



Documentary Realism: Painting in the Digital Age

Robert Priseman, Sophie Cummings, Paul O'Kane

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A book of contemporary British painting which explores the new relevance of this traditional medium in the context of the digital age... With the dawn of the 21st century, the mass media has been adopted by the ruling elite to manipulate and present key messages for capitalism. Through the internet, on our televisions and in our newspapers, we are offered conflicting views on the economy, war on terror, celebrity culture and the celebration of wealth in a time of mass unemployment, food banks and social poverty. In doing this, the agents of mass information have stimulated a growing feeling of anomie, a social unease which is resulting in an apparent fragmentation of collective identity and a perception of alienation amongst many groups and individuals. It is within this context that an increasing number of artists are returning to the "aura" of the authentic art object and claiming it as their own. In doing this they are using the traditional genres of still-life, urban landscape, satire and modern history painting by commandeering the images they find on the internet, in newspapers, magazines and from their mobile phones. They are then reflecting the mass-media back on itself, and in painting, they are choosing to slow down the speed of engagement, in order to develop a deeper understanding on the nature of the subject. This is a new generation of artists who are creating real objects for an unreal world. Painting is now no longer the voice of the bourgeois speaking to itself. It has been requisitioned by artists like Katherine Russell, Wayne Clough, Wendy Saunders and Natalie Dowse who draw source material directly from the news media in order to create paintings which carry a social commentary. Meanwhile, Nathan Eastwood uses his mobile phone to surreptitiously photograph people in working class environments in order to conceive paintings of socialist solidarity, while Barbara Howey draws images from the internet so that she can re-connect to her own personal history. Then there are Nicholas Middleton and Lee Maelzer who capture the urban environment on a film camera in order to paint the poetry of the mundane and Alex Hanna who uses a camera obscure he built himself in order to compose paintings which meditate on the nature of utility which stands in a quiet opposition to the aesthetics of advertising. Whilst David Sullivan subverts newspaper images to produce satirically soaked paintings which the Guardian newspaper's art critic Adrian Searle described as brave, stupid, wildly ambitious and arrogant.

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