

Art Chronicles – Alex Katz & Christopher Hanlon

March 26, 2010

Two shows currently at the Timothy Taylor Gallery in Mayfair; Alex Katz in the main space and Christopher Hanlon in the Viewing Room. The Katz paintings are pretty much what anyone knowing his work would expect: large canvases – heads, for the most part, portraits – distinguished by clear colour and line and, above all, by a deliberate flatness of surface. No perspective here, nothing to draw attention away from the fact that these are paintings – Clement Greenberg would have been proud. The only thing is, walking round, admiring certainly – Katz is 82 and has been doing this kind of thing since the 1950s, and has got it off to a flattened T – it's difficult to avoid the feeling that you've seen it all before. Maybe the show of his work at the National Portrait Gallery later in the year will show a variety that's lacking here.

Christopher Hanlon, a young painter who graduated recently from the Royal College of Art, makes good use of the relatively small space allotted. Technically adroit (oil on canvas, oil on board), like Katz, he seems to be working mainly within what could be described as the realist tradition, even those works which might, on one level, be thought of as abstract having a realistic feel. One thing he seems fascinated by is screening; there are several examples here of a curtain or blind hanging down over a similarly toned background. Of the two pieces that impressed me most, one shows a curtain the colour of pale oatmeal (so almost no colour at all) blowing free from a window at the centre of a green wall. The other – *The Lull* – is a portrait, predominantly in shades of brown, of a young woman, her head and shoulders, eyes averted, looking down. Guilt, or shame, or fear – or is she just demure. There's something quite beautiful about it and yet disturbing. Maybe Hanlon's showing us a vulnerability that is, itself, disquieting. Or, then again, possibly the disquiet is in myself and this is a picture of calm?

by John Harvey

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