

How things stand, at this very moment

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In Diana Copperwhite's exhibition *Proto Fiction and the Sleep of Reason*, her paintings appear to pulse, glow, dissolve, vibrate, radiate, to fade in and out of focus even as you look at them. Layers of scuffed, scraped and smeared colour partially obscure any underlying images or suggestions of recognisable subject matter. You, just briefly, see something there, a hint of the familiar, before it disappears again - and even the memory of its vision dissipates in turn. Copperwhite is adept at implicating the spectator in her artistic process, as she registers and records the intangible and the imperceptible: radio waves, infrared light, a change in atmosphere, impinging external distractions, flights of memory or free association. These ephemeral, evanescent elements all come together in the canvas, even if only momentarily before being buried within subsequent gestures.

Consider, for example, *Electric Scream*, with its overpowering central image of an oval void, a gaping aperture outlined with concentric, coloured rings. They seem to reverberate, ripple, and throb as they echo out from the centre. Despite the essentially abstract nature of the composition, I'm reminded of Edvard Munch's *The Scream*, and particularly Frederic Jameson's perceptive reading, that the work: "elaborately deconstructs its own aesthetic of expression, all the while remaining imprisoned within it. Its gestural content already underscores its own failure, since the realm of the sonorous, the cry, the raw vibrations of the human throat, are incompatible with its medium." Similarly, Copperwhite's piece implies sound without making any, or, perhaps more accurately, visually records those sounds that remain inaudible to the human ear (but which can nevertheless still be felt physically, like a deep bass note). She has often mentioned the role that music plays in her work, in the background of the studio, just occasionally catching her attention and pulling the painting in a new direction. The inverse of this is all those instances when music is not noticed but registers nonetheless: it insinuates itself into the work without specific intent or reference, as a mark of other, unseen, voices in the room. They hum under the surface.

The studio - and what happens in it - is key to understanding Copperwhite's work. She has described her propensity to work on multiple paintings simultaneously, a willingness to let her antennae guide her away from a work in progress, to pick up where she had previously left off, to catch some invisible frequency and pursue the slightest flicker of a new idea or direction. This

sensitivity is, of course, refracted through the agency of the artist herself, her distillation of these various instances into action and materiality, into paint on canvas. As Sara Ahmed writes: "So we may walk into the room and "feel the atmosphere," but what we may feel depends on the angle of our arrival. Or we may say that the atmosphere is already angled; it is always felt from a specific point. [...] Having read the atmosphere, one can become tense, which in turn affects what happens, how things move along."

Rather than merely serving as a conduit to or document of her environment, the painting, in its ongoing development over multiple returns and revisions, filters back into and affects that very same atmosphere. There is a dialectical back-and-forth of external factors informing internal reflection motivating action which, caught in a loop of feedback, becomes one of those factors in the room. Only when Copperwhite moves to 'finish' the work, to consciously terminate this potentially never-ending process, does it come to an end (at the time of writing, some of the works in the exhibition are still undergoing the final stages, gradually circling towards their moment of conclusion).

The prismatic effects deployed across numerous canvases operates as an indication of this spatial awareness as well, an abstract(ed) representation of the immeasurable, impalpable qualities that permeate the air around us. In *The Sleep of Reason*, rainbow-like swathes bend and swirl, captured in pure, intense vibrancy and in muted, washed-out stillness, while in another, as-of-yet untitled, composition, a sweep of vivid colours, capturing the full spectrum of light, juts up against an implied figure, a silhouette in blue-purple-maroon-white. There is no differentiation or distinction between solid form and ambient atmosphere: they are composed of the same qualities, the same subatomic particles, the same tubes of paint. This synthesizing effect is deeply embedded in Copperwhite's works, bringing together memory and insight, the physical and the ungraspable, into a cohesive whole, towards an instant of perfect coherence. Before the atmosphere shifts, angles itself, and the painting responds in kind.

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