HOME SWEET HOME
Recent Paintings

Exhibition Dates
3 - 10 August 2010

HOME SWEET HOME

The laconic private eye in Raymond Chandler’s pivotal and emblematic story, Trouble is My Business, while waiting in a grimy, crime-worn police department office, finds himself meditating on the relentless struggle of a bug that is traversing the scarred desk in front of him. It falls, plays dead, finally gets up, and then wobbles off, out of the private eye’s vision (Chandler, 1960, 64).

The event, in terms of the story itself, is minor, and despite the unusually charged atmosphere of his contemplations, it is the recognizable antics of an insect that we, the readers are familiar with. But it is not just the identifiable progress of the event that is arresting: it also has the meditative, trance quality that occasionally accompanies such minor, disconnected episodes. While much has been written of Chandler’s existential style, my interest here is with the nature of the slightly hypnotic, trance-like focus we enter when observing such minor events.

As Chandler realized, the ordinary, interior spaces of our lives can both transform and unexpectedly inform us of other levels of experience. The prescient atmosphere of a room or event can deliver not only a sense of the relationship of daily objects or people to themselves, but also add to our insight into what the Italian scriptwriter Cesare Zavattini identified as the purity of ‘dailiness’ (Kael, 803). Zavattini was referring particularly to the film he worked on with film director, Vittorio De Sica (Umberto D: 1952). There is a moment in that film, where we watch the servant girl getting dressed and having breakfast, that bears no direct relationship to the narrative but it there only for itself. It illuminates the moment itself and also reveals something essential in De Sica’s vision and by including it he reminds us that significant moments in a story are always experienced in tandem with the pure, graceful ordinariness of daily life.

In longer narrative art forms these moments add more complex layers to the accumulating story but when they are explored in single frame images such as paintings they can become meditations on seemingly mundane but strangely charged moments. Because they are fixed, images can have a timeless, koan-like meditative aspect that shifting narrative forms are not able to offer.

Museum of New Painting
Invites you to an exhibition of

DEBORAH WALKER

Deborah Walker Home Sweet Home
Diptych Oil on Board 30 x 74cm
courtesy of the artist
http://deborah-walker.com
Metaphysical painting has, in common with the other fields of expression, the ability to colonize a space previously claimed as conventional in meaning. When I make paintings I am not seeking a formal language to describe the interrelation of images and objects and the physical/emotional states those relationships engender. While formal, compositional decisions do shape the work I prefer to think of the resolved images as suggestive, rather than as an intellectual response. But when I stand back from an image and adopt the role of outsider/viewer I can see how certain key decisions about these portrayals of ordinary moments have shaped the range of responses available to the viewer. For example in an earlier stage of the painting In the Morning the figure was directly gazing at the bird with wide open eyes. But on reflection I found that idea too direct and restrictive. By painting closed eyes I could access the mythological elements peculiar to transcendent visions, thereby illuminating an inner vision rather than one, which is essentially outward looking.

This inclusion occurs because, whilst it is common in image making for the viewer to return the gaze of the figure here, the viewer is offered the opportunity to look further into the frame, from both an outside perspective and that of the subject herself. This gives an intimate sense of a private, unobserved moment in which the subject is unaware of the gaze of the outer world. It also allows the viewer to participate in the inner world of the subject portrayed as she hesitates before the expectant room and table. It is important to note that other elements of the composition: the table, the knife and the room itself are as important as the figure, in both compositionally and symbolic terms. It seems to me now that the mystery of the image may well lie in the fact that we do not know whether the subject is contemplating the objects before them or preoccupied with other subjects entirely. The ambiguity surrounding what emphasis to give to the commonplace elements of our lives is a major force in the cumulative power of the mysteries of daily life.

In Home Sweet Home, the final image I want to refer to here, a woman and a dog share a contemplative space. Numerous and diverse conclusions could be drawn from the fact that, while they seem to be viewing each other, both their views seem fixed beyond the immediate. My concern, however is not primarily the relationship between human and companion animal, but rather the mood a tonal quality can exude when subtle tonal treatments and a palette dominated by tertiary greys combine to create a serene yet expectant world. Further, the visual dynamic of the two figures creates an opportunity to enter a metaphysical territory that is separate to, yet parallel with, whatever the mundane relationships of affection, trust, power or dependence are seemingly laid before us.

I offer these themes in the hope that they will contribute to discussion of the strong connection between philosophy and the visual arts. My own on-going artistic practice is of a deeply philosophical nature, where not only the forms and techniques of painting are relevant but also the wider ranging history of ideas. For my practice the mechanisms of metaphysical contemplation in the visual, particularly the commonplace space, is one connected to the whole range of artistic endeavours and, for me, these have particularly included literature and cinema.

Sarah Amos
Vermont U.S.A
2010