



Looking-Glass Land...

Anthony Francis/Solo Show/ Haptic space 22.10- 29. 11. 2010

The lines and crescents that weave themselves across an old gentleman's face resonate; a relief map of the variable wealth and poverty of a single life. The perfect spheres of teardrops hang, from grief or fatigue, in the veined corner of his eye with such gravity that one has no option but to empathetically consume them. He sits opposite me on the train back from Anthony's London studio and shifts awkwardly, as do I, as he realises I am staring at him. I turn my gaze out of the trembling carriage and see the lattice of overhead wires that make incisions in the sky yet that entangle estranged locations, allow separated space to commune.

It is with this meditative journey that the undulating lines of paint that likewise weave themselves across the amorphous, even ephemeral space of Francis' canvases burst to my mind. Bringing through their abundance of form, an abundance of life, energy and emotion, the fluctuations in Francis' painterly rhythm give a sense of the vast, incommensurable universe, a universe of spider webs and gasping breaths which extend and are exhaled in a perpetuity that exudes a profound sensitivity of being, and to our lustful hunt for information and experience.

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An abundance of knowledge pervades Francis' canvases; the painterly threads of oil paint are almost a biopsy or cartography of communication and information systems; forms entangled on forms, spiralling, cascading, dripping, and then, stopping... Suddenly, a caesura in the otherwise indefatigable speed, a breath, akin to Manzoni's *fiati d'artista* that holds my heart in suspension as my eye explodes with the cacophony of visual delight in a fractured visual plane, upon which, countless signs, pictorial traditions, cultures and counter-cultures, make war and make love.

We shift from the almost sculptural *Staying Up* to the flat visual planes of *Between Wonder and Doubt* but are still always held in the gravity of plasticity. This plasticity, this tactility, which Francis brings to his work, is evident in one's immediate response, being an incontestable physical attraction. We are drawn in by either webs of oil paint that hang as fragile cadences above the misleading solidity of the canvas; or the weight of the spherical, eclipse, crescent, forms that hang within the space of his canvas, bodies of inference dismembered from their original semantic source yet bursting with feeling. Every brush-stroke Francis makes seems to not only draw attention to our visual over-stimulation and confusion but also gives retinal impressions a tactile value. In so doing, Francis draws conscious attention to the construction of the third dimension, to actual reality as it is; as Rothko reminds us "The child is still dimly aware of the intimate connection between touch and the third dimension. He cannot persuade himself of the unreality of *Looking-Glass Land* until he has touched the back of the mirror." (Rothko, *The Artist's Reality Philosophies of Art*)

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All the painterly techniques that Francis executes so skilfully seem imbued with such love, an all-consuming passion, but it is a passion that can never be quite fulfilled, a fetishism that constantly delays climax and drags him first to obsessive repetition and then to disillusionment and a new tagli, a new cut, that must only conclude with oblivion (being the void which we finally uncover after fighting through Francis' forest of brushstrokes). His is a visceral beauty that is a fresh gulp of air, an almost Dadaistic offering of a universe sensuously experienced, feverish, scrawling, sprawling, splendid, strange, monstrous, naïve, an unashamedly wondrously whorish approach to the revered canvas. Francis shows us what Tzara long ago told us, 'people can perform contrary actions together while taking one fresh gulp of air.' (Dada Manifesto, 1918)



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