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the gallery

Peter Doig/Udomsak Krisanimis

30 January – 27 March 1999
Exhibition curated by Denise Robinson

EXHIBITION GUIDE

If the current art-world hype is anything to go by, both painting and figurative realism, having languished in the doldrums for most of the '80S and early '90S, are back in fashion. However, in bringing together the work of Peter Doig and Udomsak Krisanamis, this exhibition adds a different dimension to the current equations moving the art world and the practice of painting. It is not just that both artists have been steadily pursuing their individual projects for more than a decade; here in the juxtaposition of the two artists' work a more complex and considered dialogue between realism and abstraction is taken up. The tension between the representational or narrative content of painting, and its purely visual, decorative and abstract qualities remains a central issue in contemporary art after all.

UDOMSAK KRISANAMIS
"Through what amounts to a chance procedure, Krisanamis approaches figuration. Random patterns dictated by the givens of his col/aged and marked sheets evoke celestial vaults, constel/atory clusters, and other associations of the infinite sky. At the same time, however, the base nature of his materials, along with the cluttered, irregular topography of his surfaces when looked at close up, make his pictures flip-flop back and forth between the celestial and the terrestial, the sublime and the vulgar, between lofty subject and base matter. " 1

Born in Bangkok, Thailand, in 1966, Udomsak Krisanamis stAd at The Art Institute of Chicago, before moving to live and work in New York. Much has been made of the painstaking and laborious processes by which he makes his art, a practice which reflects his experience as a foreigner coming to terms with the realities of a different language and culture. Reading newspapers to improve his English, he began to cross out words which were already known to him and, as his language skills developed, more and more text was obliterated, leaving isolated words floating on the page. From this systematic practice, the artist then evolved a highly original and personal style which combines elements of painting, text and collage.

Working with newsprint Krisanamis scans the text to pick out the 'holes' - specifically in the letters 0 and in the curved inner spaces of P and R. All surrounding text is occluded, most often with a black Magic Marker, the relevant sections then being cut out and glued to the canvas in small strips. Recently his practice has expanded to include materials such as supermarket receipts, transparent cellophane noodles, Korean newspapers, and photocopies stained with tea. Close up, it becomes evident how the process of making itself is central to his practice, and this places his work somewhere between painting and crafted object. From a distance, however, his densely worked surfaces merge to form richly punctuated visual (and grammatical) sensations and textures: an information blizzard which on one level might be said to recreate an experience familiar to us all- being lost in the middle of another language and culture.

Using the 'figuration' of another's language as his departure point, Krisanamis thus plays with sense and nonsense, with meaning and abstraction: the experience of language as text, both as the communication of specific meaning, and as a visual abstraction: pattern and pleasure.

PETER DOIG
Born in Edinburgh in 1959, Peter Doig grew up in Canada, before moving to London in 1979 to study painting at St. Martin's and Chelsea School of Art. In 1993 he won the John Moores Prize, followed by the Prix Eliette von Karajan in 1994. In the same year he was nominated for the Turner Prize. A major exhibition of Peter Doig's work has recently been held at The Whitechapel Art Gallery, London.

By contrast to Krisanamis, Doig's paintings ostensibly use a more conventional means - oil paint - while taking up a more traditional subject– landscape. But part of the significance of Doig's work is that he has found a distinctive way of balancing the imagistic and the abstract: his designs are remarkable in their ability to accommodate varying impulses across the surface without loss of cohesion.

Photographs, stills from films, images clipped from books and newspapers, and the vast landscape of Canada are often an initial source for Doig's images. Acting as stimuli and departure-points, they are filtered through his imagination and a sense of geographical and cultural displacement. The surfaces and colours of his paintings are characterised by a burnt-out toxic quality as if the images themselves are on the verge of disintegration or being forgotten, and this generates an abstract hallucinatory feel which is both forbidding and eerie. Reflection is a common theme, and this serves to underline the feeling of solitude and melancholy that the paintings generate.

The human figure dwarfed by nature's grandure is a frequent trope in landscape painting, but Doig's unusual treatment of the theme produces a far from straightforward sensation. Here we are not in the realm of the picturesque, and Doig is not a realist. Described by one critic as 'Edvard Munch meets Twin Peaks' his paintings are less about place than they are about 'topographies of mood.'

The cinema has also been an important influence in Doig's work, and in particular the trashy, retro-chic genre of horror film epitomised by Friday the Thirteenth and Amityville, the Final Curse, for which Doig was the chief scene painter. As he describes with reference to an important early work Milky Way (1989-90, lower gallery): "It was the first painting in which I used reflection, I combined it with the dream sequence from Friday the Thirteenth. The Canadian landscape was so vast I couldn't get a handle on it, so I started getting into film, and this is how this image came out.

It seemed to say everything I wanted to say about landscape." In the intervening decade between then and now, however, as if giving way under the accumulated psychic weight of mood, memory and landscape, Doig's work has moved towards a greater abstraction: "I'd like to think that the paintings embrace the notion of a frontier type space, but they are never meant to be a portrait of a particular site...I suppose they are more about an internal wilderness."

1 Ulian Tone and Anne Umland, catalogue for Krisanamis' recent exhibition at MOMA, New York.

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