



THE COMFORT OF GRAVITY

New paintings by Ebony Truscott

Ebony Truscott's Paintings

There's an old story about Stéphane Mallarmé and Edgar Degas. The pair are strolling along a boulevard in Paris. Mallarmé tells Degas that writing is a struggle and that his work has stalled. "I have no ideas" he sighs. Degas, recognising the symptoms of a common problem for many artists, himself included, is silent for a moment. But because just at that point he doesn't find himself struggling with the progress of his painting Degas is slightly peeved by his friend's complaint. "You don't make poems with ideas", he scolds the downcast poet, "you make them with words!"

For us, an artwork is something made by someone. Aesthetic experience requires the embodiment of worldly materials for its transmission and to preserve its availability. Artworks are made well or badly from things and because they are things themselves they are used for many purposes other than aesthetic experience some good, some not so. When we judge an artwork we are making an assessment of how well it is made and the good of the use it is put to. An idea, on the other hand, is not a thing, it is not made and it can't be used. Like artworks ideas can be good and bad but who has ever made an artwork from an idea?

Yet things - such as words - without ideas are meaningless. Even strings of letters that are not words can have meaning: password gibberish that unlocks our files, grants access to our digital worlds, has significant meaning. Meaning is alloyed in objects of utility as much as any sacred artefact. For the most part our tendency to ascribe meaning is something we habitually take for granted. Iris Murdoch has used the term 'metaphor' to describe this fundamental form of the 'awareness of our condition: metaphors of space, metaphors of movement, metaphors of vision'. Not 'merely peripheral decorations or even useful models', metaphors, she says, are inseparably connected with the development of consciousness in human beings.*

Ebony Truscott's paintings draw attention to the deep investment of meaning we make in the things surrounding us. She does this by making them objects for contemplation. First for herself when she's making the paintings, then for us when we look at the pictures she has made. In the arrangements that she orchestrates familiar meanings are substituted for ones that arise through partnerships with other objects knowing that our analogue minds narrate pattern and connection in order to discover - or impose - sense. She seems to be seriously enjoying herself and her technique is masterful. In *Ball and earplugs on mirror with glass* (2015) two yellow earplugs and a tennis ball are reflected in the mirror they rest on. The flat base of the upturned earplug echoes the larger shape of the tennis ball, which although painted to represent a sphere we know must also be flat in the 'real world'. The reflection of the other earplug, upright, cropped by the mirror's frame, we imagine forming an illusory oval like the shape of the circular mirror, foreshortened to an oval by the painting's particular point of view. Then all of a sudden the yellow earplugs dematerialise as they are transformed into highlight reflections on the glass jar. Everything inside and out of the picture can become something else or is already in the process of doing so. The painting is a world metaphor not because it stands aside from the world but because it informs it.

Another painting featuring a glass jar - my favourite - is *Grow your own crystal with glass and brick* (2014). It reminds me of John Millais' portrait of John Ruskin (1854) which is really a representation of different orders of time: geological, terrestrial, human. In *Grow your own crystal* different states of minerals, crude and refined, are grouped. If we consider the mineral pigment suspended in the oil medium of the paint the picture is made of we have yet another mineral form hidden in plain view. All, however, is returning to an amorphous fluid state, like paint, in the glass jar's reflections. This painting, like the others in this exhibition gives us the chance to think about the relation of objects and images in the world. The cool, airless space concentrates my attention and once I get past the analysis and thinking I come to something else that I can just about hear: the sound of the thought itself.

Andrew Seward

* Murdoch, Iris (1970) *The Sovereignty of Good Over Other Concepts*, Routledge & Kegan Paul

Front image details:
Ball and earplugs on mirror with glass (detail)
2015
oil on canvas
77 x 62 cm

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