

The Fortunes of Painting

Fu-on Chung's new exhibition; what can I say without pre-empting your own response to these paintings?

Firstly, I would advise going directly to the paintings to get acquainted; spending quality time tuning-in to what you are seeing and feeling. Don't try to make sense of the work, this is about sensing the work.

Take your time—the fresh experience of first encounter is never repeated. It's an opportunity for empathy in advance of criticality. It could become the entrée to deeper, intimately nuanced, sustained and sustaining interaction: a partnership between spectator and painting, cooperating to unfold the work of art.

So, withhold judgement, clear your perceptual filters, and suppress internal chatter about meaning or significance. Be open to what you are seeing and feeling—that's the first work to do. It's visual art, and these paintings are beings of sensation. So it's apt that the first encounter should mostly be in the realm of affect. It is from there that the work's vitalising potential (its art-ness) will start to emerge. In due time concept and context will connect to those affective responses, bringing critical considerations into play as entrée becomes melee.

All this work, happening in our perceptual processing, is the *work* of art. It happens in us and its effect is in us. It is our work to do, and our responsibility to do it well, and as the writer Richard Ford asserts, it is our *right* to do this work—it being the reason we come to look at works of art.¹

Fu's painting offers great scope for that work. His painting is exploratory: it has to work itself out by figuring things out as it goes—things worth feeling, experiencing. Within these paintings, we can see traces of how that may have happened. We can trace gesture, chromatic adventure, along with layering, recursions, serendipities—and how serendipity comes from happenstance. We sense the spreading of planes, receding of space, surging of colour, writhing of line. We feel luminosity blooming, grids veiling, form equivocating, ends fraying... Yes, these paintings say: as in life, things work and don't work—resolution is always provisional. There's always work to be done, places to go, fun to be had, along with things to consider, celebrate, or fix. Loose ends abide; loose ends hedge against an aesthetic becoming anaesthetic. It all finds welcome in Fu's painting. From his prior writing I find that Fu has a soft spot for 'camp' sensibility with its impertinence—you know: "The ludicrously tragic; the tragically ludicrous."² Well, why wouldn't he?—it's an aesthetic that relishes being out-of-control as much as it is firmly in control. It's like saying that a serious issue needn't get in the way of a seriously good party. Can't say better than that.

So, Fu's paintings are beings of sensation and there's a party going on. Your participation is invited.

Over to you...

-Ian Jervis, 2022

¹ Richard Ford, radio interview (RNZ c.2007)

² John Waters, voicing his own character in an episode of *The Simpsons*, illuminates a concept of camp.