

Looking at the Overlooked

Artist's Statement

Let men busy themselves with all that has to do with great art . . . let women occupy themselves with those kinds of art that they have always preferred. the painting of flowers, those prodigies of grace and freshness which alone can compete with the grace and freshness of women themselves.

Sir Joshua Reynolds

Throughout history, still life painting-the lowest form of artistic life- has been a genre regarded as most appropriate for woman painters. History painting, an exclusively male dominated genre, was highly valued while still life lagged behind other art forms such as portrait, and even animal painting.

Still life's commitment to high focus reality was the source of its distinctiveness but also its comparative limitation. The Academy in the 18th Century, with Sir Joshua Reynolds at its helm, dismissed still life as mere craft, only capable of producing sensuous pleasure and not conducive to higher forms of artistic expression. With the men focusing intently on the historical tableaux of the day still life painting became or more accurately was presented as the only viable option for countless female artists.

Thankfully, women are no longer restricted to the painting of flowers yet still life painting continues to struggle with certain prejudices. Even now, still life is considered inappropriate for the serious or ambitious student. While long since a student, but no less serious or ambitious, I undertook the making of a piece of work entitled Looking at the Overlooked. The piece comprises of 304 small works on board. Text and photographic images appear throughout the piece blending seamlessly with painted images. True to the tradition of still life, the completed works have a strong attention to detail with their subjects referencing the world of the every day life. Yet unlike my predecessors, I am not interested in that which is stereotypically beautiful. Instead, attention is given to routine spaces and the discarded commonplace objects of our quotidian existence. Images more fitting for the excessively commercial and profligate society we occupy today were commodity replaces commodity with a ceaseless rapidity; respect for and need of tradition and time honoured craftsmanship is negligible

The inclusion of the photographic source for the paintings and a reworked reproduction of each painting serve to create a visual conundrum to be navigated in the viewing and subsequent reading of the work. The photographs are ordinary snapshots without aesthetic pretension whose beauty and strength lies in their lack of design and simple reality. The paintings have a drilling clarity, a unified surface of a more or less even spread of pigment sealing the image under a skin that gives it the impression of something technical smooth and perfect – like a photograph. The reproductions have aspects of both which evoke and simultaneously mocks the authenticity of the original. Ultimately all three representations blend seamlessly within the framework of the installation

By virtue of its scale looking at the overlooked commands a presence and demands attention from the viewer. It was my intent to create a large contemporary work of art that owed its very existence to a traditional genre and which, unlike the objects within and their author is not so easily overlooked. I hope the viewer on closer inspection will call into question their initial perception of the work and ultimately the still life genre.

Jennifer Trouton