

Inverleith House is delighted to present Nicolas Party, *Boys and Pastel*, the first major solo exhibition in a UK public gallery by the Swiss artist (b.1980, Lausanne. Lives and works in Brussels, Belgium).

For *Boys and Pastel*, Nicolas Party has transformed the formal Georgian interior of Inverleith House into a contemporary ‘gesamtkunstwerk’ with the most expansive installation of his decorative wall paintings to date, spanning every available inch of the seven gallery spaces, and also encompassing the stairwells and corridors of the House. These patterned murals act as a framing device and wondrous stage set for a new series of pastel compositions and charcoal drawings delivered in Party’s unique aesthetic language. Party will also present a selection of rarely seen short films.

Through Party’s gregarious, distinctive and stylistically dexterous paintings and drawings, the total environment created by *Boys and Pastel* directly responds to the interior architecture and mirrors the surrounding botanical context of Inverleith House, ushering in elements of the Garden to animate the stillness of the gallery space. Each room takes on its own thematic discourse, like chapters in an absurdist narrative whole and whether full, immersive tableaux or repeating designs, Party’s artwork continuously oscillates between abstraction and figuration.

Sometimes there are thick swathes of solid, flat colour suggesting primal, rocky landscapes and scorched earth; other times bucolic scenes are evoked by clumsy-looking vertical lines coursing up the walls, appearing to sway as if growing towards the light; whilst at other times still, clashing shades and ice-cream daubs produce fantastical, almost psychedelic scenes. Elsewhere there are dense charcoal forests, idiosyncratic yet repeating motifs - perhaps a branch, perhaps a teapot - or recurring marks that appear to have been rendered by some lo-fi computer programme. These arresting environments hold a visual immediacy that cannot help but elicit a visceral response.

However energetic and untroubled by the anxieties of painting these tableaux may first appear, they nonetheless belie Party’s continuous meta-investigation into the very nature of painting itself; its conventions, traditions, veiled hierarchies, prejudices and interior classification systems. Party’s work can be read as a rich collage of referents and signifiers carefully appropriated from the history of art, design and craft. Borrowing from canonical art historical subjects such as nudes, portraiture, still life and landscape, Party selects and reimagines familiar, even hackneyed motifs – fruit arrangements, pastoral scenes, the coffee pot - reusing them in his work in a parodic and irreverent way, as can be seen in his anthropomorphic still lives of fruit.

Through the appropriation of certain themes and gestures, broad influences can be identified, with

landscapes deriving from David Hockney; colour palettes borrowed from the Fauves, or perhaps Pierre Bonnard; painted collage referencing Matisse's cut-outs; or else a Picasso figure. Party's work is therefore at once homage, quotation and reappropriation, demonstrating a deep respect for, but also a critical attitude to the history of art. In this way, Party seeks to deconstruct prevalent artistic tropes and question the established paradigms of art history, challenging taste and taking ownership of the canon for his own means.

This process of appropriation also points to contemporary anxieties regarding authenticity, image reproduction and a culture mediated through the computer screen. This is made explicit in the recurring marks in Party's work which overtly emulate the digital 'brushstrokes' of creative computer programmes such as Photoshop and even MS Paint. These inelegant 'worms' course the walls of Inverleith House in varied colours shapes and thicknesses, taking an angular, juddering, artificial line. Many of these shapes appear pixelated as if rendered on-screen, suggestive of computer agency in authoring the work. This subtle convention shifts the focus from the act of painting itself to the tools of contemporary artistic production, transforming the wall into a substitute for the depthless surface of the computer screen - a comment on the work of art in the digital age.

Boys and Pastel exists within a liminal space somewhere between the digital screen and the art history lesson. With this exhibition, Party has captured the contemporary zeitgeist, but also delves much deeper than that, suggesting a future for painting that conflates the physical and immaterial world.

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