

Notes: 5



Notes: 5 / Paul Glennon

Saatchi Gallery / London / Tuesday 1st March 2005

The Triumph of Painting (visit with HND Graphic Design Students)

M Kippenberger, P Doig, M Dumas, L Tuymans, J Immendorff & H Nitsch

The HND Graphic Design first year students have a project called 'Develop a Personal Style'. The success of the project lies in the students' ability to understand the personal style of other designers and artists – so we took them to the Saatchi Gallery to see some paintings and play detective.

Last year there were many articles and commentaries criticising the absence of painting in contemporary art. Saatchi's Triumph of Painting exhibition could be a reaction to such comments. Certainly the work challenges the perception.

The students seemed taken by the photo/film style of Peter Doig's work. 'Canoe-Lake, 1997-98' & 'White Creep 1995-96' were good examples. The former work had undertones of Friday the 13th (the painters in this exhibition seemed to be selected for their interest in film media). Prior to entering the exhibitions students were told nothing of the works and had to interpret the meanings and inspirations of the works.

Martin Kippenberger's work caught my attention for the multifaceted styles of painting. 'Paris Bar, Berlin, 1993', had a Hopperesque feel (a café scene with a range of modern paintings on the wall and a Vermeer floor), but in stark contrast, 'Portrait of Paul Schreiber, 1994', was an abstract style dissected brain of the aforementioned senior judge, whose mental breakdown in the late 1870s was autobiographically recorded. Kippenberger's ability to jump styles for his subject matter was very impressive.

Jörg Immendorff caught the attention of the students with his abstract theatre sets of moments in German history. Hermann Nitsch had a similar effect on the students but perhaps for more shocking reasons. His violent splatter style paintings were accompanied in the corridors by books about the artist that showed how the work was created. Mock crucifixions (with the use of humans but with calf carcass and blood), were used to splatter, walk and blotch the blood onto the canvas. 'Golden Love, 1974', showed Immendorff's ability to collage and the 'Last Supper, 1976-79', was a line drawing of anatomical bodies, which reminded me of the work of Giger.

I tended to avoid the work of Marlene Dumas as the subject matter seemed to confront, head on, issues of how children can be seen in art. My decision to avoid the work makes her style and subject all the more memorable. Luc Tuymans had a similar effect but for a different reason. The enlarged area of a birdcage in 'Within, 2001', gives the eerie feeling of entrapment and isolation.

Some permanent exhibits were still in place during the Triumph of Painting. Richard Wilson's '20:50, 1988-89', was in stark contrast to the paintings. The installation of a tightly fitted oil tank presented a different form of contemporary art.

At the end of the day we took the students to the stairway of the Saatchi Gallery and discussed the work. One interesting point raised was the 'rough quality' of some of the paintings. This surprised some of the students who were obviously used to glossy and fine tuned works of design and art. Students also pointed out the range of inspiration points for the artists.

The Saatchi Gallery is based on the South Bank in the old County Hall.