

INTRODUCTION

Trying to define the source of that loneliness which he felt every serious work of art should contain, the Italian metaphysical painter de Chirico came to see it as lying in that "beatitude of contemplation produced by the ingenious construction and combination of forms whether they be still lifes come alive or figures become still, the double life of a still life." An acute description of the Surrealist moment, it is a remark which has continued to echo down our artistically self-conscious century with undiminished poetic resonance, as true to our understanding of Warhol or Beuys, Louise Bourgeois or Stanley Spencer, for example, as it ever was to Picasso or Duchamp, Balthus or Magritte, or de Chirico himself of course.

Aside from its subject matter of figures and still lifes, none of this might seem, at first sight, to have all that much to do with a painter so apparently academically inspired and technically traditional as Nicolas Granger-Taylor. Yet, without in any way wishing to burden a young artist with such imposing (and perhaps, even to him, somewhat surprising) antecedents, the figures and objects – sometimes both – in paintings like *Seated Nude* (plate VIII) or *Still Life with Paint Tubes* (plate VI), only begin to take on their full lyrical life when thought of in these, more unexpected, terms. Because, for all their outward appearance of objective realism, these are works that in their intense concern to convey both the magical physicality of objects and, at the same time, the human body as one among many mysterious objects, tacitly acknowledge the truth of those elements of 20th C. metaphysics that de Chirico was articulating c.1920. For it is here, by the most unexpected and doggedly obstinate and unfashionable of routes, the prolonged and thoughtful scrutiny of the form and structure, physical qualities and relation of a few limited objects – some bread rolls in a paper bag, a naked body in a room, cup, spoon, glasses and notebook on a table top – that the works unmistakably possess a contemporaneity of feeling.

It has something to do with the length and depth of his looking and recording – one painting can amount to over a hundred hours of observation from life – which, at times, reminds you of nothing other than an astronomer patiently scrutinising endless photographs of the heavens for super novae in order to unravel the future of the universe, or a biologist examining the images revealed by an electron microscope for one of those moments when chemical non-life moves to biological life. John Constable, living in the Romantic Age when the study of Nature was as exciting to the artist as it was to the

scientist, saw nothing unusual in this regarding painting as “a science [which] should be pursued as an enquiry into the laws of nature”. In our own time perhaps these concordances of thought and feeling between art and science may become, in fact need to become, the natural order of things in order for us to co-exist more happily with the world we temporarily share with other objects, organic and non-organic.

All that is going out on the kind of speculative limb Granger-Taylor has no intention of asking us to attempt, but it does, at the same time, seem to make other more contentious issues in his paintings, above all that of the eroticism of his female nudes, somehow beside the point. He does not, as a man, deny the sensual pleasure he feels in painting them (they would not be very good if he did) but he is at pains to point out that the poses he arrives at, always very much in a deliberate and often lengthy collaboration with the models themselves, are, finally, the outcome of a need to express the particular physical character and form of that particular anatomy, its ‘objectness’ if you like, as truthfully as he can. His own unsentimentally observed *Nude Self-Portrait* (Biography inset) is perhaps the best evidence of this actual impartiality and directness of approach – objects and living beings, we all create our own forms and spaces – and therein lies a large part of our individuality and humanity.

Nicholas Usherwood – February 1999

Acknowledgements

Nicholas Granger-Taylor’s fourth solo exhibition is a retrospective of the period 1993 – 1999. I would like to thank all of the collectors who have helped to make this exhibition possible by agreeing to loan their paintings.

Offer Waterman

The following works are for sale: Plate XX, Plate XXI