

Henry Hudson 'Sun City Tanning'

Carl Kostyál 23rd February - 26th March 2017

By Niru Ratnam

Henry Hudson's new body of work 'Sun City Tanning' is set in what looks initially like a tropical paradise featuring plants of vivid colours overlaying each other. On closer inspection however, these are landscapes of almost suffocating density. They are scenes of over-abundance, where the hallucinogenic qualities of many of plants depicted seem to have been already imbibed by the viewer. Paradise, it seems, is not quite all that it might appear at first sight.

The heaviness of the imagery is underscored by a different, physical heaviness. Hudson has become known for his use of the children's play material, plasticine, melting layers and placing them on top of each other to create works. In this series he builds the layers of plasticine up to the point that the wall-based works hover somewhere paintings and sculpture. These are works that insist on their object hood. They have a distinct aroma that signals that they are clearly not paintings in a conventional sense. Yet equally as with Hudson's previous 'paintings' the layers of plasticine are constructed in a way to give the convincing appearance of the heavy impasto of expressionist painting. There is a tension here that relates to the founding myth of expressionism – that with free strokes of a brush, the artist could convey inner-truths. Hudson's works gesture to that idealised freedom whilst being painstakingly constructed.

This tension is one of many playful references to the history of modernist painting that underpins this series. There are clear references to the phenomenon of primitivism that underpinned the development of modernism at the turn of the twentieth century. There is also wry acknowledgement that the primitive ideal imagined by modernist artists such as Picasso, Matisse and the Fauves was largely the work of the imagination. Hudson did not actually visit the tropics in order to make these works set in dense jungle foliage. Instead, he produced the works from visits to Kew Gardens and from source material culled in his studio in East London. And it is worth noting that Hudson's method of making the works differs from what is stated on his own Wikipedia page. There is more than a nod here to the self-fashioned mythologies of artists such as Joseph Beuys.

It is arguable that Hudson's work is not a rejection or an undermining of the imaginative leaps and idealisations that modernist artists made in order to move art forward. There is a positive, almost cheery engagement with the history of modern art that suggests that Hudson wants to productively deal with the mis-recognitions and self-fashioning that underpin that history but in a way that accepts assumptions and little deceptions. Hudson's work demonstrates that in the end, the legacy of modernism will take the most unexpected and unusual forms.

Henry Hudson (b.1982, UK) lives and works in London. He has had solo exhibitions at galleries that include Sothebys S2 Gallery (New York), Sothebys S2 Gallery (London), Sir John Soane's Museum (London), Carl Kostyal Gallery (London), 20 Hoxton Square Projects (London). His work has been written about in publications that include The New York Times, The Telegraphy Magazine and The Wall Street Journal.