



On the Work of Jon Pilkington (Leading Images Astray...)

I visit Jon Pilkington's studio on a beautiful day in South-East London. Over the next hour or so we talk about the artist's approach to painting, the different teaching approaches of each London art school and the problems of flipping artworks (the process whereby dealers make quick profit on emerging artists' work). Pilkington's paintings line the wall, with many more piled on the floor. The studio, like many I have visited in London, is small and windowless. Amid the clutter a group of chromatically intense paintings evoke fantasies of escape. The accumulative effect of the boldly colourful work is more West-Coast America than South-East London.

Like a sunnier take on Raoul De Keyser or a more relaxed Thomas Nozkowski, Pilkington's paintings exist in a nebulous state between the figurative and abstract. Like these forebears, the young artist's paintings teeter on the edge of legibility, resisting easy consumption. At the moment of near-enunciation, Pilkington pulls back. The final image is always indeterminate. Clouds, speech bubbles, zig-zags and palm trees. Pilkington's visual lexicon is recursive, with images and ideas appearing across canvases and morphing in shape and scale. Typically, Pilkington's canvases feel more like collages, aggregated images taken from separate works. A single painting will

have blocks of disparate activity layered side by side. The surfaces are often painted with loose brushwork, allowing the underpainting to come through. Each work is marked by previous failures and false starts. It feels that Pilkington is attempting to lead himself astray, to lose himself in the process of painting.

A touchstone for Pilkington's work could be the German painter Charline Von Heyl. Both artists seek to productively confound the spectator, refusing clarity in favour of a more conflicted monologue. Pilkington's paintings rarely do one thing at a time but form a polyphony of competing approaches. Drawing is an important aspect of his work, and his paintings are worked up from these sketches. If the drawings articulate figurative elements then their subsequent translation onto canvas divorces them from these recognisable motifs. The act of everyday observation is quickly traded for a different type of visual logic: the process of painting is one of distortion. This visual noise undermines the efficiency of looking – Pilkington's paintings want to trip you up.

Pilkington puts art history on speed dial, riffing on various Modernist antecedents. For figures such as Maria Lind, Jan Verwoert and Doug Ashford, abstraction at the beginning of the 21st Century has invigorated itself by embarking on new objectives. Pilkington belongs to a new generation of artists who have a more protean approach to the legacy of abstraction. Looking at his paintings in his tiny studio in South-East London, it is clear that all is up for grabs. For Pilkington the act of painting is akin to deep sea diving, and we're never quite sure what the artist will bring to the surface. Did you know that last year scientists discovered 20,000 new species, many of which were in the deepest parts of our oceans? This fact certainly runs counter to the script of ecological and cultural exhaustion. It reminds us that there are images that need inventing and paintings that haven't yet been painted. Pilkington's industrious practice brings new focus to the possibilities of abstraction and it will be fascinating to see where the artist is headed next.

George Vasey

Jon Pilkington

27 March–2 May 2015

Thursday to Saturday 12–6 pm and by appointment

Private view 27 March 2015 6–9pm

For all further information please contact the gallery.