

B, E, L, D

Like the dead metaphors that litter ordinary language (the body of an essay, the face of the clock), painting has metabolised many corpses over time. Plants, bread, nudes and apples in these paintings connote a generalised sense of art history and the language of painting as much as they refer to the objects themselves. A painting of an apple, laden with allegory, is so well-worn a trope that it seems an unrealizable ideal that it could transcend its status as an ur-signifier and be assigned this or that particular meaning. Instead, it is recognisable to us as a metaphor of metaphoric meaning, something that signifies its own power of signification. These tautologies suggest overlaps, imbricated layers of meaning obscuring the one beneath - or they could be circuits that keep returning us to point A.

Other paintings won't let us journey too far. Semiotic games seem intentionally insular, like a female stomach 'pregnant' with meaning, or trunks being whipped off to canonise the 'Reclining White Man' as a more distinguished 'Reclining Nude'. A young GDR era Merkel complicates things – but then, this is a complex kind of realism - and I'm now thinking how European centrism is as anachronistic as the landline she holds, just how long ago the twentieth century was, and then stepping further back - how images lose their particularity over time, and how painting abates that process, drawing out the generalities and ambiguities of its subjects. The aleatory scatter of apples and bread suggest her image, (not her portrait) is laid flat, a symbol of brevity in this vanitas composition.

Henry James described how relations “really stop nowhere” but it was the job of the artist to make them “happily appear to do so”. When Oliver Osborne describes his figuration as a kind of abstract, I think he is attempting something similar – to somehow arrest interpretation, to stop it from spiralling out too far and to return it back to itself.

There are formal and material ways he achieves this - its tempting to see the precise rendering technique as a glacial-speed process painting. There are deliberate changes in the composition between each one, reinforcing a sense of procedure, parsimonious differences between 'apple here' or 'apple there'. This isn't a Warholian silence or emptying of meaning, rather, scanning between them is like the aphasia induced by carefully enunciating the same word over and over again.

A vowel is swallowed to measure out the lines 'FCK SEX ISM'. Sprayed over an image of a glamorous woman begging a pair of indifferent trousered legs, it's an act of earnest detournement that bears a strong family resemblance to early aughts Adbusters as much as its enjambed

typography recalls Christopher Wool. Redeployed as a large pigment print on canvas it manifests another layer of codes that we recognise from recent process painting. Despite a modicum of distancing effect, its flat statement of certainty is hard to tear away from. This all-too-easy legibility draws an ever tighter circle of relations, a more insistent and immediate set of meanings that moves the painting closer to something like every day language.

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