

Remaining Mysteries

by Gerhard Charles Rump

When Alice had listened to „Jabberwocky“ she was bewildered. Something had been killed. That much she had understood. When we look at Sue Hayward’s new paintings, which pursue the elusive and partly dematerialise the material, we are bewildered, too, but also enchanted. Something has been painted – that much we understand. We are made to rescutinise what we think we have seen, we have to probe into the fabric of our associations: Is there someone lying on the couch, swimming in the pool, hunting in the woods? We can only make sure by using our perception closely following colour and light, composition and form – and these fantastic four will furnish a background enabling us to understand the manifold (we borrow this expression here from modern physics) of the diaphanous figures who quietly and obviously happily live in Sue Hayward’s images. Not that getting interested in them is difficult. Contrariwise – they are seductive, enchanting, lure us into the world they represent without really depicting it. And just in the moment we think we have solved their riddles and explained their mystery we have to admit that they are still there, almost untouched.

Sue Hayward’s way of painting is tenderly poetic, but often also strongly expressive, but it is exquisite all the time. She doesn’t paint on canvas or on boards. She paints on a diaphanous fabric, a gauze, which makes the (light) shadow of a figure become one with itself, obliterating all material character, introducing a new kind of inhabitant of pictorial space. The wafting, apparition-like figures (let’s call them “shafigs”, from shadow and figure, for short), nevertheless fit in perfectly into Sue Hayward’s pictorial world. The blend into the fabric of the image as if they were as natural as all the other things to be seen. And, of course, they are, as the nature of everything to be seen in the paintings is painting. And the shafigs constitute an instant of painting, too.

It’s Sue Hayward’s mastery of her media which prevents the shafigs to look like cut-outs. They are fully-fledged, fully integrated pictorial figures. Yes, the area they cover is often also partly covered with paint, but as a principle they are painted “in the negative”, as the damar resin or wax or the mixture of both with pigments Sue Hayward uses as paint stops at a line which is both the edge of the painted area and the one-dimensional contour of the figure. The use of wax will make the appearance of the colours matte, not shiny, giving them more body. A more real presence without denying that they are painted figures, or, as it were, painted landscapes.

They represent contemporary, albeit anonymous, persons, whether in a bikini and swimming in a pool or in outdoor gear. Their situational existence is transformed into art and therefore they are turned into very composite allegories or plain symbols for human existence, re-enacting chapters from the never-ending story of the *conditio humana*, the human condition. Their existence represents existence as such. Here, there, and everywhere. There are a lot of relationships touched on: Man an animal, man and woman, man and fellow-men, man and history and so forth. The *dramatis personae* connect to any kind of the beholder’s existence. We all have a chance to relate to them, of at least partly recognizing ourselves in them. They serve a number of purposes. They oppose a hollow, a visually negative form against the positive and materially compact rest of the image. By being diaphanous they may be compared to silver mist hovering over a meadow in the morning, but at the same time their see-through quality will induce changing and varying effects of light and space depending on the beholders position and the light in which they are being seen. Their neighbouring opaque parts may cast a shadow which can be discerned through the gauze, adding a however fleeting and evasive spatial dimension not there before. And they dematerialise matter. They are physically bound to matter, but visually they transcend it, opening new dimensions of experience.

They prove themselves to be manifolds, if we can use this analogy. A manifold (or y-clept “Calabi-Yau-Space”, CYS) is a bundle of not unfolded spatial dimensions. We can experience three of those, but physicists think there are ten of them. And they can mathematically

describe their properties. Seven haven't had the chance to unfold, but they are certainly there (see Brian Greene's "Elegant Universe"). They are cuddled up in these CYS, just like the figures' possible characteristics if painted in the positive are sleeping inside the shafigs. This can also be called visual poetry.

Let's have a look at composition and iconography, too. It's definitively not Pop iconography, although dominated by everyday experience. Maybe not of all Europeans – Sue Hayward comes from down under – but near enough. It is something between Alex Katz and the New Leipzig School, but started earlier than the latter and is more elaborate than Katz. It's Sue Hayward, after all. The composition is highly classical, a visual vehicle to the goal of somehow understanding the imagery. What's in the middle is important, the golden section stands in for harmony and so forth – just like in the Old Masters.

Similar principles govern her 3D works. Her steles, higher than most people are tall, often kept in white, have a peculiar presence, like a strong mint. They beckon you on, invite you to explore their properties, yet these sculptural objects keep their distance, too. Of course the transparent parts are even deeper, constitute an almost immaterial tunnel into matter, and there is a kind of semi-open box integrated, for housing a related, compact and dense object. They can be seen as a plurification of the images, yet just as poetic as these are, always in search of that special character, that special moment in time which we think makes all the difference. It sure does.