

Nigel Cooke

Introduction

Released in conjunction with Nigel Cooke's 2012 exhibition at the Andrea Rosen Gallery

Andrea Rosen Gallery is delighted to present our fourth solo exhibition of Nigel Cooke's work featuring seven new, large-scale paintings. In these new works, both the pictorial landscape and the surface of the painting become charged grounds for negotiation, where the suspicion of the image itself is actually the critical function of the picture. In a fugue of abstraction and representation, depth and surface, micro and macro, the remarkable slippage between gestural waves of paint and fantastically rendered figures, creatures and objects, these epically scaled paintings evolve Cooke's fundamental interest in the theory and practice of painting to a compelling hybrid state of generation and destruction.

The impact of Cooke's exceptional fluency with paint is -as always- immediate, but perhaps what is most remarkable is how with each body of work Cooke radically pushes the boundaries of painting and our historically loaded expectations of painting, by both setting up and undermining these expectations. Abstraction and representation vie for primacy, each ultimately failing and succeeding in turns. As Cooke describes, "In multiple cycles of destruction and renewal, the wave storms crash into the imagery and wipe it out, leaving me the task of rebuilding the picture." Through this intrepid process of addition, subtraction and obliteration, each painting holds its own specific tension, and reflects the risk of being pushed to the brink of destruction or failure. A particular historical springboard for these new works was de Kooning's assertion that a successful painting had "no holidays" or caesuras- places where the painting was allowed to rest or to breathe. Digesting this in the studio, Cooke made one of the first paintings from this body of work "No Holidays," in which the space is entirely sucked up by paint, where each mark quite literally becomes both a support and a threat to the pictorial space. Even the hapless vacationers who inhabit the pictorial plane are part of this ambivalence, asserting their sovereignty while on the brink of being washed away.

Acknowledging the velocity of painting, the vitality of the impact of the paint itself and the perverse psychology of the strokes that make it, Cooke's paintings deliriously push and pull us from layers of depth and detail to extreme surfaces of impasto. Despite the emphasis on the abstract, nevertheless, we are always returned to the inner workings of the characters that inhabit the picture- the lovers, holiday makers, sailors, sirens, clowns, chefs, half-wits and smoking flower people. There is a fascinatingly unique temporality and often seemingly blasé self-possession in each subject and object that survives the storm. The complexity of the layering of subject, narrative and the psychology of abstraction allows for an unusually protracted experience of each work, and seems to open a new chapter of painting. As Cooke puts it, "When does meaning get into the picture and convert the struggle into a second picture, outside of the mere paint, drawing the mind into a story, a setting, a drama? Why can't abstraction happen? And why, simultaneously, is it always already there?"

In conjunction with the show, we are delighted to announce the publication of a book of Nigel Cooke's writings, *Words*, which includes an edit of his PhD Thesis, *The Ambivalence of the Undead, or the Nature of Painting's Essence*, as well as a selection of shorter works originally published in *Tate Etc.*, *Art Review*, *Turps Banana*, *Transmission Annual—Hospitality*, and in a publication on Ansel Krut.

Nigel Cooke has exhibited at a wide range of international institutions, including a recent solo exhibition at the Goss Michael Foundation in Dallas Texas, and a forthcoming solo exhibition at the Douglas Hyde Gallery, Dublin. He has had solo exhibitions at Moderna Museet, Stockholm in 2007; The Museum of Fort Worth, Fort Worth, TX and South London Gallery, London both in 2006, and Art Now, Tate Britain, London in 2004. His work belongs to several public collections, such as the Dallas Museum of Art, Dallas; Moderna Museet, Stockholm; Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; Museum of Modern Art, New York; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; Tate, London; National Gallery of Victoria, Victoria, and the UCLA Hammer Museum, Los Angeles. Cooke received a PhD in Fine Art from Goldsmith's College, London and an MA in Fine Art from the Royal College of Art, London. Cooke lives and works in Kent, England.

This essay downloaded from nigelcooke.net is copyrighted and protected under international copyright laws. This material may not be reproduced in any form or manipulated without prior written permission from the artist and/or the copyright holder(s). Copyright © 2013 Nigel Cooke.