

## Diptychs

Christopher Le Brun, 2019

It is characteristic of Shakespeare's plays that there is no single authorial voice. In the epilogue such as Edgar's famous brief lines that conclude *King Lear*, characters appear to step forward and speak as if outside of the play and address us directly, but even then not necessarily in the author's voice nor do they sum up what we have just experienced.<sup>i</sup> A play's ideas and images are presented by actors sequentially or in opposing dialogue or in concert together. The entirety of the play is encompassed in the text, but the lived experience of a performance in time feels too indistinct and resists being grasped as a single form.

Painting, by contrast so very singular, is seen in an instant – suddenly. When it resolves into an atmosphere or mood, the senses and not just the sense of sight are instinctively and speedily responding. They are anticipating what knowledge, memory or words will, on reflection, contribute to our understanding. I agree with how the 20<sup>th</sup> century American poet A. R. Ammons put it in his journal:

I now see feeling as incorporating the intellect – I once thought them separate. Intellect is the slow analytic way – the unexperienced way to action: feeling is the immediate synthesis of all experience, intellect as well as emotion.<sup>ii</sup>

These diptychs aren't dialogues or conversations, as that would be to anthropomorphise them, since they neither speak nor argue. They are more like occasions seen together. I seem to remember once hearing a poem described as an occasion without a place, but a painting is always both an occasion *and* a place. To put it another way, if in a painting colour or an arrangement of shapes were even to hint at the resolution that a dialogue implies, it would be a horror. Instead of giving, it would be persuading or communicating, a closed circle which doesn't satisfactorily describe what is happening.

...painting is something that takes place amongst the colours... one has to leave them alone so that they can settle the matter between themselves. Their mutual intercourse: this is the whole of painting.<sup>iii</sup>

These diptychs admit a truth of painting by seeming to withdraw the authorial voice which might be expected to impose unity. They vividly offer the logic and language of the eye as it is experienced. Colour calls to colour and shape to shape again and again. In the art of painting, sensing, or more precisely, *looking* is thinking. In effect, here is what I do and feel now, and when I follow this up as a painter, allowing my responses through colour and touch to multiply on the canvas, I acknowledge the world of our senses as sovereign. In this way a far more valuable *involuntary* truth may emerge. Movements of imagination are bound to follow each other as inevitably as the shadows on the studio wall. Although a painting on our first encounter gives itself in the blink

of an eye, nevertheless it continues (marvellously!) to give under all light conditions: morning, noon, evening, and night, forever changing, a glowing, slowing thing – inexhaustible.

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i ‘The weight of this sad time we must obey, speak what we feel, not what we ought to say. The oldest hath borne most: we that are young shall never see so much, nor live to long.’

ii A. R. Ammons, *An Image for Longing: Selected Letters and Journals of A. R. Ammons, 1951-1974: Ommateum to Sphere*, Kevin McGuirk ed., (Victoria, BC: ELS Editions, 2013), p. 165.

iii Rainer M. Rilke, *Letters in Cézanne*, Joe Agee trans., (New York: North Point Press, 2002), p. 66.