

Arteviste.

December 13, 2017

A Review of Flora Goodwin's Curatorial Debut in Kensington, London



Photo courtesy of Flora Goodwin

Flora Goodwin's show is striking for a number of reasons. Firstly, the exhibition has no name - she states, 'I feel strongly that I do not want to put these artists under one umbrella hence there is no title for the exhibition'. Despite the fact that the artists on display are all female, mostly British, and people that Flora 'has known and collected for a long time', there is no theme to the work, or at least none stamped upon them with a name. That reservation is telling, and all too rare a thing; there is often much made of the artist's story, the fact that they may, or may not be, female or male, that we lose touch, even if minutely, with the art itself. This is art Flora admires, and it just so happens that the artists are all female, and predominantly British. More so than most, Flora had good reason to label the exhibition, but her desire to refrain is interesting, because it puts the art first. This inverts most gallery styles, in which the focus is placed on the artists; and even when a gallery starts the story with the artwork, and then finds a common theme in the artists, it is that theme that presides, takes the title, and inevitably canopies our interpretation of the work.

Secondly, Flora distinguishes her exhibition from others in her setting - her apartment. This 'domestic setting', as she calls it, is 'where the restraints imposed by a gallery context dissolve'. Galleries are intimidating places, especially for the uninitiated. Usually echoey white rooms, full of silence and shuffling feet, art galleries often create a kind of distance between the viewer and the

artwork. Having them at home means you can sit, have a coffee, and just soak in the art; and, as a result, you get to see new things, new meanings and suggestions in each work. Most importantly, you get to experience what it would be like to live with this piece of art. Any piece you buy will be with you for many years, you hope; it seems to make sense that you test run it in a home environment, where you walk and sit and drink, talk and shuffle, glimpse and gaze, forget and return; that's how you're going to find a piece worth the commitment.

There were eight artists on display, showcasing fourteen pieces in total. It is just as well no name was given to this exhibition, because there isn't really a unifying theme. But all the pieces are beautiful in their own right. Alba Hodsoll's work is colourful, offering clear lines, and nothing clear in the subject. It is all suggestion. 'You know you're looking at a body part,' assistant Ayesha Shand says to me, 'but you're not really sure what'. There's something sensual, familiar, and tactile about the pieces. You never feel threatened or teased out of thought - the work is simply lovely. The artist takes familiar outlines, shapes - mere suggestions of flesh, more the essence than the thing itself, and distills and disrupts, making you gaze with wonder, and think with the wordlessness that makes truth feel closer.

Katya Lewis's work is less colourful, and one step further into abstraction. One piece, *A tiny try (fails/ falls)*, I was told, was a meditation on memory. There's something vaguely ethereal about it, almost bruised, with light brush strokes and a paled palette. Her other piece, *C over, covered*, is, as the name suggests, full of layers. Here, there is beauty in the depth, or idea of depth; the deepest layers sometimes come to the front with detail and texture, and then fall away to the shadowy outlines you gaze through.

Lydia Gifford's work is a perpetual play with texture. Her piece, *Landing (VII)*, is again full of layers; over the creamy canvas a piece of muslin has been draped, and then, at the bottom, picked up and pinned in a small peak. There are suggestions of hand marks, of brush swishes, and patters all across the painting. You feel the role of the artist is coming into play, and, as Flora says, her 'work grows from an inquiry into the physicality of painting'. The line between painting and sculpture is questioned, if not crossed; and the work 'takes on sculptural volumes'.

I have never experienced an exhibition quite like this one. I think there is something to be learnt from Flora's curation; the art is more important than any theme you could hope to shackle the pieces together with, and the home is, perhaps, the best place to display art, whether you hope to sell it, or just to admire it.