

Dracula's Revenge

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE :

Nicholas Hatfull

Shades

May 7 – June 18, 2023

Dracula's Revenge is pleased to present a new body of work by British painter Nicholas Hatfull, the artist's first solo show in the United States. A conversation between artist and gallery took place on the occasion of the exhibition:

DRACULA'S:

Where does a painting begin?

NICHOLAS HATFULL:

The better paintings begin as a kind of mirage right at the back of my mind. They appear uninvited, perhaps in the shower or just before sleep. The composition will be made up of things I've seen some time ago. The timing of their reappearance and the extent of their transformation is the mysterious thing, and a thing that I trust. So to some extent a painting can begin before I know about it.

D:

Once a 'mirage' materializes on the canvas, though, it takes on a certain reality. In turn the viewer implicates their own memories, thoughts, and beliefs.

NH:

A mirage feels like a good metaphor because it's an apparition, an image displaced from elsewhere that's subject to distortion. In attempting several 'takes' at depicting the jumper design, for example, I'm working on the principle that by the time it reaches the surface of the canvas, it has become something else, something pliable. A vector for other meanings.

The jumper pattern and the ruined building recur, and seem to assert themselves as prime motifs, but in the making of the painting the most demanding moments might be things that seem dialed right down in the mix. Less legible forms, softer touches, moments of extemporising...these may be what count, or count just as much.

Painting, as I understand it, is a chain of decisions. You can see the next one or two stepping stones or lily pads - the decision is usually how are you going to go about trying to land on that next step (whether your arms are flailing or you're full of poise). I'm wanting to avoid either being totally arbitrary or making the wrong kind of sense.

D:

Is it actually possible for painting to express something that language cannot? Can painting express anything at all?

NH:

At this point I wouldn't be expecting to get what I think I want out of a painting, or even want it, really. I'm remembering a scene from a school language textbook - a bemused diner telling the waiter 'this is not what I ordered.' Now you can't send the dish back, but you may be able to tease it into something.

I think it's quite possible to be at the same time self-reflexive and in thrall to the medium. Painting is especially good at allowing irreconcilable things to coexist. It comes alive when it's riven with contradiction. I do think making work and looking at art can return you to looking at the visible world, at its enigmatic side, with some kind of fresh...I don't know...awe. That might be to do with either estrangement or a kind of enchantment, or somehow both.

But I suppose it's worth emphasising that many decisions, gestures and responses emerge only inside the activity of making. The kind of open-weave nature of the layers in these paintings is perhaps to do with reflecting on the act of painting, and ping-ponging between improvisation and reflection. The painting can seem to be withering or flourishing minute by minute.

D:

Painting can be so serious. But it can also be a place of playfulness, and childlike things, like pizza, gelato and autumn.

NH:

The other day I took my daughter for ice cream, which she was eating with a little wooden spoon, and she was re-forming her little scoops of ice cream in her mouth, taking the spoon and studying these temporary sculptures, interpreting their form in that naturally, madly associative way children have - 'look, that looks like a bed.' 'Now it looks like a sofa!' That spoke to me of plasticity, and pleasure in forms. I could see the headrest of the 'bed', on the brink of returning to total formlessness.

Making paintings with children, or watching them paint, you can't help but be struck by how quickly they can generate something interesting, and how unafraid they are to obliterate it. It reminds you that paint can have a certain wildness.

D:

Can you trace a symbol that has returned, grown and developed on the canvas, and the ways this has in turn changed your understanding of that thing as it exists in the world?

NH:

Well, we've mentioned the jumper pattern from Takeshi Kitano's film Hana-Bi. I wouldn't say I understand it much better, really, than when I first chose to work with it. I don't think I'm done with it, and in part that elusive quality, the sense of something slipping through your fingers, something whose full power can only be glimpsed, is a subject of the work. Alice, my wife, is very involved with textiles and makes clothes, and I love watching her processes. I found myself suggesting those stitches or threads of wool - in that black-ground painting they sort become interchangeable with brush marks - and I'm not sure I would have been sensitive to that kind of detail were it not for Alice.

The pizza with the green paddle, positioned like some kind of oar, is drawn from a pizza box I kept from a meal in Rome in around 2001. I had in fact made a kind of transparent painting on top of this box. The continued hold something like that has over me perhaps suggests whatever it means has both changed and remained the same. You can't step in the same river twice and all that, but you can sing the same melody - your voice may have a different timbre, and your relationship to it as a singer will have changed with the passage of time.

Pizza is formlessness bounded by crust, it suggests viscera to me, but also these vernacular abstractions. I've always thought there was a certain pathos to depictions of them. It comes out of the fire. It's sort of primal.

D:

When is a painting finished?

NH:

When the air inside the painting looks less hospitable, no longer open to further remarks.

Nicholas Hatfull (born in Tokyo, Japan) is a painter who lives and works in Norwich, UK. Hatfull received a Postgraduate Diploma from the Royal Academy of Arts, London in 2011, and was the Sainsbury Scholar in Painting and Sculpture at the British School at Rome in 2012. Recent solo exhibitions include Josh Lilley, London (2020, 2017, 2014); The Club, Tokyo (2019); and Peles Empire, London (2012). Group exhibitions include Leave the road; take the trail at Xenia Creative Retreat, Hampshire (2022); Timelessness at The Club, Tokyo (2020); Stains On A Decade at Josh Lilley, London (2019); Folly at Emalin, Airth, Scotland (2016); D'Après Giorgio at Fondazione Giorgio e Isa de Chirico, Rome (2012); and Re-generation at Museum of Contemporary Art, Rome (2012). His work has appeared in Financial Times, Frieze, Mousse, and Time Out, among others. Hatfull's writing about painting has appeared in Apollo, Frieze, Mousse, and monographs such as Michael Armitage 'You, Who Are Still Alive' (2022).