

## DOMOBAAL

### Roxy's Words

As much as it does anything, this painting also undoes something and maybe more so. How can it undo more than it does, unless that something is outside the image? It puts things together and it undoes them, and it does both of these things at once - obviously enough, and separately, but it undoes first, by putting things together and this is an undoing and is what we see first. So too with this second painting, and it's almost certainly a character of this whole series of works.

What its members have in common is both everything and very little, the delusion of an illusion, which is a certain perfection of the inauthentic relation to the image that is their manifest surface, something I have just tried to name.

This naming: an oxymoron, a cheap rhetorical turn on my part? A tiring, facile oxymoron that makes it easy to speak about these odd works? I do want to say more than that there is a contradiction here; rather that there is something contrary in the making of the piece, a contrariety that arises from its painting, from its being painted in the first place, and from the uneven memorising that flows from something that could be recognised as it is painted (an animal head, an E) and something else that can't be recognised in its relation to the first. This something could be a red or a black, or a stain in the gesso ground; yellow and blue smudging into a barely relevant or accidental green, or a ragged edge of overlaid colours round the circular panel of the second, that separately revivifies the colours after their separation and overlaying and showing through in the body of the work; though at this instant also they show nothing - unless it is the memory of another, grander kind of painting that dripped and flowed to betray itself at the edge. And is the E some thing? Apart from the play with illusion of line and ground, the old eye-tricking beloved of psychologists who are infatuated with the duplicity of vision, where the black U flips in and out of the E, a little rococco shadow play; apart from this, which is an unimportant memory, is the E a thing, a thing like an E, for example? After all illusion is something, but not necessarily an interesting thing, more than a mere accident or conjuncture of shape and colour that enables the psychologists' 'discovery'; while here, rather, the animal head makes me forget whether it is a childhood thing that comes back to me or a coincidence that it looks like this, something indifferent to a memory of the attachment of the marks to something else, an animal head, some rabbit ears; an arbitrary intrusion that is at once material to the matter in hand, of seeing and of wanting to see, and incidental. So there it is, these paintings bring me - force me - to a strategem of writing as these contradictions pile up into a general contradictoriness, a sense of contrariety, of writing contrarily, of making my own figures (of speech, of writing) accumulate edge to edge, palimpsestically too, so that they begin to read like what I think I want to see in Roxy's work. But is there not something austerley philosophical as well as indulgent about this? of saying that the painter thinks by being contrary and by contradicting herself, as if in my pleasure I wanted her to be someone other than her own protagonist.

How they do this, what the things are that they put together and what it is that they then undo makes for a queer (rum?) series of questions that I am trying formulate, all the while, I imagine, still doing what I have done before with Roxy's paintings; which is to try to describe

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one fully and to fail to do so. I did think that this would somehow be a simpler thing to do with them, now that they have settled into a standard format, now that they are what we might call a reasonable size. Neither so small that we have to peer and pry to get a hold on them, nor so large that we have to stand back and scan them, the matter of the format seems to have fallen into the redundancy of the standard, for many of them are on identical stretchers, or they make for a comforting and regular distribution of oblongs, squares or circles. The fragmentary objects, rioting penises or random verbal phrases that once she painted, on undistinguished little pieces of board, the clutter of clutter, the ex-votos, or relics, whatever it is that they were or have now become, have fallen away before this curious respectability of her current pictorial formats. If tracking across those old ones was always difficult, making a way in an undergrowth of burgeoning distractions; if seeing them on the gallery walls led to an act of faith in their bare presence, so distracting was their mingling of signs and marks; then at least there was an enquiry for a presence, an enquiry as a substance of the work. For if these seem to take the eye in a more persuasive manner, or so it seems, nothing, finally, could be less sure. Or so it seems? The pleasure is just this, that they put together and they put apart, and this too makes for a difficulty in tracking what the thing might be, other than a now, other than in the instant of seeing that what you see is not quite there. A painting that is a circle, a circle that is like this painting but part of another painting. An instance, or the instance of a recognition that fails, once more in distraction, but a new one. A collapsing geodesic form that is neither leaf nor architecture, nor the one pretending to be the other, trailing and fading, or hands that are a semblance of a gesture, as if what is left of a hand when it becomes representation, teetering on the edge of the symbolic, a leftover from having been recalled rather than seen. Roxy's paintings, then, have things that look like things, but they do not have an iconography. And all those faded ripples of a transparent flow, as if a trace of something once solid, around and under the E and in its surrounding colours, have a seismic quality - but in miniature, as if caused by something absent from the work, or hardly figured in it; the washing of the gesso, the flowing of a tap, the sliding of a brush. It is important here to remember this - perhaps most obvious thing of all in painting - that the signified comes into being with image in the delusion of the referent, and that this is the bringing together and putting apart of which Roxy's work records the process.

Sometimes, I think, a storm in a teacup, sturm ohne drang... and therefore a higher form of bliss than the turmoils of expression. Here the drives and their appeasement find a liquid balance of pleasure on the edge of finding and of the found.

Adrian Rifkin, June 2006