
Majella Clancy

Boundaries,
spaces
and subject
positions

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The digital photographs for the eight small images in this show were taken in Sri Lanka, during May 2007. Clancy visited the temples in Batticaloa, in the East of Sri Lanka, in 2004 and 2006.¹

When I returned in 2007 I revisited a temple in Kandy called Perapeniya Buddhist Temple, I was particularly intrigued by a small area in this temple where people make offerings through tying pieces of cloth to a railing. It was a visual feast of colour, form and space. What intrigued me also about this area was that it was constantly changing ... The work in the exhibition originated from this area of the temple.²

Rarely have I seen abstraction rooted in the changeable yet strong identity of age-old rituals being transferred with such a light touch from a far-away culture to the Western idiom. No nostalgia, no astonished naïveté, just that lightness of being, that feast she notes in the above quote, an intoxication by colour and space, the principle of indeterminacy operating silently under the experience. The final image is a seamless co-existence of a photograph and a painting. A careful handling of the materials, as if not to disturb their authentic energies, governs both parts of the creative process. The first part consists of taking the photograph, manipulating it, overlaying it with bits of the original take, and printing. The second part is painting over the print:

How I paint on it depends on what is already there and how I want the image to read. Sometimes the photograph is laid flat on the ground and the paint is poured on, this way I can predict that the paint will dry in a flat semi opaque way ... and free of the brush marks ... to avoid oil marks residue on

the paper it has to be poured off away very quickly ... it is unforgiving surface ... I cannot go back over the areas once they are painted.³

I read that Juan Miró poured blue paint over the horizontally positioned canvas to inspire a new composition.⁴ In his art practice the change and chance were under the sole supervision of the 'inner model'. Clancy works in the opposite direction: first, the 'outer model', the one the lens can 'see' and record is being temporarily 'fixed' and then 'responded' to by her imaginative powers governed by the poetics of colour and space. Thus the ground is lens-based, the layers are placed not just by chance, but by empathy with the final image, which is not known until it is made. This is a risky strategy, for which the neurology brings some support: our brains have 'mirror neuron systems' that fire both when we do something or watch it being done. Clancy's images start with lens-based mimesis, a record of watching the changeable object. Later on she changes that record by 'doing', acting upon its surface.

*Fiction versus reality*⁵ presents shimmering colours, not unlike Aurora Borealis, in a soft voluminous form closed off from our world by a fragment of blue elliptic brushmark. The composition has no centre; instead, a small red triangular shape incises a diagonal into the major form. Kandinsky comes to mind, and evokes a realization that Clancy's print/ paintings are a reflection not just on the relationship between photography and painting, but also on the history of painting. The colours range from Rothko to disco. The sensuality of hues, tonality and textures have their forebears in late Gothic and Baroque. It all appears as luxurious materials in *The Play is serious*. The simultaneity of black with orange and pink with pale blue in *Points of departure* is utterly

modern and contemporary in its denial of drama.

Amongst the prominent ID signs of Clancy's art is the role of light. It has a specific job to produce the illusion of vast depth, or is it just inches deep? Contemplating facts as fallible, *Convergence* presents a large red-and-green asteroid/ jelly/ iceberg form pierced through with a dark-blue determined line coming from nowhere on the right. Profound and vacuous, active and immobile, palpable and transient, these works of art not only insist on the impossibility of fixing anything permanently, they celebrate it! Clancy keeps inventing the rules for directional thought and chance to construct a space, which does not exist outside each image:

Pleae add:

"The poet must enter an impersonal state, in which the familiar division between subject and object dissolves and feelings are at liberty to enter into a new combination"⁶

1 e-mail Clancy to Sverakova, 27 June 2008

2 ibid

3 e-mail Clancy to Sverakova, 24 June 2008

4 *The Birth of the world, 1925*, MoMA, New York

5 All works are 2008, unless otherwise stated.

6 T S Eliot, *The Sacred wood*

Slavka Sverakova is a writer on art.

[opposite left]
Majella Clancy
Fiction versus reality, 2008
oil on inkjet print on diabond
51 cm x 61 cm
courtesy the artist

[opposite right]
Majella Clancy
Convergence, 2008
oil on inkjet print on diabond
25 cm x 18 cm
courtesy the artist