

Jennings Kerr

David Hamilton
By Distance Simplified

With Time

In 2007, the exhibition *Artempo: Where Time Becomes Art* brought together the work of over seventy artists alongside objects and artefacts in a diverse conversation of time and its significance in art as well as its ability to create art. This eclectic show was curated by Mattijs Visser, Axel Vervoordt, and Jean-Hubert Martin and took over the Palazzo Fortuny, Venice. The objects and artefacts ranged in period and provenance and told a story of the patina of time. This attention given to material and surface as opposed to period and style was such a special way to strip these works back to the elemental. This show came to mind immediately when discussing the broad range of periods and styles that inform and influence the paintings of David Hamilton. It might be an Indian miniature or an Egyptian effigy that speaks to Hamilton and in one work he has allowed archaic roman busts to guide portraiture. The surfaces of Hamilton's paintings are also intricately handled and the images seem to sit into the materials with a light and refreshing reduction. Some of the works at first glance feel bleached by the sun, like a faded black and white photograph picked up at a country town fair. The paintings are wiped and scraped back to the bare essential. They are not caught up in rendering formality, depth and perspective but preoccupied with the arrangement of shapes in the rectangle. I see a nostalgia in some of the work but I also feel there is a chasing of the sublime, and perhaps a catharsis in the light and airy scenes that Hamilton chooses to depict. The show feels iconic and in many ways timeless or at least suggesting a continuum. I sense adventure and play, activities occurring outside of the rectangle. People are stood in for by clothing hung out on the line or a cricket pitch after stumps. This narrative suggestion functions in a similar way to the bold and graphic work of Alex Katz but with the light touch of Lois Dodd.

Many of the paintings that David Hamilton allows out into the world follow on from many more that are scraped back, wiped off and discarded. There is a journey to find balance in the image, to see it for what it needs to be. The painting 'Nathalia, 2021' depicts the regional Victorian country town and has been worked back into for years. I think this is important in a mark making sense but also perhaps a means of understanding a past and an upbringing spent on sheep and cattle stations. I think of some of these paintings as letters to a bygone era, a nod to the pastoral industry who his father was a part of but most importantly a consideration of simpler times. I think the show is very much contemporary but I also cant help but think of coming into a small country town and seeing the population sign, or catch phrase associated with the area. The sense of expanse in the coastal scene of 'Tide, 2021' reminds me of sitting back after a holiday swim and squinting into the sun with the steady rhythm of the shore setting the pace for the afternoon. There is meditation, a sense of calm and a refreshing understanding of beauty here. This work like most of the show deals with tone and palette so efficiently and its distanced view helps simplify the work in a literal sense towards abstraction. 'Nocturne, 2021' is another work that signs the rhythm of nature in the colour of the moon at dusk. These patterns and moments are magical and perhaps not implied but we are so often swayed by these natural markers of time.

The paintings in the show are small scale in the tradition of folk and outsider art. There is a suggestion of domesticity and craft in the painting of a paper flower. Perhaps avoiding the more grand approach to cut stem still life. The painting 'Figure Reflected, 2021' was painted from a reflection cast in a highly polished tea pot and brings a ghostly figure into frame. Here it is more about the object and form than the personality and repeats the choice of figures being rendered without recognisable facial features. It is a study of shape and object in the rectangle, and in some cases other elements used to stand in for figures. The drawings in the show also offer up the same reduced softness of the paintings. In 'Fitzroy, 2021' we also see a theatricality in the lighting of the scene. There is a high contrast and harsh sunlight spilling into the lane from around the corner. These drawings have the feel of an antique patina and for me speak to the cookie tin of old family photos, to the familiarity of found archives. The sense of artefact feeds into the notion of time in this show and to how we cling to the comfort of nostalgia.

This show has a lovely weathered feel, a kind of implied 'Artempo', the illusion of distressed fading that is achieved through control and economic mark making. The images appear to have seeped into the woven fibre. The surfaces tempt our touch and the hand-held scale adds to the intimacy. The paintings stand alone and do not require a narrative reading however I can't help but feel some nostalgia, simple times and places that have made a mark on Hamilton. I look at these paintings and they take me on a journey. The images connect with moments from my past. I think this is a beautiful ability in this work. The scenes are iconic but Hamilton is able to strip away the superfluous and deliver serene and calming images. I feel a cool afternoon breeze sweep in to relieve the sun beaten earth and the stiff laundry is blowing in the wind under the night sky. It is waiting to be softened by body heat the following day.

James Kerr, 2021