

Caravan – Veronica Slater

An Tobar Gallery Mull 11th October - 13th November

In need of a studio space after moving from Brighton to Mull, Veronica Slater adopted an abandoned caravan in Fionnphort - a small fishing village in the Ross of Mull. Seven months later the caravan's exterior has been jauntily wallpapered in blue and white stripes – a folly sitting surprisingly congruous amongst the lobster pots, abandoned white goods and sheep that share the plot. The caravan became more than a temporary studio as the interior was rendered into a febrile swirling 'walk in' painting. Each surface and cupboard is densely worked - Slater's luxuriant paint veers between joyful pattern to darker more layered vistas within the caravan's cupboards and compartments. The surfaces are punctuated by a selection of charity shop china ornaments encased in visceral swirls of globby paint creating tableaus against accretions of glimmering colour. The effect is at first funny in a slightly alarming way, as if you have stumbled across that painter who has finally lost it. However this gives way to something more complex as the adeptness of the painterly spaces and the subtle shifts in mood become more apparent.

The caravan has now been opened for public view to accompany Slater's solo show at Tobermory's An Tobar Gallery. Here the viewer is drawn into the exhibition by the buff coloured floral wallpaper which covers the main gallery wall. Printed with different images of caravans on Mull, the papered wall creates an intimacy providing a thematic and aesthetic touchstone for the work in both sites. The exhibition at An Tobar reveals the artist's continued preoccupation with documenting the island's various caravans - from the well appointed back-garden holiday lets to the disintegrating wrecks of abandoned temporary homes. Suggestive of the passions of the bird-watching fraternity who come to the island for sightings of golden eagles, Slater's collection becomes a taxonomy of common and less common species on a pedagogic chart. The artist has commented on her interest in the way that these images frequently prompt nostalgic personal recollections while attesting to bleaker socio-economic contingencies that have often determined their presence.

The small paintings and technicolor photographs also presented in An Tobar evoke more interiorised pleasures and dramas. The artist's Rococo like sensibility is layered with a tactile expressive language creating a tension which hovers between suggestions of domestic consolations and something more volatile. While not an unfamiliar dichotomy in visual art, this dynamic is nuanced by the specificity of its context on Mull and the transience historically associated with both the local population and waves of holiday makers. The relationship between the 'mobile home' emblematic of certain 20th century social and aesthetic mores and Slater's painterly idiom could have appeared either randomly whimsical or as tedious commentary on the vagaries of class and taste. However the artist has created a body of work that mediates between the notions of what home can be with intimations of comfort, pleasure and anxiety. Slater adroitly combines a seemingly playful response to her environment with rawer emotional undercurrents.

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