral spaces of local creeks and far-flung rivers, remnants of exotic and displaced vegetation, weird anthropomorphic resonances of form and an emergent faciality, and the clear evidence of flood have all added to a very particular mood - suggestive of a raft of interpretations and possible narratives.

So...maybe these paintings are partly an ode to the troubled environment, partly a formal investigation of the banal and abject, partly an evocation of the 'flood' with all its rich historical, contemporary and metaphoric possibilities and partly

an (albeit modest) extension of the 'noble' history of landscape painting. Whatever they are, they remain as evidence of action within and reaction to a wider world, and my attempt at figuring it.

Some of the images are peculiarly evocative for me - in particular a balloon snagged in an eddy of floating detritus strikes me as full of pathos, that usually celebratory (or at least sentimental) object fated to drift, wrenched from its usual 'happy' context - a banal form memorialised in it's damp fate!

The painting 'A Riverbank...' edits a number of disparate images together, to create a transitional immersive space, the horizontal flow echoing that of the river, ending with a logjam of accumulated material (perhaps a fitting metaphor for the artists studio/brain and its ongoing accumulations!) Another (like the balloon image) presents something (a kite or leisurewear perhaps) snagged, the slightly odd and out of place hoarding and branches indifferent, like nature, to its fate.

'Lair' is curious image - a hoarding kicked through to expose an 'evil smiley face' - detritus, moss and a general dampness at its base - perhaps a canal edge with access to a verdant landscape beyond. Wrestling with the 'reality' - ie: the trompe l'oeil effects in this painting for several days, the flat plywood hoarding has assumed the role of a metaphoric reference to the barrier of the picture plane and the 'flatness' of modernism, whilst the facial image and the 'landscape' elements ground the image in a contemporary 'now' - Jasper Johns, Robert Rauschenberg and Robert Ryman (exemplary American modernists and boyhood heroes) all came to mind during this process ... (it's the wild-card in this group, though I had thought the balloon painting filled that role!)...

And a whole history of 'Romantic' painting is inevitably evoked by the various rather melancholic trees depicted - but my interest here are in those qualities that evoke a surreal (think: symbolism - Redon) and anthropomorphic dimension - I want each image to infer a real and individual 'character' - one that nevertheless remains mute and possibly unknowable.

The river of my 'Down by the river' isn't a specific place, but a distillation of a number of places, real, imagined and contrived. In some paintings the river is only hinted at, as if the viewer has turned his back on it to get a closer view of some detail - those accumulations of various matter that has found at least a temporary resting place or foothold.