

Jennings Kerr

David Hamilton

A Momentary Equilibrium

These small paintings hold our gaze. They are powerful despite their scale and they continue to command through their reduction. They express a constant and remind us of comforts in simple things. I notice the clarity of a sunny morning, with sun piercing through and around objects or shimmering across the damp grass and it brings me back to the same moments as a child desperate to get out and play. The last series of work 'By Distance Simplified' stripped out place and time markers while drawing on a broad field of inspiration. I wrote about it in relation to the Vervoordt show at Palazzo Fortuny and how Hamilton is able to bring these disparate scenes, location and moments together with a touch that is both formally resolved but with a stripping away of the superfluous. The image once again seems to be classic, a timeless quality, moments we have all seen throughout our lives that touch us and stay with us due to their simplicity and constant quality. The show shifts between genre, sliding from endless expanse to the intimate and personal and this seems effortless in stitching these quiet and calm moments together.

The surfaces are built up, wiped off, scratched back, reworked, image slips in and out of focus as the material is pronounced. The linen weave and timber board once again holding up their part in the resolution of the scenes depicted. The material converses with the image but it also is part in the image making. We see this most clearly in the rendering of disturbance in water. Sometimes scraped back to linen or board in sharp highlights or rubbed into in softer gestures with similar result. The more you look at the make up of image, the structure of the resolution reveals that the erasure is critical but resolved in elegance. It is not pronounced through large passages left bare or unpainted but it softly pronounces depth or highlight. The paintings continue to side step a preoccupation with depth and perspective and once again reduce the image to its core components. I wrote about a previous seascape and staring out to horizons, how experiences like this seem to be about feeling with your eyes, how the viewing could be meditative and I find this to be once again relevant in this show.

Hamilton speaks about the arrangement of shape and form in the rectangle, a sort of simplified description for some of the formality and process. But this is also a great place to start in terms of his way of depicting scenes in very measured and simple gesture. The marks are incredibly hard working but seem to be laid down with ease. I don't feel it as something that has changed the painting in this show but perhaps an important consideration is a shift in the way Hamilton has made this series from the last. In many cases the previous show came together over a long stretch of time, linen and board worked meticulously while on duty then signalled at ease in the plan draw or turned around and then returned to later. Things needed to hold Hamilton for longer to make it, to keep his attention. I think this selective or critical approach is ingrained in all that comes from the studio. It is what leads to so many images to be wiped away and reset. There are many paintings that don't make it. I have been fortunate to see the show evolve, scenes shift and change on the surface and in many circumstances it is very simple gestures, a stroke to add a body of water or further articulate a branch or stem. Sometimes it might be softening, blending it on the board and reminding of the root of tonal drawing we found in the previous show.

If we turn our attention to the title of the show I think balance and harmony are evident within the works as well as across the show. 'A Momentary Equilibrium' perhaps not in the sense of a market or economy but the tone of the show, the weighting of elements in composition, the light in scenes, the times of day across the show. I have mentioned a variance between this show and the previous but I feel another constant or similarity would be the serene and harmony that Hamilton is able to achieve in his paintings. The way he is able to counterweight genre through the use of stand in form for figures is an example of this. The work 'Pyalong', 2023 depicts a scene of the landscape in central Victoria with its commanding boulders. These strong forms are intentional stand-ins for figure in landscape. They are in thoughtful conversation with the painting 'Statuette', 2023. Here the piece depicts a 'Kore' sculptural form, the free standing archaic greek sculpture is rendered hazy, ghosting but still once again a pendulum swing between genre while also giving a taste of personal interest. The boulders also speak to the reduction in form seen in Egyptian and Greek sculpture. In discussing this with David he brought this up in relation to the the use of volume and form in the work of Antony Gormley. We also discuss the early works of French painter Odilon Redon and the paired back naturalistic scenes.

'A Momentary Equilibrium' hints at activity, signing movement through a winding path, a worn track across a lawn, or a crashing wave. Theatricality and stages, backdrops as shape in the rectangle for a narrative outside of it. I feel weather as a device in the wind swept trees of 'The Shortcut', 2023 and city glow giving us backlit trees in 'Less Known than Not', 2023. The subtle suggestion of activity and narrative is what pulls you into the scenes, it is what holds you with them and how they are able to sit together in such harmony. They allow room for the viewer to fill the activity in, to place some of their own lives into the scene, or for the painting to take them on a journey.