

Silentium Tremens:

On diastolic aestheticism in the work of Colin Waeghe

Looking at Colin Waeghe's work is like going for a walk. It's like setting off with an action cam through the landscape, to an art gallery, a house or through the clouds, the camera recording every vibration our body makes as it moves. Waeghe presents us those fickle movements as an image. Though turmoil is tangible, it can't be called anxiety. The stroller isn't being hunted. His movement falls silent in a fragmented way, as if his aim is to get a grip on the power of nature, architecture, sculpture, textile, play on light, the face. There are so many elements that want to come forward into play. From a purely technical point of view this is not simply capturing motion. In Waeghe's work motion simply slips through our grip just out of sensory reach, wavering and often alluding to our hesitant perception. Waeghe's style, best described as an experiment in style, always has one aim: recording the echo in what we generally call silence. He portrays what surrounds us, the 'silentium tremens', which we have difficulty understanding given our limited human faculties. This is the same for everything that is present but as a rule invisible.

Waeghe's canvases allow silence the time to appear. Time here should be seen through Heidegger's eyes, comparable to consciousness, an awareness of being unlocked, leading to a reality, which, although outside itself, is concerned with itself and surrounding objects. The moment Waeghe captures in his work is very difficult to pinpoint, as it doesn't follow the hands of the clock, but simply exists. The question to be asked is therefore, where, or rather, when? The moment in Waeghe's works of art is to be found in the past and future bursting into the here and now. This is a way of perceiving the supposed vibrations in Waeghe's work and ruptures in an understanding of time that is essentially non-linear. Tellingly, Waeghe's portraits allow that notion of dynamic rupture to come to the fore. We see a face that in a nanosecond shifts from the past to the future. To record this momentum Waeghe uses his brush in different ways: pointillistically, with short touches, sometimes sweeping, searching for fleeting escape or lubricating and thus quickly asserting motion. Each one is an attempt to identify something that doesn't self-identify. This explains why the attempted and ultimately failed record of elusive time is possibly a metaphor for our identity. An identity on the run and fluid.

A good illustration of this is the portrait of the master escape artist, Houdini, in the series called 'A Hermit's Dream'. In his attempt to escape from his chains and be released from captivity we see Houdini in a pose, hushed. A pose that unmask the master escape artist and shows him as a subject of time, subjected to identity. Identity is after all an instrument of oppression used by totalitarian regimes. However, Waeghe's work evokes an underlying reality. Engaging with our identity is the same as creating a regime and almost every regime is a form of totalitarianism. People bind themselves by recognising or borrowing an identity. What became a fascination after his stay in Leipzig was, I would say, always present in Waeghe. His early works sewed the seedlings of this confusion, which 'with time' became a fascination and gained the mark of social concern thanks to art critics' comments.

I have my doubts about this concern. Not necessarily the sincerity of it, rather the idea that it was society that was the reason behind this confusion and subsequent fascination. In my opinion Waeghe is too much of a dyed-in-the-wool aesthete to really worry about what is happening socially, historically or topically. People tend not to handle shape well, especially given that visual language expresses such unpredictable versatility. Again, we try and give shape a name, define it, hold it down, like Houdini chained up. What Waeghe exposes in his work is an attack on the aesthetic shape. His own struggle with identity is based on an awareness of the intangible. In this sense Waeghe's entire work can be called existential and humanist. If this is what critical discourse of Waeghe's work points to, then maybe it is in fact socially driven, even engaged. From the point of art education Waeghe's work then becomes extremely valuable.

So we should be wary of lofty commentary. It rarely betrays the artist's intention and can directly lead to confusion or an invalidation of the power of the work. This shouldn't surprise us as words and language belong to a system, which, like all systems, establishes a regime. A regime that creates sense and motion to escape from oppression, even though the system or regime is responsible for the oppression. Waeghe examines and details the ambiguous dynamic of oppression. In his work he evokes what I could call the depression of the heart of things. Colin Waeghe's work is primarily characterised by diastolic aestheticism, portraying in each image a perceptible release between two moments, where something exists and something counts.

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