

THE PIPER GALLERY

Neil Stokoe – All Things Must Pass

Friday 22nd March – Saturday 27th April 2013

All Things Must Pass looks at Neil Stokoe's recent paintings that address acute feelings of pain, despair and loneliness. Often on a large scale, Stokoe's works are both haunting and surreal, offering profound statements. His paintings are corporeal, focusing on the actuality and physicality of their environments.

Recently, Stokoe has begun using black as the predominant colour on his palette, with its prevailing association of mortality and incipient danger. As Francis Bacon said, 'We all have to be conscious of the possible catastrophe which could hit us at any given moment of the day'. The sense of the tragic that many read in Stokoe's paintings is more implicit than explicit. He considers that everyday life is full of anguish and, as a realist painter, it is a natural conclusion that his work reflects this.

It can take Stokoe decades to find the perfect images from which to work and, often, his final statement is a conceptual amalgamation that is the result of long rumination. Over time, these paintings have become darker whilst embracing a more universal perspective – concentrating on questions of mortality alongside earlier themes. Stokoe's trajectory has never been a smooth one but a path of constant revisiting earlier subjects in an attempt to produce a more concise and poignant statement. To this end, the microcosm of domesticity has been continually intertwined with the macrocosm of universality and, thus, his artistic concerns have existed simultaneously across parallel planes.

His triptychs have a powerful emotional resonance that reverberates between the three panels with a persistent staccato tempo based on tonal and colour relationships. The interplay between themes, subjects and formal values reinforces the works' emotional stance and power. It is unusual for Stokoe's work to be devoid of figures but, in his recent staircase paintings, rhythm successfully flows across the empty spaces.

Stokoe never places a definition or set reading on his own works – he intends the viewers' interpretation to be flexible and fluctuating, allowing the forms to have their own tangible existence through an ordered, concrete image. With this in mind, he aims for his works to leave us in a state of percipient inquiry. It is this unknown context that makes his works so fascinating. In *Whither from Whither to* we see figures running between two black expanses – coming from nowhere and going nowhere. Structure is very important to Stokoe and his ordered forms juxtaposed with allusive content add poignancy to the images and reflect the enigmatic duality of existence. The works are all united by their focus on the actual – the physicality of both the human body and the visceral properties of paint.