

Becoming-Adolescent (Eight Paragraphs on Roxy Walsh's Paintings)

1. On adolescence. Adolescence names a stage of growth, a specific period in a life course. But it is also an orientation and a very particular kind of body, in effect, a particular set of capacities to affect and be affected. What is at stake in this adolescence? A fraught time after the innocence of childhood (if such a state has ever existed) and before the onset of adulthood (read: the solidification of habit, the repression of desire), adolescence is an in-between, an interzone, a place of specifically different potentialities that will always threaten the adult world, and in turn be threatened by that world (and this adolescence will involve a certain kind of indifference, even a nonchalant resistance, to the signifying/affective assemblages of grown-up existence). This is a time of fluidity and a time of events. It is also the time of art.

2. On authenticity. Authenticity is an attitude and an intention. A way of being in the world and of making ones own particular way in that world. These paintings by Roxy Walsh are not ironic; there are no pastiches, no parodies, no second-order abstractions here (art theory will always be stymied by dumb paintings like these). But this is not a simplistic 'return to painting', a retreat from modernity and from the vicissitudes of contemporary life. For these paintings are modern - produced in this moment and for those who dwell in this moment (they are complex objects for complex subjects). Authenticity also means inventing your own languages, saying it how you see it (after all, the languages on offer proffer only more of the same, more so-called reality that sucks dry the dreams of anything different). And thus these paintings will oscillate between figuration and abstraction, indeed, they will use anything to get their point across.

3. Faces and landscapes. Perhaps all painting is landscape-painting. World-creating, every artist demarcates a specific region of Being, stakes out their own private universe. Perhaps all painting is portrait-painting. Subject-constructing, every artist gives us a different diagram of subjectivity, a different model of how we might be in the world. Landscapes and Faces - but not those we habitually recognise as our own - these painting demarcate new territories, new worlds (and call forth a new subject for these worlds). These paintings are germinal; they invoke another space-time, one that is always present within our own but is masked, hidden, by common sense, everyday doxa and the cliché of images that surround us. Each painting then a fiction, its own particular myth-system; a specifically different organisation of elements to those we habitually encounter. These paintings allow something else to emerge from the landscape-face that constitutes our habitual world.

4. The figural. From within this world other worlds can and do emerge. Within painting this might involve the productive utilisation of chance; the odd mark, stain, shape...suddenly (perhaps after days, weeks, months)...as if from nowhere...another world emerges. This realm of the figural is impossible to predict, arriving as it does from an altogether different regime to the every-day (an underground seething world of yet-to-be-actualised virtualities). Painting might utilise cliché but only as a first step; ultimately it undoes the clichés and ready-made opinions that surround us. Painting is this exploration, the discovery of these unseen worlds hidden within the seen. These paintings then are controlled, measured (they are the careful contours of worlds-in-

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process) but at their heart they involve this productive utilisation of chance, this confrontation with chaos (how else could the new emerge?). A balance then between accident and intention, between formlessness and form. This is the rhythm of art.

5. Motifs (and repetition). Peopled by different creatures, other part-objects and stranger motifs, these paintings are inorganic life. Bunnies and puppies (but not as we know them), fingers and tongues...seeds and foliage...eyes and tears. Motifs repeated within a painting and motifs repeated across paintings (a repetition always with difference). Looked at all at once, a shimmering web of alien life forms, flitting from painting to painting. A joke stuttered and stammered, rephrased again and again (not obsessional but playful, not neurotic, but certainly, at times, psychotic). And then, at times, windows within painting - microscopic landscapes - homing in on the detail of our own representational (read reproductive) systems. These paintings clone themselves, they hum, resonate - turn towards each other, smiling, greet one another - and then, saying their farewells, move away once more. Each painting here is caught in a relational network of, an interplay with, paintings already painted, and paintings still to come.

6. Sense and nonsense. Sometimes a proliferation of forms, of meanings (almost too much to read), at other times a pale sparseness, a toughness (almost nothing to see). Poetry has always had these two modes (I will break sense by giving you too much...I will break sense by giving you too little). Poetry, here painting, is always inhuman in this sense, always at odds with the world (here, any sense emerges from, and merges with, nonsense). These paintings are indifferent to you as you see yourself reflected in the Spectacle's hall of mirrors. They operate under their own logic, obey their own rules. And what is the relation between language and paint, between word and image? A tension, a mutual interest, but ultimately an incommensurability (you go your way and I shall go mine). Any title here will be a feint, a smoke screen. Words, in this place, are not what they seem.

7. Matter-events. But after all these paintings - like all paintings - are just matter, nothing but matter. They are organised, intentional objects (they are made things in the world), but they go beyond any authorial control (they are cleverer, quicker than their mistress). There is an erotics of painting; of paint, of canvas, of the application of paint to canvas. These paintings evidence a desire given solidity. Fragile, they depict abstract diagrams of states of mind and body. I paint with the light of a pale autumn day. I paint with a brush dipped in moonlight. I am mortal but my paintings are eternal. There is a ritual time of painting, a certain speed of manufacture (these paintings move fast but are painted slow), a whole genetic history that provides the platform for each painting's event. Painting is always a solidification of this human time, and always something that goes beyond this labour.

8. Community. These paintings by Roxy Walsh constitute a gathering, a collectivity (listen very carefully, you can hear the children laughing...). This is my collectivity - you are all my children - that I have made for my own company and now wish to share (painting is always an expanded practice in this sense). When hung together there's really quite a crowd, quite a cast of characters clamouring, albeit softly,

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for attention. These paintings are then a community that calls forth a community (indeed, who are these paintings for? Who are their 'missing people'?). At times this involves a melancholy wistfulness (a looking back to pasts that never were), at others it is something less full of regret and more full of promise (a look forwards towards futures yet to come). If becoming-adolescence names a transitional body, then it is this body, a body on the cusp between these different times, these different states, that is being invoked here.

Simon O'Sullivan, June 2006