

Wildwood

GREG WOOD

...on the art of Greg Wood

'The world eternally turns round; all things therein are incessantly moving, the earth, the rocks of Caucasus, and the pyramids of Egypt, both by the public motion and their own. Even constancy itself is no other but a slower and more languishing motion. I cannot fix my object; 'tis always tottering and reeling by a natural giddiness: I take it as it is at the instant I consider it; I do not paint it's being, I paint its passage.'

Montaigne

Like Von Guerard before him, Greg Wood has responded to the ineffable phenomena of the landscape in such a way that the ideas within the image always remain infinitely inconclusive. The light of the clearing in the midst of the dark wood, the well-tended place in the wilderness, painted with an eloquent silence that calls forth the vital energy of traditional topoi – everything visible speaks of this open secret.

*'And this our life exempt from public haunt,
Finds tongues in trees, books in the running brooks,
Sermons in stones, and good in every thing.'*

William Shakespeare, As You Like it 2.1

Cloaked in the genre of a regional landscape practice, Greg Wood's paintings are abstract and stylized; they have little to do with observational painting, naturalism or realism. His works are pictorially consistent, often repeating a compositional format that includes pared-back forms centred in a middle ground, shifting horizon lines that divide the middle space of his pictures, or a horizon that hovers close to the bottom of the picture plane; with foregrounds that are often slithers of ground, and swathes of open sky to constitute the background, the viewer is often implicated within the work.

Within these formal structures there lies a rich vocabulary of painting; they are highly crafted compositions built of infinite space and obscure form. Wood's use of muted colour is sparing. Crafting softened forms through subtle shifts in tone, they reveal a deep sense of space and are a triumph in distilling the complexity of atmospheric experiences; standing in front of these works we are at once encouraged to walk through and explore, our toes sink deep into the cool sod of earth.

This in-depth exploration of a limited set of rudimentary visual elements gets played out from painting to painting. These landscapes don't offer any overt symbolism, however distance and isolation are employed as structural and psychological devices: this is a personally familiar environment with a touch of the melancholy ease of forbears such as Caspar David Friedrich. Wood's lofty clouds, winter foliage and heavy light exhibit a visual acuity that keeps his subjects from revealing too much.

Spending time with each painting, enables us to draw on our own memories and varied experiences of wild places, however, the power of these paintings lies in their ability to capture the essence of the location without the need to rely on a didactic depiction. They could be any wild place, our interiority fueled through a process of identification.

Wood works on multiple pieces at once, and although the hanging arrangement throughout the process of making and public exhibition only exists for a short time, there is a moment of shimmering interplay among the paintings. Each is a part of a connected, un-verbalised narrative, seemingly grounded by the gravity of topos: an experience that is reliant on people's own memories and histories, on the power of colour and atmosphere as well as the passage of time. As a body of work, it has an enhanced capacity to encourage us to view and engage with the subject in this new way; to move beyond seeing to a state of experiencing.

Mining the personal by way of the oblique, His paintings convey a sense of self and its privacies, abstract and yet faithful to ideas about origin – as much as they are about painting, they approach a concept called "home" – the place where being is formed, where we first begin to think about who we are, the double-sided question of leaving home, and the possibility of longing for it.

His paintings take up a lineage, from Cezanne to Morandi, a world where light registers an emotional state and colour marks the temperament of an inconstant world. These landscapes reveal the empathetic potential of colours and neutral greys, depicted in tender forms that refuse conclusiveness: he manages to capture the flux of the daily and the interruption of simply being.

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