

Painting/ Compiling - Alexander Harding

"All that I am trying to do in each picture is to bring together the most disparate and mutually contradictory elements, alive and viable in the greatest possible freedom. No paradises."

Gerhard Richter

When I think of contemporary painting, I'm always clouded by the perverse idea of 'Zombie Formalism' – a term which was usually employed in reference to a certain kind of empty process-based abstraction, once attractive to certain markets, but it still remains present to me as a way of talking about and making sense of painting. It probably retains its relevance to me because painting, as *a medium*, over its long life, has metabolised so many formal and stylistic corpses, it's logical that certain contemporary practitioners are chewing up and spitting out these amazingly mangled and mobile creatures. Paintings are Zombies, more 28 Days Later than Night of the Living Dead.

What's a more productive definition; Painting is cannibalism? or a Frankenstein-like bricolage? There's a difficulty in prescribing a definition to this idea of a single painting that is now existing everywhere at once. Assumed into our networked culture, contemporary painting has gone beyond mere things like genres and movements, and now everything exists simultaneously – and that's a good thing. Painting is now about a certain kind of choice, or more accurately, a liberation from that choice.

To be abstract, representational, high, low, either, or? These rigid definitions are the antithesis of vibrant contemporary painting practice, by way of modern technology and crucial aspects of image culture: the sharing, distribution and mediation of images have given a new level platform to history.

As Gerhard Richter explains, this is the greatest possible freedom – responding to a world where everything is available, all the time. With the slowness, the employment of a different kind of materiality, the painter is not an observer anymore but a compiler. They've broken from the previous rhetoric of painting, existing as a form of representation, to address the whole network beyond what's independent of the easel or outside the picture frame.

With their paintings existing on this new temporal plane, the painter can now compile their canvas with references from across art's history, without seeming incongruous in the way they're constructed and disseminated. Elements from 'high' and 'low' culture become fused, tagged onto and remixed with historical tropes, fashionable and unfashionable flourishes, forgotten scenes and overlooked outliers.

Among all the potentials and possible re-readings of different historical moments and genres, painting speaks to us at *this* time, where there is an attendant desire to sift through, control and organise. Paintings are compilations, as if you are painting you are also compiling and mediating all this information at once.

Paintings as compilations should be celebrated – ‘Now That’s What I Call Painting!’. To see abstracted figuration among lyrical mark-making, placed against the tense and photographic, gives off such a palpable energy, a productive tension that keeps you circling back for more. After Post-Modernism, painting developed beyond linear notions of time and style; the paintings on view here are evidential in showing that if there is anything uniting them other than their contemporaneity, it is that they’re literal compilations of assimilated references, interests and cultures.