

Julie Cockburn

Portraits & Landscapes

23 May - 23 June 2012

Private View

Tuesday 22 May 6 - 8pm

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Smile 1 2012 Embroidery on found painting 42 x 36.2 cm

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Julie Cockburn's embellishment of found paintings and photographs by embroidering, painting and reassembling, delivers the images out of redundancy into a meaningful present. The very stuff of *Portraits and Landscapes* is, indeed, portraits and landscapes. Hand-tinted studio portraits of the 50s show the persistence of lives recorded in an instant: a mother and daughter, the vignettted emanation of a young girl, soft tones of a movie star, and lush landscapes of mountain and lake provide the raw material. Who are the people in these portraits? Where are these places? Little can be deduced from their mute appearances. A locket necklace shows us little of the sitter's biography. The mountain range gives no clues of which tarn, loch or lake lies at its foot.

With striking economy Cockburn breathes life into these moribund found images. Simple additional gestures to the original object, or rearrangement of what was already there, are transformative. Usually this transformation goes beyond recognition of the original, and yet nothing is removed: the new image contains, however partially evident, its old image. It remains too, according to the artist, within its genre. Cockburn's embellishments extend the vocabulary of the images, indicating the limitations of their medium as they pass beyond. Where stitched, for example, sensual texture becomes an adjunct to the visual. Cut and splice in **No Means No** effects a compelling dynamism of a different order to the conventional single shot portrait.

In landscapes **Pylon 1** and **Green and Blue** the modernist technique of appropriation and montage effect a collapse on the surface of the painting, of naturalism into abstraction, depth into flatness and vice-versa. Ellipses are precisely cut out of the canvas. Reassembled and mounted onto board, the colour and texture of these overlapping shapes are pronounced in contrast to the background field. Where reassembly is not precise - perhaps the canvas shrinks or warps - the colour of the support board appears at the seams. This light rendering of pattern is a contingent excess of Cockburn's technique. Where it occurs light marks of negative space outline the ellipses, giving them definition.

If the history of landscape painting is a progressive foregrounding of what had previously been background setting to a narrative or event, this logic is played out to its endgame where the support manifests at the very material surface of the image. The effect is vertiginous: unable to apprehend wholly the new form nor the landscape itself, the viewer oscillates between distance and proximity, simultaneously perceiving depth in fragments of amateurishly rendered three-dimensional pictorial space and the 'all-at-once' inscribed pattern on the surface.



Pylon 1 2012 Altered found oil painting mounted on board 18.7 x 26.4 cm

The cut and splice technique is methodically applied to both landscapes and portraits. In Cockburn's reassembly of portraits - *ostensibly portraits* - one's bodily inclination to identify a face is disrupted by fragmentation. Altered in their new image the viewer might seek the semblance of faces and, remarkably, see several looking back. In portraits such as **The Skeptic** and **The Secret** the complex play between concealing and revealing is dramatised. Cut and splice, gauche gestural strokes and dense rainbow stitching interrupt the view. They are a rude imposition, a denial of viewers' habitual behaviour and easy identification with the subject. In **Pearl Necklace** fragments have dispersed to such a degree that in place of a face is a breach, a breach that is gap, severance and ornament.

Cockburn's engagement with the image is often characterised by forceful tactile language, she 'manipulates, tortures and caresses'. Timeful labour over the image - equal or in excess of its original producer's - makes it the artist's own. Not only does the artist reassemble the image - 'make it new', she establishes an intimate relationship with the materials. Careful cutting, rearranging and stitching takes care and attention over a duration of time. It is this quality of engagement Cockburn wishes to engender in the viewer with the animation **Drawing 1972-2012**. Based on a drawing the artist made at five-years of age, in the animation blots of muted hues change imperceptibly on a looped video. As with many of Cockburn's works, this positive transformation occurs at the cost of its original form, however, a necessary link to the genetic model remains in evidence. From an old image comes a new image: a counter-image.

Text by Jonathan P Watts

Julie Cockburn exhibited as part of the Salon Art Prize 2010 and was selected from a shortlist of 65 artists for the Selectors' prize, supported by John Jones. She studied at Chelsea College of Art and Central St Martins College of Art and Design and has exhibited extensively in the UK, Europe and the United States. Her work is included in the collections of Yale Center for British Art, The Wellcome Collection, British Land and Goss-Michael Foundation as well as numerous private collections. This will be Cockburn's second exhibition at Flowers.