

BLAISE DRUMMOND ***A LIQUID NOTE IN SPRING***

16.12.2022 – 11.02.2023

Blaise Drummond: From magic lantern to manifest destiny

Cartoon epics and the dramatised wild frontier permeate Blaise Drummond's latest works. It might be cowboy versus Indian in one or remembered film versus reality in another. Overall, these pieces play out over a shrinking natural plain as history and myth wither under the heat of the sun.

Landscape and portrait are two world views domesticated into our smartphone world but borrowed from art history and art practice. Drummond plays with subtle portraits of landscapes – both historical and fictional. We are not talking about aspect ratio, rather, about a way in which terrain is captured. His art is a landgrab but of aesthetics not people displacement.

Look more closely at the clues. Pieces of graph paper litter that landscape, like environmental threats cast back into a mythic past of how the West was won. Dangerous confetti from future societies which serves as tinder for identity democracy. Which has politicised the planet into green party politics. The damage done, we leave it decay. Look at that patch of graph paper and its signal lines of latitude and longitude. It is the atlas on which Drummond paints. It is the grid across which lone characters move – by horse, by boat. Or not at all. The point being that in some images of constructed habitat, humans are strikingly AWOL. Grid lines intersect from east to west and from north to south: maps for landscapes and maps for portraits.

His linear verticals clash with nature's heroes, the trees. These lines cross swords. They fence in some ordered co-existence. It has never been humans versus nature but rather humans and nature in continued negotiation. But humans are very much acting in bad faith.

A lonely mountain is an elephantine marvel, a repository of wisdom that never forgets. A man rows on some future rising waters, elevated by the tide of a world which doesn't care. A straggly flower begs for a lost man's attention on a white landscape. But for the green trees in the background and the snappy attire of the sitter, the place could be a frozen wilderness, the lake sheeted in ice. The man is Johnny Appleseed. Walt Whitman. Henry David Thoreau. Some sage environmentalist. Or some scout engineer out to industrialise the landscape with train tracks for commerce. Or some contemplative poet seeking the weapon of verse with which to protect nature from destruction; with which to immortalise the eternal, fading outdoors.

Drummond's paintings don't preach. They observe. They glimpse out through bars and railings from modernist dwelling structures and present us all as ultimately caged. Perhaps to protect us from nature. Perhaps to defend that nature from us as, imprisoned, we serve out our remaining sentence on this sweet Earth as our time ineluctably runs out.

It's a native thing. Guns and feathers and manes. Some sort of wigwam mash-up: wallpaper pasted across the great terrains as Indians and horses and simple headdresses allude to the pictures on nursery walls.

A sailor with Soviet overtones and an Indian, feather in cap, wields a revolver astride a horse; he appears to have jumped ship from some Potemkin vessel or some Potemkin village. Or is he a Gaultier perfume bottle? Or a Kenneth Anger extra? From sea to shore he rides, witlessly vicious, a goon of the machine of war, oblivious to a mosaiced crocodile which could have crawled from the Gaudi art park or a Damien Hirst jewellery display cabinet. Or floated into your city centre on a disaster flood. Vengeful displaced beasts wait in the sewers pumped up with flushed antibiotics and other pollutants.

Drummond's images belong to a magic lantern in a Victorian playroom. They are of harm and charm. Watch the "heroes" ride in tight revolutions around your wall, the cowboys and Indians, circling the wagons, the horse already enslaved as a manifest destiny is fulfilled.

John Fleming, writer and journalist, Dublin, December 2022

New publication

Blaise Drummond, A Liquid Note in Spring

Paris, Éditions Loevenbruck

Writers Blaise Drummond, John Fleming

Graphic design Sylvia Tournerie

Available from 22 December 2022 at the gallery and on shop.loevenbruck.com

This exhibition booklet contains the text "Blaise Drummond: From the magic lantern to manifest destiny" by John Fleming, excerpts from the artist's notebook which reveal his sources of inspiration and multiple references, both musical, artistic, philosophical as well as literary, reproductions of seven unpublished works, as well as a portrait of the artist in his studio in Ballymahon, County Longford (Ireland), a photograph by Tim Durham taken in December 2022.

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Gallery opening hours: Tue–Sat, 11am–7pm and by appointment