

The Density of Life



All Apologies

IN THE WORK OF SAM JACKSON things aren't what they seem. His paintings may look as if they're portraits; nothing could be further from the truth. They're paintings that invoke portraiture combined with a hint of the readymade. These are paintings that start life as depictions of portraits – or memories of portraits. Rather like the work of Gerhard Richter, in which he (Richter) paints the photograph as an object, rather than what is depicted in the photograph – a form of 'second order' representation. It's painting which refers us to a condition rather than a subject – a remembrance of paintings past. Painting as discourse.

At the core of these pictures are a set of ciphers or talismans which take the form of predominantly youthful white women who seem to have appeared from either some mediumistic ether, or torn from an ancient copy of Screenplay or perhaps the sleeve of a charity shop LP – the sort that have the legend 'Stereo' emblazoned across one corner.

"Are you talking to me...?" Travis Bickle

They appear as if they're a roll call of unidentified victims, long-forgotten celebrities or minor starlets – it's never specified. All now dust – celebrity dust. If that is not enough, Sam Jackson's paintings bear scars and scuffs, looking as if they had been mislaid or passed down. This is conferred by their mildly distressed and desiccated surface – images that seem as if they were once lost or abandoned and have recently been rediscovered – paintings in which two or more individuals seem to have had a hand, sometimes years, even generations apart, each unaware of the other's existence, or intentions. Some paint, others pen epigrams and several others half remembered lyrics and fragments of texts.

All of which creates the 'noise' of partial, fleeting and fugitive thoughts – intangible, broken and bruised. It's a cliché to suggest that disassociation and discontinuity are symptomatic of modernity but few painters manage to reflect this more convincingly – or more authentically – an incongruous term, for what is fundamentally a fully synthesised form of appropriationist painting.

Sam Jackson's paintings have the appearance of apparition. They look as if they were portraits of the 'departed' as if summoned by a medium. The theatrical or performative analogy can be extended to a kind of ventriloquy in which the painter voices the cipher or image.

A critical element of Sam Jackson's paintings is the distinction between wakefulness and sleep. Key to these pictures is what Celia Green and Robert Waggoner (amongst others) have termed lucid dreams – a state in which the dreamer is aware that they're dreaming and is able to influence the dream.

The surface of the painting exemplifies this as it's a mix of fleeting thoughts and hypnagogic imagery – the internal chatter and broken ramblings that characterise the drift into sleep. Near waking images of a lost love or some unspecified longing

