

Tableaux

Stephen Palmer

Ria Green makes her works in a windowless studio. The work originates from the landscape, but she does not gaze out at it, or refer to it through photographs or sketches. Instead she looks internally, drawing on memories of activities she has performed in various locations, such as walking, looking, and collecting.

In this manner she doesn't look solely with the eye, or attempt to produce a scenography of the landscape. She instead works with the traces that it has left upon her: the feeling of wandering and the negotiation of terrain, the texture of sand and of shifting light, the open and encompassing dimensions of an atmosphere.

In the studio there are various things. Bags of plaster. The remains of older works. Recent pieces stand on shelves in various configurations. On the floor there are groups of stones she has brought back from her expeditions. Here the works are produced through a material process through which these memories are revisited.

Several layers of plaster are built up, and then pigments are worked into the wet material. The works are improvisatory—in that they are constrained by what is available to hand, and the limited working time of the plaster. As the material solidifies, differing types of marks and textures are possible. Green responds to the inchoate images emerging in clouds of colour; moulding and developing them—somewhat like a photographic image forming in the emulsion.

The tablet becomes a kind of mystic writing pad. Gestures are traced upon the surface, which are overwritten by further marks, which are reworked in turn. The resulting object is a record of this temporal process, as much as it is an attempt to capture the past. Fragments of perceptions are evoked, or might jump forward erratically. These apparitions of prior experience are rewritten in the present; it is a work of translation, like memory itself.

Green seems to look back: she attempts to picture and respond to something no longer present. Nevertheless, it is only through the opening of distance that such a picturing is possible. Perhaps it is better to think about this as an act of displacement; the production of a distance by which experiences can be processed and reconfigured.

Often, the works come in pairs; and particular gestures can be observed echoing across several pieces. It is as if a recalled image, or sensation, has been reiterated and developed according to different nuances or chance occurrences. Or perhaps the recollections upon which a work has drawn have proved too effusive to be contained to a single panel, and have engendered the production of further renditions.

Green's practice also speaks of a deeper time. Not just of "personal" memories—of names, dates, places, and occurrences in one's social life—but also of climatic and geological movements. The layers of plaster allude to a strata of sediment slowly compacted and transformed, becoming re-exposed and subjected to erosion; to a multitude of tiny gestures and traces. Far from aggrandising individual experience, Green's tableaux attest to a fleeting moment situated within a vast geological epoch.

The works come into being through a stilling of movement, and again like a photograph (or any form of writing), take on a form that can be carried or passed around, stored away, or displayed as a souvenir. Yet the play of surface and depth, and the suggestions of opacities and transparencies, manages to defy the plaster's physical rigidity. Our eyes are in constant movement through their haptic spaces; following flows of particles, stains and residues; witness to an accumulation of impressions in time.