

PETER JOSEPH

[eye and mind series #2]



Reds, Blue and Light Green, May 2015

Peter Joseph and the Mercus Barn

Peter Joseph might have been a philosopher. He was compelled to paint instead. His painting is not without philosophical moment. In a career now in its fiftieth year, he has established himself as perhaps the finest colourist to grace the practice of contemporary painting. It is said that the most notable artists only attend exhaustively to a handful of themes. Often enough, these emerge and are articulated as ensembles of paintings. Individual paintings can be seen to belong to a given ensemble by sharing features with all the other members of that ensemble. Consider Claude Monet – 25 studies on the play of autumn light on haystacks, 30 on the play of light across the façade of Rouen Cathedral, 250 bearing the name ‘Les Nymphéas’. Paul Cézanne – 40 paintings, the putative subject of which was ‘Mont Ste-Victoire’.

In our time, the list would include Peter Joseph, also, in a certain sense, a painter of light. His oeuvre falls into four great phases. Each ruptures from the previous while bearing within traces of its antecedents. All phases bear traces too of the bigger picture, in which the classical tradition of Western painting figures prominently, though far from exclusively. These, visual and verbal registers and the texture of the history in which they are inscribed, are the daily nourishment of this artist’s practice.

Today, the Mercus Barn is delighted to premiere the most recent paintings from the most recent phase. La Grange de Mercus is an artist-run project initiated by David Saunders. In person-years, the friendship of David and Peter, artists in arms, sparring partners, is coming up to celebrating its centenary. The conversation is conducted in the counterpoint of visual and verbal. Like all such enduring friendships, particularly those where there is communality of spirit in matters artistic and political it will, on occasion, have been tested by serious differences.

Each of the conversants is ‘on the left’ of the political spectrum. Peter cleaves to the system of philosophical idealism, David no less to that of philosophical materialism. Close friendships and solid comradeships have foundered on disagreement over finer points of difference between these two great systems. This is ultimately a political matter. Care in respecting differences, while tending to and nurturing what binds, is at heart of the politics of friendship.

The work presently celebrated at the Mercus Barn is in no small part a tribute to friendship, as a political practice, shored by care for the other. Past the age when many a painter settles for the risk-averse, mannered reprise of memorable bits of the back catalogue, the painting of this old master continues to break new ground, to surprise.

The world has shrunk. We are saturated with knowledge, so-called facts, blinded to the simple acceptance of our existence.

Painting is a simple clarity, an interpretation without proof and yet a meaning to what we can no longer name.

Tone, the sensitivity of light and dark, is missing from modern life. It has been superseded by shape, the crude definition of personality. We are dependent on the toppling mass of scientific evidence for reality or the alternative, our subjective truth. The latter is the terrifying risk, the loneliness, and yet to me the infinite possibility.

Peter Joseph, 1980



Ochre, Greens and Blue, February 2015

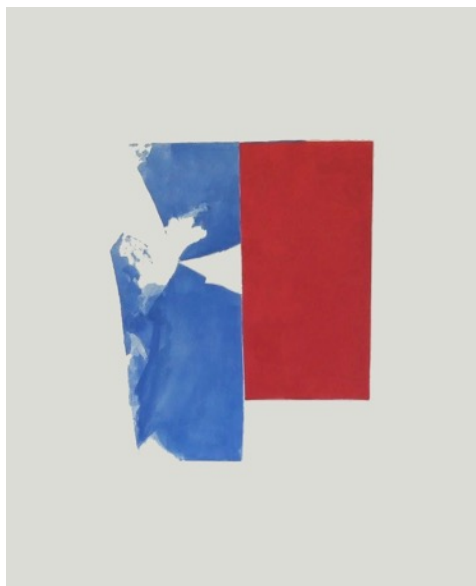
The Artist and the Market Place in the 21st Century

As it does with everything else, consumer capitalism, functioning via the media, swallows art and regurgitates it in apparently virtuous roles – gathering millions to Tate Modern, rewarding young talent with success, prizes and notoriety, making art an attractive investment.

But its very ethos is subtle corruption – the subordination of values that it effects as the dominant force. That is why the serious artist cannot merely inhabit or allow themselves to be defined by the art industry, which currently provides a playpen for artists, commentators and media, bounded and ultimately defined by the hard terms of market forces.

I am extremely happy this summer to show work at my friend and fellow painter David Saunders' new gallery at Mercus, to know it is not part of a scheme of promoting and dismissing artists as chaff for the market place. I am sure, with the healthy air of the Pyrenees, this new gallery will make a distinct impression.

Peter Joseph, 2015



Blue and Red, April 2015



Blues and Grey, 2015

Public Collections: Art Gallery of New South Wales, Arts Council of Great Britain British Council, London, Contemporary Art Society, London, DeMenil Foundation, Texas Fogg Art Museum, Philadelphia, Fundacio Berado, Sinatra Museum of Modern Art, Lisbon Fonds Regional d'Art Contemporain, France, Gelco Collection, Minneapolis, U.S.A Hamburg Kunsthalle, Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool, Kunsthaus, Zurich, Laing Art Gallery, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, Migros Museum, Zurich, Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago Museum für Gegenwartskunst, Zurich, Museum of Modern Art, Caracas, Venezuela Musee d'Art Modern et Contemporain, Geneva, National Museum of Wales, Cardiff Neue Nationalgalerie, Berlin, Panza Collection, Milan, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, Southampton City Art Gallery, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam Tate Gallery, London, Victoria and Albert Museum, London, Walker Art Centre, Minneapolis, Welkunst foundation, Zurich.

[eye and mind series]

“L'oeil et l'esprit” is the title of the last essay that the French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty wrote on the phenomenology of perception. In it he argues that painting is a form of thought and that the work that he does as a philosopher is closely linked to the art of painting. He sees painting as engaging the whole body and not just the eye. This is the second in a series of exhibitions at the Mercus Barn that will explore this idea.

