

Jennings Kerr

Catrin Llwyd
Into The Forest

There is a freshness in the air and clarity in the morning light as Llwyd sets off for a walk. Flowers springing into bloom and butterflies circling about as the dew wet grass flicks the legs. There is a jasmine perfuming the scene as little pockets of nature start to stand out and take focus as the sun beams cut through the trees. The idyllic, the timeless, or perhaps more simple times and scenes reflected in these works are both expressions of the surrounding world but I think also gateways to a childhood spent in a rural and more remote setting. Perhaps a longing for the less built up, a walk into the woods with the odd cabin and nature at full extent of vision. Imagination running wild in the woods, this was a time to escape and drift, perhaps Llwyd's walks still take her back to this time. This show feels like a theatrical backdrop, the visual language of many fairy tales presented to us with the plot occurring just out of frame. The flowers burst out to the edges, a rainbow of colours contrasting with their green grounds. The huts and houses observed from a distance, windows obscured, no smoke from the chimneys. The calm shelters hinting that perhaps the life and activity is out playing in the woods, chopping the lumber for fires and tying daisy chains. My mind jumps to the language used to describe Marc Jacobs line of fragrance 'daisy' but also the tulips of Jeff Koons, the erotic stems captured by Robert Mapplethorpe and the graphic floral screened works of Andy Warhol. I guess it's the symbolism we assign to flowers, the energy and life translated through blooms. It is a constant source of inspiration for many artist and painter. The forest expresses an interconnectedness, a harmony of elements of the landscape in communication, a natural internet of life. I have only met Catrin Llwyd through the other web, through screens and the digital landscape. It is here I have been made aware of her connection to the wild. It is here we discussed the paintings and studio, where we built the relationship and planned the show. It is in this realm that we set the works on their path from Wales to Robertson.

When you type 'What does Daisy by Marc Jacobs smell like?' into Google it comes up with; "It opens with sparkling, crisp grapefruit, and kind-of-synthetic but soft (and not too sweet) strawberry. That soon leads to a vague, light floral heart, with a grassy touch of violet leaf. The base and drydown add to the mix a gently powdery, transparent musky-woody finish." I guess all this romancing of the flower, synthesised floral notes floating around in the air drawing people together by scent and separating them from their cents is a little orchestrated. There is the industry around all these stories, fairytales and the capitalised forest, flowers and patterns in the wild. I think of seasonal shifts in the fashion industry and how the great houses tease out these fascinations and fetishes in our psyche. Catrin Llwyd is able to tell her own tales, to tease out her own fixations in such a sensitive and soft hand with surfaces beaming the light back out. There is a Japanese term 'Komorebi' which has no simple translation in the English language and refers to the affect of sun light being scattered through trees. It is often observed when walking through wooded areas and as it specifically refers to nature and trees in its three part make up of Kanji characters. It is a magical experience, moments of splendour that take you somewhere else and transform the scene into something new. I also think about the personal joy gained in listening to Icelandic band Sigur Rós, a sort of beauty in not understanding the lyrics, listening to another language and appreciating its sounds. There is room for the fantastical and magical in the world just like in our fairy tales. Sometimes not knowing, not fully understanding is where the magic comes in.

The mark making in this show glides with efficiency and renders petals, fields and the forest in a somewhat simple but affective way. The surfaces are light on and this translates from the watercolour and gouache on paper to the oil on board. We see this very clearly in the work 'The End of The Road, 2022', where the facade of the building seems to be composed of a single stroke with a slight shift in the brush, the windows again elegant in their dabbed gestures. This stripped back and minimal approach to representing the forms and landscape can be seen across the entire show. In many ways it presents the scenes in a fresh and light way, many of the works removing formalities of depth and perspective in great detail. The pieces are table top scale, the folk tradition of small sized pieces seems to not hold these back in terms of impact and commanding the wall. Many of the compositions push out to the edges, in repeat pattern in the case of the flowers. The landscapes and houses fill the frame with great expanse but such a handling that the scale does not depreciate the awesome wonder of their horizons.

I know from my conversations with Llwyd that in many works there is room for her imagination to spread across the board or paper, the world translated with creative agency through drawing on memory. Perhaps the balance of real and imagined is how the scene is set, how the tone and sensibility of the show resolved. It doesn't seem the 'when' and 'where' are of importance, it seems to be more a set of values or ideals. It could be a way of moving through the world, not too quickly and with the time to appreciate the seasonal shifts. Perhaps it doesn't need to be a culling of the internet connection and going off grid, tiny house and nature warrior. It might just be spending some time between trees, smelling the real and not the synthesised floral notes on the air. It is a show that makes you want to lace up the walking boots and get out into the forest, to create some tales of your own and to soak up the magic and wonder between and in the trees.

James Kerr, 2023