

# THE HARKER

AN ONLINE ARTS MAGAZINE

## Art: Neil Stokoe: All Things Must Pass



Cristina Ramos González

I recall the feeling I had on my first reading of Dostoyevsky's *Notes from the Underground*. I had the same feeling when I met with the paintings that Neil Stokoe has been working on for the last 10 years at The Piper Gallery in central London. In both Dostoyevsky's book and Stokoe's paintings, the central figure is the antihero. The 'underground' of the mind is the treacherous terrain into which Stokoe delves deep, exposing the daily realities of pain and tragedy.

Essentially, explaining his paintings is like explaining the ineffable that we all know. Despite the fact that each painting has a powerful sense of action, what it is beyond the scene remains consciously ambiguous as in *Ritual or Renunciation*. The titles of the paintings reinforce this idea, not giving any extra information, and it is for the viewer to make up their own mind.

The use of the large scale in most of the pieces enhances the power of the fuss, and Stokoe manifests a strong sense of the canvas composition and its structure. The black panels to either side in paintings such as *Whither from Whither to* and *Shrouded Figure*, strengthen the sense of *mise-en-scène* but are also reminiscent of religious paintings from Western culture, which gives a disgruntled feeling considering that it is a disturbing image, far away from the security of visual religious imagery.

Indeed, one of the most prominent features from Stokoe's paintings is the sense of inhibiting, of the irritating. They depict our vulnerability in a society in which death it is often a taboo and the human body is more and more built up to live longer. But Stokoe reminds us that not everything can be controlled, starting from the will of the human being.

Compositionally, another special characteristic is that Stokoe brings together the human appearance with dynamic architectural features. The controlled geometric formality frames the scene, giving a sense of domesticity and making the painting enthralling.

In this way, *Requiem* (pictured) is an architecturally articulated painting with a strong sense of action. It could be easily an image from a David Lynch film, a disorientating palimpsest of encounters and hypotheses. Again, the viewer finds his or herself pondering the lack of control in their own life.

The themes chosen by Stokoe are dark because we live in murky times, even though this idea is largely hidden. His palette is rich in earthy hues and different shades of black. This formal feature is emphasised by the fact that the gallery space has been painted grey, making it the perfect atmosphere to display Stokoe's paintings.

Forging a career as a painter for over 50 years, Stokoe is still searching his own path and this exhibition proves that it's not a disappointing one.

*Neil Stokoe's 'All The Things Must Pass' ran at The Piper Gallery until the 26 April – follow the gallery on Twitter @ThePiperGallery*