

Alice Boyle

Coming Alive

Linlithgow Burgh Halls

Until 13th October 2019

An artist's studio is perhaps the ultimate space in which to garner information about their working practices, inspiration and methods. Alice Boyle's studio in St Margaret's House art centre in Edinburgh offers many clues about the work of this vivacious and colourful 38-year-old painter. There are books about Karel Appel, the Cobra Group, American Abstract Expressionism and Egon Schiele; various 'to do' lists; and an impressive self-made time-line of world history and major global cultural movements; and large, ordered stacks of paintings, mainly in acrylics on hardboard. Boyle even does her own framing, executing meticulously accurate mitre-joints with a cross-cut saw.

Like many younger contemporary artists, Boyle has had to treat her work as an artist as a professional business, where she manages her own social media, publicity, photography, printing, and exhibition organisation. She is savvy with her finances and has a strong instinct for networking and media contacts. She has an impressive following on Instagram, Facebook and Twitter, working hard on the business of keeping her followers up to date with her activities. Such devotion has resulted in sales of her work to buyers as far afield as San Francisco and New York.

Boyle originally trained in architecture but found the profession too orderly, predictable and time-consuming. She turned to painting because of its immediacy, its colour and its unpredictability, although vestiges of the architectural still recur in her painterly techniques, where, for example, she builds up the texture of her hardboard surfaces with three layers of different plaster, prior to painting. When a layer of paint is applied to the overlapping, merging plaster coats, the resulting colours and textures are unforeseeably different.

Her recent body of work, created in the eighteen months or so since the birth of her son, is appropriately titled 'Coming Alive', although the term also resonates with other inferences. The starting point for these vivid, technicolour (sometimes fluorescent) figurative works is a

serious of pencil sketches drawn in a state of mind where, Boyle says, she has trained herself “not to think”. The imagery, drawn loosely, but not randomly, contains multiple anthropomorphic and zoomorphic forms – small figures, sometimes in isolation and sometimes linked together in action or dialogue. These, in turn, then find their way into other, coloured, sketchbooks, where the compositions and ideas are more fully worked.

One piece, predominantly in aquamarine and fluorescent yellow, shows two forms, recognisably in a state of tension and animation, with the title ‘Do You Still Find Me Attractive?’. Another work, with a similar energy, depicts a dialogue under the heading ‘Your Nonchalance is Really Winding Me Up’, while another is given the moniker, ‘Shit, I did not Mean to Say That’. Indeed, it’s difficult not to invent a narrative based on the punchy, sometimes humorous titles. The title of the story would read something like, ‘Young Working Couple, Overtired and Emotional (With A New Baby), Struggle to Keep on Top of Things (Like Everyone Else), Thus Proving There is Nothing Original in Human Relationships.’

Boyle sees her forms, motifs and situations as archetypal, believing that the scenarios are lived by generations of humans and that there is really nothing new under the sun, as far as human behaviour is concerned.

Part of the thinking underlying this body of work came from the venue. When Boyle realised, she had the use of the Burgh Halls in Linlithgow, a building which dates to 1670 but with significant Georgian additions, including two light, airy gallery rooms, she could become more expansive in the scale of her work, as well as the use of colour. She has created around 80 works but the selection for the final hang will be reduced to about 35. The ultimate selection takes place in the venue itself, although, as in all other aspects of her meticulous planning, Boyle already has a strong sense of which pieces will work in the space.

Boyle’s last show ‘Think Less, Feel More’, in 2016, in Edinburgh’s New Town. was more or less a sell-out. The location helped, but with Boyle’s dedication, professionalism and impressive list of contacts there is no reason to believe that this show should not go the same way.

GILES SUTHERLAND