

Terry Shave

A reflection by Dr. Richard Davey

In August 2000 fire destroyed Terry Shave's Stoke on Trent Studio. In an instant the paintings, drawings, and sketchbooks that had charted more than twenty-five years of creative practice were no more; a pile of grey ashes lying in a charred architectural skeleton. No longer could the vibrant, vigorous marks that had once given emotional form to his back garden collide with the maelstroms of colour that had turned tree-filled landscapes into a glimpse of sublime possibility, nor could they resonate with the viscous smears of paint that had changed plain canvas into a space of luscious beauty. Instead their playful interaction was consigned to the managed, systematised memory of the artist's photographic records.

For the true trauma of this fire was not to be found in the loss of the works themselves, but in the opportunity that their presence in the studio provided Shave with to experience those magical and unexpected moments of passing wonder, when a fragment of form, or kingfisher flash of mercurial colour would leap out of a momentarily forgotten work to snare his peripheral vision as he passed through the space. This was a space of tangled time in which the past coloured the present, and the present informed the past.

The fire, however, destroyed this tangled skein of dreams and memories. Shave was forced to start from scratch and to engage with the tabula rasa of a new studio and a new series of work. Initially he filled the space with photographic reproductions of the work that had been lost, but they lacked the spark of the originals. He then spent time exploring new materials and techniques, but gradually he found that in order to deal with the trauma of his loss he had to revisit the works that had been destroyed, not to recreate them, but to re-engage with the ideas, emotions, and memories that they had contained. The resulting works, recently exhibited in the Bonington Gallery of Nottingham Trent University where Shave is Professor of Fine Art, are both a re-capitulation and memorial to what was lost, and a reaching out into a new and unique space.

On first appearance the highly reflective, luminous surfaces of these most recent triptychs seem to defy any narrative reading. We are confronted by works that radiate light and colour from the layers of tinted resin that cover their surface. Our eyes slip and slide over them as they scrabble for some form of purchase. Although they constantly

resist and defy our efforts at engagement, their luscious, visceral beauty keeps calling us back, urging our eyes to taste the liquid rainbow that lies beneath their surface.

Occasionally we glimpse recognizable motifs: a blue Suffolk sky; the familiar, simplified shape of the tall trees that had dominated his work for a while; the stars above a North Wales beach; flock wallpaper; a winding river that first appeared in his work twelve years ago; the viscous smears of paint that he had used to mask his role as an artist; forms that provide a memorial to a past that can only be known through the distortion of memory and dreams.

These are deliberately evasive, mysterious works that demand our attention rather than offering quick solutions. They ask us to look with our peripheral vision; to look slowly, allowing ourselves to fall into their depths and bathe in their rich colours. If we do so we find ourselves on the edge of a liminal threshold glimpsing a tantalising space beyond that is seen through flock patterns and leafy branches. Yet as we gaze at these solid forms they also seem to dissolve, tearing a space in the world's fabric and enticing our eyes into their infinite depths. Suddenly we find that all that is solid melts into air as we enter a sublime space, a liquid space that breaks down the solid barriers that define our existence in this world, just as the boundaries between photograph and paint are obliterated in these works.