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NEIL STOKOE

ART

On the scene for over five decades, Neil Stokoe has never placed a definition on his own oeuvre, leaving room for different – even opposite – interpretations on the viewer's part. Although at first glance they may appear anything but equivocal, Stokoe's paintings in fact exude a sense of persistent ambiguity and ambivalence that leaves us in what we may call "a state of percipient inquiry."

On display at the Piper Gallery until April 27th, *All Things Must Pass* brings together a selection of Stokoe's latest work confronting themes of mortality and loneliness, suffering and pain; in a world that seems to have forgotten how transient life is, the artist reminds us our own fragility and vulnerability. Not surprisingly, the "sense of the tragic" emerging from the paintings is implicit, indirect and far from plain, but no less effective in achieving its purpose.



Neil Stokoe, *Renunciation* (2001), 213 x 188 cm, Oil on Canvas



Neil Stokoe, *Requiem* (2012), 198 x 198 cm, Oil on Canvas

Among the works on display is *Renunciation* (2001); recalling images of Christ deposed from the cross, it displays a body covered with a shroud. The sense of grief and sorrow gives way to different feelings as soon as we glimpse, in the lower part of the painting, a cloven hoof. Similar to *Renunciation* and working as a metaphor for the lack of control within our lives, *Presence* (2012) presents the viewer with a man – or a woman? – wrapped in a plastic sheet, unable to move. *Ritual* (2012) shows what appears to be a domestic scene; yet, almost immediately we discern something disconcerting in the subject, and the "domestic tranquillity" turns into something vaguely perverse and obscene. Echoing Robert Capa's reportage imagery of war and political protest, *Encounter II* (2011) seems to epitomize our vulnerability to the will of other men, while *Encounter I* (2011) depicts a frantic and hazy scene, "shot" from the point of view of a security camera. In *Requiem* (2013), the heavy, spiralled monolith/staircase may allude to life inescapably turning on itself; one of the most enigmatic and evocative paintings, *Whither from Whither* to (2012) depicts a group of people aimlessly running between two expanses – or side panels – that can be seen as a reference to life's voids. *Two Figures Within A Conservatory* (2012) is equally enigmatic; a barrage of spiky foliage obstructs the view, and we cannot help but wonder whether the two figures in the middle of the painting appear to be engaging in a sexual intercourse or rather in an act of violence.

Born in 1935 in Bowburn, County Durham, Neil Stokoe graduated from the Royal College of Art, London in 1964. A part-time Lecturer in Foundation Course at Wimbledon School of Art until 2000, he currently lives and works in London. Selected exhibitions include: Langham Gallery, London (2012); *In this Vale of Tears*, Langham Gallery, London (2011); Pilgrim Gallery, London (2004); *Death, Sex and Ageing*, Pilgrim Gallery, London (2003); *Out of a Clear Blue Sky*, Pilgrim Gallery, London (2002).

Neil Stokoe – *All Things Must Pass* will be running until April 27th at the Piper Gallery, 18 Newman Street, London W1T 1PE.

www.thepipergallery.com

Words by Jacopo Nuvolari