

Phillip Allen

“A painting by Phillip Allen presents the viewer with a self-contained drama of seemingly irreconcilable opposites. Each individual work stages a confrontation between matter and metamorphosis, between paint as base materiality and painting as imaginative transformation. Confronted with one of his pictures we may find our gaze shifting back and forth between a place where nothing can move and a space in which anything can happen, between heavily impastoed passages of oil paint squeezed straight from the tube, which push out into the viewer’s visual and physical ambit, and a flatter field of thinly applied paint that pulls our eye into a space of considerable illusionistic depth. Clotted swirls, thick cords or congealed smears of raw paint form horizontal bands along the top and bottom of each painting, all of which are painted on solid board rather than stretched canvas...Suspended between the dark and dense materiality of these upper and lower bands is a more expansive, luminous field, often irradiated by shafts of painted light emanating from a distant vanishing point or points. This is an arena within with a kaleidoscopic array of brightly coloured geometric, biomorphic, architectonic or numeric motifs are free to play ...”

“The preponderance of earthen tones in the lower borders in particular, as well as a general preference for horizontal over vertical formats, encourage a reading of these enigmatic pictures as hallucinatory landscapes or virtual skiescapes ...” On a purely visual basis, they evoke “the virtual universe of computer games, the scenography of science fiction, the fantasy architecture of the fairground, the microscopic world of atoms and molecules, the refracted optical displays of rainbows and sunbursts, and the richly decorative patterning of Islamic art and architecture ...”

In spite of their immediacy and their optical exuberance, the paintings by Phillip Allen retain a certain distance. They ask for attention but take time to see.

Drawing has always been an important part of the artistic practice of Allen. The artist draws everyday on to sheets of cream-coloured, A4-sized paper, and each drawing starts with a four-cornered box, freely marked out in felt pen. The drawings in colour marker and felt pen by Phillip Allen provide an excellent visual insight into his unique construction of iconic motifs and his inventiveness as a draughtsman. Looking at Allen’s drawings, arranged here one after another across a wall, one cannot but think of the doodles and cartoons every one of us makes on their notepads. Although he claims not to know where the shapes come from, the major difference with our scribbles is that Allen’s marks and motives, whirls and twirls, are extremely accomplished. They create, refer to and further develop the imagery found in his paintings and always end up in beautifully balanced compositions. By using plain colour markers and pen, and exploring a diversity of ‘office stationery’, the artist gives them a very direct forthright touch. Complex in their apparent simplicity, the drawings by Phillip Allen are more than just notes on his paintings, they are autonomous works of art.

Phillip Allen has exhibited in group shows in the United States, France, Italy, Belgium, Greece and Poland. These include *Archipeinture* at Le Plateau in Paris in conjunction with Camden Arts Centre, 2006; *the British Art Show* at BALTIC, 2005 – 2006, *Stay Positive* at Marella Art Contemporanea, Milan, 2004 and the Royal Academy, London, 2002. Solo exhibitions have been held at Milton Keynes Gallery, London, 2006 and PS1 Contemporary Arts Centre, New York, 2003. In September 2007, a first publication about his drawings has been published by Other Criteria in London.

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