

TERRENCE M FFYFFE – A NICE SURPRISE by Edward Lucie Smith

Every now and then even a hardened old lag in the art business – yes, folks, I mean me – gets a nice surprise. Last month an artist I've known for quite a long time -Terence Ffyffe, aka Terry Ffyffe – asked me to come and look at a new series of paintings. So I trailed out to a studio he uses in the far East End of London, expecting some pleasure, but nothing resembling a major jolt. Terry is of mature years, an immigrant from Oz, and till now he has been known chiefly for religious paintings, in a solidly realist style. He has had quite a bit of exposure over the years, and has had success in major competitions, notably the Discerning Eye.

I'd recently seen some small works of his that suggested that he was changing direction, transiting to something new. Then I got to his new work place, and my reaction was 'Wow!'

He showed me a whole series of much larger paintings, from a series he calls Cosmic Art. These were whirling, dynamic abstract designs – a total break with anything major of his that I had encountered previously.

Big leaps in style are not unknown among major modern and contemporary artists, Picasso built his career on them. Just recently, however, the art being produced, both here and elsewhere, particularly in more traditional media, has seemed to be pretty stagnant. For example, all those self-portraits of the great Mr Baselitz, presented by grand commercial galleries such as White Cube and Gagosian. Major museums throughout the world now seem to be stuffed with them. But at least one thinks, each time one sees yet another one: "Yea, well after all – the guy can paint."

Most of the action, however, now seems to be focused on technological innovation – things you can do on the computer, or only see in finished form on the computer. Those at least are indubitably new.

Meanwhile, Tate Modern, in its new wing – more restaurant spaces and meeting spaces than actual gallery space, but who's complaining? – seems determined to promote new forms as opposed to what it thinks of as old forms: performance, installations, video. Though the paradox here is that at least some of these supposedly new forms have a very long history behind them. Where performance is concerned, for example, I'm pretty sure the men and women of the Stone Age did performances, as well as making those old-fashioned fancy pictures on the walls of their caves. Maybe even a bit of public human sacrifice, like ISIS in the Middle East today. Mother Tate wasn't there to tell them which form of activity pointed more directly to the future, so they were happy to do both.

Ffyffe's show runs until 9th June. Hours are restricted 10am-4pm Monday-Friday. See it if you can.

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