

The Voice from the Well

Text by Jevan Watkins Jones

On the surface it is shapes that
appear to the unify the works of Ed Halsey and Simon Newby.
‘Collecting shapes that become my shapes’, as the artist Wilhelmina
Barns-Graham put it succinctly.

Essentially, this is what most artists do, find meaning in the shape of things that surround them,
reshaping and laying them out in accordance to their felt, visual thinking.

‘ He remains standing and waits by the brim of himself, leaning forward, until the stone hits the hitherto invisible
water’s surface...and he who wants to remember can see how the deep suddenly sparks, attracts the light, becomes living as
when an eye opens, and he is recognised by another eye below.’

In the case of Halsey and Newby, the stone that hits becomes living through myriad forms, in drawings, paintings, prints, sculptures,
photography and film. Sounding its SPLOSH in varied intonations, we listen in. Where on earth is this voice coming from?

Halsey’s voice echoes from the deep. Viscous surfaces pushing at our sense of reality. A non-slip reality of taut line and hand-drawn geometry.
Newby’s voice rebounds off the water’s top. Sifting images to the surface as if strewn by the wake of a flood.

Together their voices reverberate around its circular wall, passing through its mouth and depositing a fine sediment of moons, windows, corners, nuts,
sills, arrows, roll films, tabletops, coins, rooftops, clocks, rings, sofas, leaves, steps and other structures of human endeavour and contact.

The black voids and the white blanks help in this matter. Underground water and overground air. The well keeps its measure as we peer in or out. ‘To
retch one’s balance of vows and curses where no one else is listening’, the Norfolk poet and environmentalist, Matt Howard, says.

Black is described by Ken Kiff as ‘the nothingness behind things’. The nothing and the thing belonging naturally. Yoko Ono said ‘white is the most conceptual
of colours. It doesn’t interfere with your thoughts.’

The white of Newby’s sofa, *Skull*, repels any projection of a chocolate stain on the arm and any thought of a penny wedged down its side. The white, vacuum
sealed. A ghost of a sofa that sits between the worlds of Lego and DFS.

The black in Halsey’s *Green Arrow* provides recessionary space, enough to squeeze your head into it without scraping your ears. Adding base to the seven inter-
locking shapes it supports, cupping their tints and shades of blue, green and red.

There are hapless shapes, mismatched and broken and fortunate ones, fixed and butted up. These types of shapes are haptic, drawn deep from our
collective past and deep from the horizon that we point to.

Resurrected and reasserted in points of contact, the painter cuts in and the sculptor cuts out.

Halsey’s lino print, *Winter Palace* suggests the carved surround of a triangular tympanum. Or, a striped cloth draped over a hard
edge. Herringbone black on an off-white cushion that dampens its shimmer.

Newby’s film *Paper, Scissors* shows the artist’s hand cutting through sheet after sheet of paper, teasing us with climactic
trilateral movements and stops before flooding the screen again with a new colour.

In their work they fabricate solutions and open ended questions. Here we have a chance to see Halsey
and Newby together, playful with domestic scale, tabletop colour and familial landscape.

‘Landscape begins when it absorbs or dissolves all presences into itself.’

References:

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