

English Painting

I am conscious that I paint in England making me an English painter, therefore the language of my paintings is English as I am born of this country; a country with an active Monarchy, an island Monarchy, that suffers from post-colonial ennui. I can only imagine one possible outcome from the luxurious claustrophobic conditions suffered by the Royal Family, that being sovereign paranoia. 'One' heard what happened a stone's throw away, across the channel, when momentum grew, hunger and squalor will make the ordinarily passive get hot under the collar and heads will roll.

Is it to be believed that this green and pleasant land is fecund with such singularity as embodied by the eccentric, or has the soil been seeded by the Monarchy as a divide and rule strategy to deter grouping? And over time this construct of the eccentric has entwined itself around the genetic code of the English. You see, a Frenchman en plein air in Aix-en-Provence poking erratically at mimesis opened a door that was stormed like Black Friday at Target led by Liberté. A frightening prospect to a Monarch who understands the mass opening of minds may spark the question, "Why do we curtsy to such a costly symbol?"

Yet the lone fire of the eccentric burns out leaving nothing but colourful anecdotes and relics too sodden with the ghost of their author that any scavenger would be decried as a mimic. Responding to decree, the eccentric fortifies the Monarch's rule through controlled burning avoiding the flash point. The romantics that walked the City of London's Square Mile were an institution of symptoms: Blake, Turner, Coleridge, Byron, Keats, mad, working class, dissenter, addict, pervert, bipolar and sickly. As a collective they would arguably be a threat to the orthopraxy of thought, singularly their imitable minds follow their lonely narrow private path. What could have lit the blue touch paper of artistic revolution evolved into the damp squib of the Victorians with one eye on detail and the other on revival.

The counterpoint being a unity of those mad with national pride, decked in their raiment of plastic Poundland bowler hats printed with the George Cross chanting Ing-gurr-land, Ing-gurr-land! 'Brit' attached to all cultural export: Brit-pop, Brit-art, Brit-fash, Brit-cetera... the xenophobic prefix signposting exclusion of participation from all but the Brit. A symptom of a post colonial ennui, cultural export as invading force used as a stopgap measure to fill the void left by the globe recovering from its pink rash. With pomp and circumstance cultural export departs these shores with the intention of storming the Billboard charts and plundering the gold at the Oscars. Conversely import is greeted with distrust, ascribing to a foreign ism (the suffix being participatory) would be adulterous for those committed to the prefix of Brit. State-sanctioned grouping around the militarised prefix that labels invading export precipitated a boycott and distrust of the import; this, in conjunction with the programme to neuter creative energy growing beyond the singular, acts to fortify the Monarch's sovereignty leaving the English artist truly isolated.

English artists of old, stripped of agency and marginalised through classification as a misnomer of eccentrics, denoting their singularity thus rendering impotent the possibility of their life's work being built upon. In lieu it is set in aspic, archived in halls of academia, the primary object an oddity that is crutched by biography. Logically, following generations see the path to recognition as an artist, if English, exists through the cosplay of eccentricity: an outward gestural signifying of singularity. Paradoxically, the exteriority of eccentricity clashes with the reserve and repressive

nature of the English, if one cannot enact the state-sanctioned peacock-plumed role of official artist/national treasure isolation is compounded.

In the face of such conditions, as an English painter it brings comfort to know that in the darkest depths of some caves live aquatic creatures without eyes that swim avoiding obstacles and they still are called fish: how beautifully attuned to the interiority of isolation. I contest the vestigial being considered a withered loss, instead I ask: what is gained by the evolutionary deprivation of that which is primary to so many? The compounded isolation experienced over generations by the English artist, like the blind cave fish, has rendered the relational vestigial. A horror vacui like that experienced by those lost at sea or in the desert, the specific state born of the dislocation of self through the loss of external relational registration. Turner knew the horror vacui, it whispered to him to remove both shore and horizon. A symptom not a picturing; rendered unmappable therefore unknowable by the criteria of those whose centring comes from their cypher being a pin on a map, around which all is concentrically placed. And therein lies the rub.

If not for the domineering persistence of surface, that outermost layer of paint understood as destination, insinuating an affirmative process, thus seen as a codified field born to cradle communicative intentions; if not for this, painting would handsomely quarter the English countenance. It is a problem of perception as an affirmative bias is congenital to relational processes and the corollary growth of research populates the map with propositional nodes that act as theoretical registration marks. Yet within the confines of this Island the nucleus of production is built of a negative construction, moving away from all that it cannot be as a result of conditioning to refuse import/input, the only investigative possibilities within the state of the horror vacui are autocannibalistic. If possible to ignore first impressions, painting and the English would make fine bedfellows; after all when painting was sick, rushed to the hospital to be X-rayed, under the skin were innards. These numbles point to the impossibility of a true extraction within painting therefore supporting a negative generative process. The surface is porous, not a solid wall inscribed with coordinates but a permeable membrane; the zero point being the subjectile and each step away from it passes through a deep space of painted stratum, negation upon negation indicated by suffocation pockmarking the surface with burial mounds called pentimenti. The 'no' of the negative construction moves away from the affirmative bureaucracy of research, as research is the inventive traversing between propositional nodes thus a hybrid of selected collective understanding. But 'moving away from' is at the same time moving blindly into an un-relational space and what is notated in these conditions could only be known as visions, noncommunicable as it does not belong to the beholder, an emergence from a deterritorialised space holding no connective grounding, affect not subject. The visionary 'no' affirms the English favour of that which cannot be built upon, that which falls in on itself and offers no friction allowing for accretion. And unlike the idiosyncratic display markings of the eccentric that sign singularity, there is no possibility of ownership of the vision as the horror within the vacuum is caused by the dissolution of self, as there is nothing to correlate oneself to.