

DOMOBAAL

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writing about Miho Sato's work, extracted from the essay for 'Oyster Grit' - a group exhibition introducing a line-up of domobaal gallery artists as at September 2007.

..... On the flip side of the narrative coin, Miho Sato's pared down painting process echoes back some of these concerns from a distant, fractured realm. Both wait proportionately long periods of time for the correct imagery to arrive within their lives, but where Cramer is beholden to the whims of nature, Sato fatalistically fishes from the sea of visual ephemera fly posted to and hidden within the everyday. You can imagine myriad secret connections creating skeins of new meaning beneath her characteristically black grounds. Sato's pictorial veil, which simultaneously connects and separates us from the contemporary motifs she describes, appears as transitory as Cramer's meteorological ruse, but is essentially comprised of translucent membranes of acrylic paint.

In the 'real' world, Sato's chosen subjects/emblems, regardless of their status, may at any time become wrinkled under buttocks on a bus, slapped haphazardly on the side of a building or imprisoned within library tomes disconnected from the metronomic tick-tock of modern life. In her often small, impossibly spare paintings they are given a second chance. But rather than reframe the iconic as something new, Sato works the disparity between public consciousness of these characters and her own representation of them as an outsider (she came to London in 2000 from Japan) partially subsumed by the melting pot of the city. Moomin, Justin, Maria, Nessie, Robin, Cowboy... might leap from the wall into virtual existence or slowly materialise within the mind's eye, depending on our relationship to them.

.... Sato's production process follows a strict set of creative guidelines, but with paint her chosen medium is free to eradicate or reconfigure detail at will. A limited palette and propensity towards harsh cropping encourage a sense of familiarity while preventing formulaic results. It is testament to Sato's perfectionism that old sources of material inspiration have yet to be discarded for the sake of associative innovation. The latest body of works feature Blighty's cock robin reduced to a gunmetal grey silhouette trapped atop a branch within an indigo ground. It may appear that a similar fate has befallen the evanescent female being floating in the mid-section of another. But, almost instantly for some, she will take her rightful place in the annals of film as opposed to art history as the spirit-possessed child in 'Exorcist'. Her face, now cleared of its memorably twisted features, promotes an eerie sense of calm referentially equidistant between the morgue and the lofty heights of religious iconography.

.... No matter how quietly shocking or out of their time the works of these eight artists may appear, the apparent non-conformity of this group is driven by individual default settings over a collective sense of design. There is little evidence of preoccupation with trend or ownership - as if they might be curators of lost thoughts or property. The past, the many sources of reference unashamedly acknowledged in these works, offers an essential portal between states, a Narnian wardrobe of unknown elements that must be negotiated in the process of moving forward, a backstitch during the re-hem of a second-hand garment essential to the wending linear strength of the hand-sewn whole.