

Through the Mind's Eye

A global pandemic such as Corona virus, that can bring the entire world to a standstill, might occur once in every hundred years. When it strikes, artists and writers are perhaps better prepared than most for dealing with the imposition of isolation - for they are, of course, confronted with their own thoughts and ideas in solitary confinement for hours on end, just by the very nature of what they do.

It is interesting then to consider how artists use their imaginations to not only find new worlds to create and escape into, but to fuse personal memories with images drawn from existing sources - paintings from art history or photographs. These resulting scenes - either entirely imagined or reconfigured - bring another dimension and depth to the works they make that can be felt as well as seen.

The painters Michael Kunze and Santiago Giralda use their mind's eyes to conjure up new worlds for their viewers. Kunze's painterly roots draw from German romanticism and what he describes as the 'shadow line of modernism' which took early European modernism as its genesis and imagines an alternative to the narrative hijacked by America and presented as the continuation of art's genealogy during the Cold War.

Kunze's new body of work sees him returning to one of his heroes for inspiration - Giorgio de Chirico. The Italian artist often created paintings centred around the motif of a wall in sunshine. Beyond this wall, the viewer could find a trace of something intriguing or mysterious - from a puff of steam from a faraway train to the tip of a sailing boat as it slips across a glassy sea.

Kunze not only depicts a wall in sunshine as a consistent theme in this new body of paintings, he also focuses on a corner of a courtyard - perhaps a schoolyard - where we find a strong use of chiaroscuro to evoke the extreme contrasts of light and shadow present in the early mornings or late afternoons. There is little that changes compositionally between these works, and yet paradoxically everything changes, albeit subtly, in terms of the arrangement of the depicted objects. Balls are thrown and items are re-arranged as if by imaginary hands. Kunze himself describes the series as 'Synchronia'. Everything is linked and appears rooted in a certain time frame and yet the artful changes between the works unnerve us. There is a sense that nothing is actually as it appears to be, and this engenders an uncanny reading of the paintings: could it be that we are seeing traces of actions from other times - from the past or even from the future? Either nothing is synchronised as it should be, or everything is synchronised, in which case perhaps we are the ghosts, looking in on a reality which we can observe but no longer inhabit.

Like Kunze, Giralda's paintings draw from art history and notably landscape painting, while also incorporating new technologies and viewpoints derived from our increasingly digitalised world. The artist begins his working process by photographing different places in cities in order to observe how the urban context has transformed and adapted the natural landscape. He composes images on the computer and then edits these by interspersing them with additional material he finds online, thus melding the seen, personal memory with those drawn from outside sources. The result plays with the collective unconscious - the notion that we have a collective memory bank populated by instincts as well as universal symbols - archetypal images such as the shadow, the tower, water and the tree of life. According to Jung, the collective unconscious has a profound affect on our lives, we live out its symbols and clothe them in meaning through our experiences and add

to them from the likes of popular films, memorable news footage, remarkable global events and such like.

The idea of the persistent image as a source of power that affects our relationships to certain contexts or our reaction to objects is interesting to consider in relation to Giralda's work. His paintings throw into question the place that nature occupies today in the sprawling urban jungle. Through the act of painting, Giralda opens up a space to ponder the different ways we relate to our environment. The image, taken from the media and made-up from coded programs, is translated onto the canvas. The resulting work plays with the romantic idea of contemplating a pacific landscape, but from the perspective of the hurly burly of contemporary life.

We are not permitted to see the totality of the landscape of Giralda's works and we will never know the true size of the vistas that he finds, though we sense they are vast and indiscernible. Instead he offers us a window, the proverbial 'selective view' on the world which he casts open for us, leading us into a space that is both new and unknown and yet strangely familiar. We accept his invitation to immerse ourselves in this invented space, just as we sink unquestioningly into plush seats before a cinematic panorama, knowing that the process of painting is a construction that is always in flux: fluid and elastic but also enveloping.

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