

Jude Rae
476-482

For Jude Rae painting is a deeply expressive form of communication that is completed in its reception by others. Through her meticulous attention to detail, the play of light and shadow, and the careful rendering of textures, Rae invites the viewer to engage in an immersive and multisensory experience. Conveying an illusion of tangibility, her still life paintings encourage a deeper, more tactile connection.

A central theme in Rae's work is the tension between object and image. Her paintings have subtle sensuality that beckons the viewer to explore further and to reflect on the experience of vision, and in doing so they challenge assumptions about the self-evidence of sight. In an interview in 2020, Rae spoke about her interest in the "felt quality of vision" in painting which is present in her rendering of light and colour. Both are evocative but for Rae, the visual quality of light in particular creates a sense of feeling.

Rae's paintings serve as a subtle reminder that our experiences and understanding of reality extend beyond surface appearances. She encourages us to consider the interplay between different senses, the complexities of spatial perception, and the ways in which our bodies engage with the world around us. Painting has the potential to reverse the assumptions that govern normal vision. The process of vision itself involves the coordination of the eyes and brain via numerous neural pathways and complex interactions to translate light into sensible perceptions. The material dimension of painting can slow this process, variously reflecting and complicating the act of recognition. In this sense, the viewer's response completes the painting.

Rae's still life paintings can be seen as a deliberate attempt to reclaim the holistic nature of vision. She captures the essence of objects in a way that goes beyond mere visual representation, evoking a sense of presence and tactility, inviting engagement not only with the visual aspects of the painting but also with the implied textures and spatial relationships. She has noted that technological advancements have often prioritized the optical aspect of vision, neglecting the tactile and spatial aspects that also register, particularly in painting. The quality of seeing engendered by Rae's still lives provides respite from the visual overstimulation of the highly energetic, smooth and glossy screens that surround us as mirrors and portals. While useful, these devices can capture and drag us into a dulled looking, a looking without seeing that is an anathema to the slower, deeper felt quality of vision Rae's painting.

Phenomenology, a philosophical approach that seeks to understand human experience as it is directly lived, is a resonant echo in Rae's still life paintings. Phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty, who wrote about perception and art, emphasised the inseparability of the perceiving subject and the perceived object, suggesting that perception is inherently ambiguous, as our sensory experiences are always open to multiple interpretations. Rae's paintings embody this ambiguity, with objects that appear to oscillate between their material presence and their representation on

the canvas. This ambiguity challenges viewers to navigate the blurred boundaries between reality and illusion, inviting us to question the stability of our own perceptual experiences. In the paintings shown in the exhibition SL476-482, the foreground strip of the surface supporting the objects is at times perceivable as the edge of a bench or shelf. It operates as an underlining framing device at the bottom of the canvas, and often reveals itself as the background underpainting. When it meets the vertical lines such as those in SL482, it flattens the depth, confounding spatial comprehension, creating a particular felt quality of vision that can be mildly disorientating as flatness and depth exist simultaneously. Rae's deft use of visible underpainting also contributes to the spatial experience. In SL480 for example, the vivid transparent iron oxide of the foreground strip is also pushing through the top layers of paint on the surface where the objects sit and the wall behind, once again revealing the flatness of the painting. Rae is a master of creating work that is simultaneously spatially flat and deeply layered. Through vision, these effects embody what Rae refers to as the "interplay between illusion and materiality" where in the skilful rendering of objects, light and space the presence of paint can recede, while the materiality of the paint can break the illusion of depth. Rae's paintings quietly remind us that perception remains fluid and continuous.

Charlotte Huddleston, 2023