

Bohemia Galleries 16th March 9th April 2012

Chris Gollon: Master of Change

Innovative, unique and thought provoking spring to mind when looking at the works of established British artist Chris Gollon, quickly followed by humorous, challenging and fascinating. Gollon is an artist unafraid to take risks or to experiment with his work; he is wholly and refreshingly unaffected by trends in the art world and produces pieces that are achingly honest and true to his ideology. This being the constant exploration of expressing 'humanness' from the robustness of the body to the frailty of the soul. Walking into a gallery full of Gollon's paintings is akin to journeying into a different realm, where everything is slightly off kilter and the party of life never ceases. It is also a privilege. His characters are compelling, often dryly humorous, sometimes poignant, frequently ebullient and rarely straightforward. Gollon's paintings are not for the lazy art enthusiast, they are not, generally, pretty pictures, but are defined by their complexity in both content and technique. These are paintings that demand a level of inquiry, and the more they are considered, the more they reveal.

Gollon has worked almost exclusively in acrylic paints for the last twenty years experimenting with the technical aspects of this medium, and print making. Most definitely he has absorbed subtle Old Master techniques using multiple, delicate layers of washes and glazes then adding in printmaking techniques, using rollers and rags, linear detail and even occasionally sand and textured materials. Recently he has moved into a different area of experimentation, this time with oil paints returning to the medium he used over two decades ago. In his delightfully unassuming way Gollon attributes this change to when he was Artist in Residence at Durham University in 2011 and encountered another artist painting with oils. The sharply evocative smell of oil paints inspired him to start using the medium again. Like the content of his paintings, the explanation runs a little deeper. While acrylics lend themselves to pure and crystalline colour, oil paints have a richness and presence, a depth and texture that gives them added visual weight. Gollon's current experimental phase is to combine these two mediums to create images where the colour has brilliance and substance.

This is seen in *Singer of Sad Songs*, which is oil paint partially applied over an acrylic base, and forms part of the *Love* series. It is in his use of black in this painting where his experimentation is played out. Black is often present in Gollon's work and is core to his continual quest for expression. Significantly he manipulates the colour to create either areas of infinity seen in his acrylics, or to be multi-dimensional and textured, as seen in the oils. The Singer's hair and eyes for example have an energy and presence that is lacking in the jealous figure seen in the painting *Envy*. *Envy* is an acrylic work and also part of the *Love* series. In this Gollon has deliberately used flat, endless black on his love-thwarted character that, along with his ghoulish green complexion, renders him effectively two-dimensional and almost cardboard cutout-like in appearance. He is manifestly an interloper on the two earthly robust lovers in every sense.

To clarify both the differences and the artistic potential of bringing the two mediums together Gollon has produced a number of pure oil paintings, such as the enigmatic *Be Careful What You Wish For*, pure acrylics including *Envy* and the dynamic *Jazz Night at St Mary's*, and combination pieces typified by *Singer of Sad Songs*. He has also begun to paint similar scenes using first one medium then another to highlight their respective potentials. It sounds strategic and carefully planned but is a lucky byproduct of a masterfully haphazard approach that is almost entirely subconscious. Gollon works from pure intuition with paintings materializing inspired by an intellectual thought or a

technical idea, but somehow they all relate and end up as a cohesive expression. His works evolve, organically with great spontaneity, which greatly contributes to their energy. Generally they are grouped together into 'series', but mostly rather than choosing a topic and painting a number of works, Gollon paints his pictures and then realizes he has created an identifiable group.

There are exceptions such as his internationally acclaimed religious series, *Fourteen Stations of the Cross (2000-2009)*, commissioned by the Church of England, and his next religious project due to tour the major cathedrals in Britain. These paintings depict twelve contemplative stories from the bible and continue to reflect his ongoing exploration of oil paints and acrylics. *Station VII* from the earlier religious series is one of a number of paintings included in a new iPad application, *The Art of Chris Gollon*, along with *Birth*, which featured prominently in the film *Twilight: Breaking Dawn (I)* and *Jazz Night at St Mary's* from the current *Love* series (latter in this exhibition). Breaking boundaries characterizes Gollon's work, so it comes as no surprise that he is one of the first artists to launch an iPad application that features a selection of ten of his paintings each month with a detailed account of his technique and philosophy behind the subject matter. Having seen and been so taken with Gollon's innovative techniques when Alan Yentob's BBC1 programme *Imagine* followed him through painting a commission, Liquitex, one of the world's leading manufacturers of artist's acrylic paints, are now supporting the iPad application worldwide.

Some of Chris Gollon's latest imagery demonstrating the extent of his technical range and captivating subject matter is on exhibition at the Bohemia Galleries, York, YO31 7EA,

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