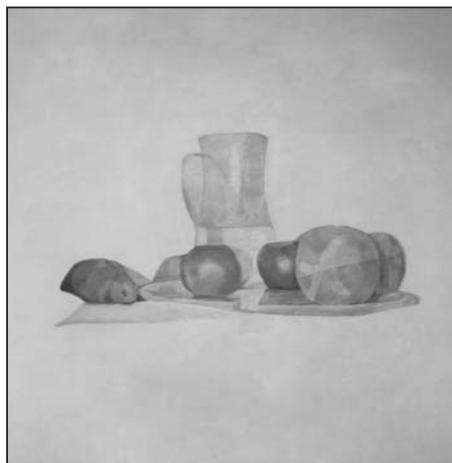


Still Life



Real Life



Still Life by Luc Tuymans

Abby Jackson founder of Oval Stuckists, explains what Stuckism is and why she chose to set up her own group of Stuckist artists.

Stuckism is a radical international art movement that stands for new figurative painting with ideas and which is anti the pretensions of conceptual art. Stuckism is famous for its artist clown demos outside the Tate, Stella Vine's streaky Princess Di and Tracey Emin's fervid insults to Billy Childish. But what do we really know about the significance of this fringe art movement?

When I think about being a stuckist painter, I imagine an artist holed up in a dank London studio, a single shaft of light beams onto their face. They sit motionless at the base of a blank canvass and then something happens. I feel the potential of a

devastating aesthetic, some kind of private engagement - the kind that is apparent in most stuckist paintings.

A painting typical of the Stuckist style is Wolf Howard's 'Superpowerless'. It is the artist's response to 9/11. Rich with honesty, this is a humanistic piece that evokes our worst fears; the intensity of utter loss, the sheer frustration that comes with it, and the urgent need to find a solution to a situation as hopeless as any act of terrorism. The entire canvass, though small, pulses with a sense of totality, not only is a moment in time captured but a melting pot of emotions. This is a painting about the complete despair brought about by an inescapable fact. Wolf Howard's 'Superpowerless' is a true testament to the international art movement. This piece best illustrates the often intangible essence that is Stuckism.

In stark contrast I want to draw attention to a non-Stuckist response to 9/11, Luc Tuymans's 'Still Life'. The painting appears to be just that: still and a little dreary. The dimensions of 'Still Life' are colossal in comparison to Howard's 'Superpowerless' - does this in anyway act as metaphor for the sheer scale of the event? Or is it a typical reflection of every other artist today scaling up banal images on huge canvasses because every other artist is doing the same?

Tuymans chooses to avoid his subject matter, whereas Howard, as a Stuckist, approaches his subject head on. I could pick at Tuymans's apples and oranges and then toy over the metaphoric relationships with 9/11, but I just can't be bothered. Still life leaves me cold - perhaps that is intentional? To be honest I just don't care.

As one of modern arts key styles, Stuckism demonstrates a subtle alchemy that is at the heart of the movement. However, not everyone has the foresight to recognize the qualities demonstrated. Sadly, the art establishment continues to be led by fashion and is still in favour of works such as 'Artemis', which the Tate insists is actually a painting. This recent acquisition comes just after the rejected donation of one hundred and sixty Stuckist paintings that were offered to the Tate's director. Trustees: 'We do not feel the work is of sufficient quality in terms of accomplishment, innovation or originality of thought to warrant preservation in perpetuity in the national collection'.

It is clear that after the huge success of The Stuckists' 'Punk Victorian', a major exhibition at the Walker Gallery (a National public Museum), that the Tate's hasty decision to write off this astonishing art movement without even seeing one of the works in the flesh, will cost the public dearly.

Without this important contribution from this exuberant art movement we are left with a residue of the same old faddish works featuring Elephant Crap, Masking Tape and Plywood, which instead of paving the way are, in fact, crying out for innovation. All this is encouraged by a questionable authority, which cites the above as sufficient enough in terms of accomplishment, to invest vast sums of public money in it. In a relentless quest to shock conceptualism through its poverty of ideas, it has become a commodity cashing in on bewilderment and has little else to offer.

This is why, as a recent graduate, a pro-painting group screamed the future to me. This is why if I was to see a dead shark washed up on the beach it would be just that - a dead shark. However, if I saw a painting in a skip, I would still recognize it as a piece of art. We are hugely affected by the images we see but how we choose to collude with the art is the difference between the medium and the language of art that we are presented with. What we interpret as important in art is also influenced by what is happening in the real world, and this is why Stuckism appeals to me deeply because, to put it simply, I can absolutely relate to it. Because of this I can demonstrate a higher purpose in my own work. A purpose which I found hard to define when in art school and one that I find impossible to detect when I observe most other noted works exhibited across London.

Painting left: Luc Tuymans, Still Life, 2002
Oil on Canvas, 347x 500cm
Copyright The Saatchi Gallery,
Exhibit Shown in The Triumph of Painting; Part.1
Painting right: Superpowerless by Wolf Howard
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