

Cow Punk: New Works by Paul Emmanuel

Arcadecardiff

Paul Emmanuel is an artist whose practice considers the nature of painting and how meaning is conveyed through form, texture and the interactions between materials. This tension between matter whether natural or fabricated manifests as a direct response to living in rural Wales. His creative language is informed through a process of engagement with the objects that inhabit his everyday life.

Based in Nantyllyn, near Brecon, Emmanuel's support for paint are the existing fabric of nature: the fleeces of sheep, the petals and stems of plants and the existing fences and gate posts that divide the land. In applying oil and chemical based pigments the source material is transformed into an art object; an aesthetic relationship between the artist and nature. This relationship may not be an easy one as the work is open to chemical reaction and as unfamiliar substances are drawn together, change and chance is allowed to happen.

His process of painting is a considered attempt at control and management of form but Emmanuel is looking for beauty throughout the object/image and the support brings a beauty that will always be present no matter how much the form is physically engaged with through his processes. This method of working becomes a metaphor for a number of symbiotic relationships and conflicts; the place of modern man within nature, organic and constructed beauty and the temporary permanence of nature.

In *Black Narcissus* (versions), we are invited to fix an image in our memory of a flowering plant in a simple vase. The *Narcissus* is a symbol of re-birth and regeneration but in presenting it as a dense form in a single colour the flower is stripped of individual identity. The visual details on the surface that define it as unique are covered over. It now behaves as a painting, representing its species purely by its form and the volume it takes up in the gallery. It is like a ghost or prop of itself. The pigment attempts to arrest time. By holding this saturated image in our mind this object goes on to live longer than the original blossom and we are reminded we have the ability to regenerate its form in our thoughts. In reality, beauty in nature is fleeting and temporary. This understanding that there are different types of time relating to experience is integral to Emmanuel's paintings as man-made, constructed time and the natural time of the seasons come together in the same place.

Emmanuel's use of sheep marker appears as a natural development of mid-nineteenth century method of working 'en plein air' (in the open air). The commercially available vivid pigments form a palette designed for viewing flocks of sheep from distance. When applied directly to plants they serve as a marker/record of a moment in time as the plant continues to grow against the pigment. The use of sheep marker for conceptual purpose places the artist within the fabric of the landscape as his passage through nature is recorded upon nature itself; removing the canvas and the position of the fore, middle and background. Here it is not time but space which is open to review by this practice.

For the exhibition at Arcadecardiff, a number of new fleece paintings will court the feminine *Black Narcissus* in the gallery. Here vibrant oil paint is applied repetitively but delicately to construct a layer that is a counter texture to the chaos of the fleece. The pigment implies balance and order while the unease is intentional as we are invited to respond to the beauty these hybrids emote. Sourced locally to his studio, Emmanuel cleans and prepare the fleeces to a point, leaving mud and space for chance, before he engages instinctively in response to the surface that confronts him.

Cow Punk presents us with evidence of actions that exist primarily as paintings and sculpture. They are records of passing time and extracts of the fabric of the rural world. They exist as a result in part through acts of performance while remains rooted to the actions of a painter seeking understanding and knowledge from their immediate landscape.

Cow Punk is, as in the words 'Cow' and 'Punk', about what happens when things are brought together, questioning whether $1 + 1$ ever really equals simply 2...

text by Richard Higlett Goat Major Projects

The Exhibition Runs from 23rd July to 8th August at Arcadecardiff.

Paul Emmanuel : In conversation will take place in the gallery on Saturday 8th August at 4pm. free event.

arcadecardiff.co.uk



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Arts Council of Wales

