

DOMOBAAL

Miho Sato @ Domo Baal

Miho Sato was born in Japan in 1967 and studied at the Royal Academy Schools. Using images from magazines, postcards and reproductions of other artworks as catalysts, her paintings have a simplicity of form and resonate with dense stillness. The mood that predominates is one of absence. Her images are emptied out, as if the subject had simply departed, leaving a trace of its former presence. The head of a nun is defined by the shape of her wimple but the face is blank. A woman pokes her head stiffly above the surface of the sea; her face is bereft of all detail. Evocative and ghostly, she is almost certainly "not waving but drowning"

Others of Sato's figures relate back to childhood recollections from popular culture, story books and history of art. A polar bear - static, white and eyeless - or the TV character Moomin evoke those spectral presences that infiltrate childhood consciousness and hover like phantoms on the edge of nightmares. These images force us to come up against the distorting and partial nature of memory. The past it is said is another country and memory its language. But its terrain is never a physical place but rather a space of shifting narratives, blurred fictions and half-remembered fears.

Miho Sato's paintings have a particular look. They seem naïve gauche even, as if executed without much concern. But this is the condition of a certain sort of modern painting. It is an attitude that both speaks of the impossibility of painting and of its death while still attempting to ring out the few last resonant phrases.

There is a bleakness here, a pervading sense of demise as if all emotion had been banished and the world rendered down to its component signs. This is a very Japanese sensibility but it also seems to be a detached comment on western culture from which so much meaning has now been evacuated - God, Belief, History - that all we are left with is a blank stare.

Sue Hubbard

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