ANTHONY REYNOLDS GALLERY

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Keith Farquhar 10 September - 10 October 1998

Once on the shelf with modern masters like Wittgenstein and Freud. But who reads R.D. Laing now.
The Guardian, July 1998

Farquhar's painting take as their subject matter, abstract designs derived from the covers of social science textbooks from '60s. e.g. R.D. Laing's The Divided Self. The covers of these books show second-rate, hard edge, abstract images which pose as psychological or sociological models. The artist's relationship to these images is one which acknowledges and appreciates both their retro cultural status and the futility embodied in the impossibility of the images matching up to the grandiose nature of the book titles which they illustrate.

The intention of the paintings is to somehow reconcile the images with their titles, affording them a sense of authenticity and a modified cultural positioning which may legitimately exist in the contemporary.

Some of the painting themselves are made using marker pens on glossed canvas and have the appearance of subverted and partly erased dry-wipe boards, the type found in offices. Here a shared utility can be observed; that both dry-wipe boards and paintings act as a surface onto which marks are used to convey serious communicative messages which the viewer relates to with the element of respect brought upon by their reliable positioning within culture. The paintings differ from the wipe-boards in that their surfaces appearing so fragile and temporary, are in fact, permanent offering to the viewer, only the illusion of tactility.

The doomed visionary R.D. Laing believed that by the mere exercise of the therapists understanding and humanity a person might be cured. Similarly, in the making of these paintings a process is employed, albeit self consciously, which puts faith in a hand-made humanism to cure the original image of its inauthenticity and create a new, believable model. This new model, if the painting is to be successful, must mirror the effects of materialism on existence; that brings to both nature and culture as well as to the individual psyche, a degree of imperfection, amorality and non-predictability.

Through this process, then, it may just be possible to create some believable pictures. On the other hand, Farquhar has commented that there is within him, an undeniable urge to create works which like Laing, may themselves be doomed.