

1990 Notes on Jane Kelly's Black Paintings, The Other Space, Walsall Art Gallery



JANE KELLY in *The Other Space*

26 January - 9 March 1991

The Other Space at Walsall Museum and Art Gallery is dedicated to living artists and to their audiences.

The Other Space is not an exhibition gallery in the traditional sense with works on walls or floors and discreet labels nearby. We recognise that many people are confused by and sometimes hostile to new art. The Other Space therefore sets out, in a series of close collaborations between artists and gallery staff, to investigate the processes of making art and to experiment with diverse forms of communication and interpretation, revealing artists work to their audiences in new, other ways.

Black Country based artist Jane Kelly is the first to show in The Other Space. She is interested in communicating about her work visually rather than with words alone. She presents just one painting and surrounds it with other images, objects and sounds that hint at the ideas, inspirations and processes that underlie her work.

This clashing, overlapping mass of visual information can be read like a map or a menu or pieced together like a jigsaw puzzle. These are the references, the ingredients, that lead to the final massive Black Painting that dominates The Other Space.

Peter Jenkinson,
Walsall Museum and Art Gallery.
December, 1990.

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Notes on Jane Kelly's Black Paintings

In these Black Paintings Jane Kelly undermines traditions in landscape paintings (the picturesque, the romantic etc) to remind us of matters more relevant to our times - the 'dew drops like diamonds on every tree' have been replaced by gobs of black bitumen surging through the underpainting of white artex. As these paint-stuffs are pushed and pulled across the canvas surface they echo the artist's movements, thoughts and intentions until action and medium stabilise into gestures indicating pressing concerns.

The real and implied weight of the heavy black surfaces seem to stress the painting's support to a point of final collapse - a silence before the storm, and the violation of the underlying white artex by bitumen slicks calls forth primeval fears:

*I had a dream which was not a dream
The bright sun was extinguished, and the stars
Did wander darkling in the eternal space.
Rayless, and pathless, and the icy earth
Swung blind and blackening in the moonless air:
Moon came and went - and came, and brought no day.
And men forgot their passions in the dread
Of this their desolation: and all hearts
Were chill'd into a selfish prayer for light.*

The irony is that despite this horror, the lusciousness of these (apparently) endless surfaces seduces us into closer inspection on which we realise that the very materials used as paint-stuff will make their own contribution to our final destruction. These filthy, smelly, brooding paintings strip-away the antiseptic platitudes with which we now surround our lives. Under the 'greening' of this green and pleasant land, the evidence of industrial blight actively accuses us of wilful neglect as we become the rotting echoes of our own misdeeds.

In a week when the United Nations Security Council agreed a timescale for war, and the Soviet peoples joined the 'Third World' food queue, and a Sunday paper highlighted the pollution of Swan Lake, it is appropriate that our gaze should become haunted in front of these Black Paintings.

*The world was void.
The populous and the powerful was a lump.
Seasonless, herbless, treeless, manless, lifeless.
A lump of death.*

Byron: July 1816

David Patten: December 1990

