

SARA ANSTIS & NEAL TAIT
COMINGS AND GOINGS

20. February – 04. April 2020

Images work where language fails. So much of the world we inhabit defies explication. It is evasive, and our attempts to define it frustrate us. In different ways Sara Anstis and Neal Tait create landscapes and imaginary, otherworldly environments as a means through which to explore subjects too elusive for words alone. Their work playfully explores instincts as diverse as memory, misunderstanding, culture and place.

Anstis uses sensuous soft pastels and paint to build fantasy worlds at a remove from heteronormative patriarchy, yet strikingly transformative of it. The arms of an unknown slick-skinned tentacular creature often appear in her images in this exhibition, either participating in the activities afoot or dividing the image into discrete parts. The Real to which these limbs belong is at once full of pleasure and terror, of tactile excitation and severing frames.

The figures seem to enjoy this creature's presence and their surroundings, but they also seem to be experiencing events they have no agency over. They do not always smile and when they do, it seems to be in acknowledgment of their wicked and cruel acts – acts that might be acknowledged by the viewer as a pleasurable occurrence in itself. Each tableau is a carefully choreographed scene in which it is not clear who is in control, or who is seeking power over whom, but it is clear that the viewer is not the intended primary witness of their naked bodies or games.

This choreography meets Neal Tait's play of chance. Diverse in palette and composition, Tait's paintings and drawings explore tensions between the figurative and the abstract, the beautiful and the grotesque, the logical and the absurd. His recent body of work takes unmediated material – either from his imagination and memory, or from direct observation – as a source, serving as a starting point for intuitive, potentially unexpected compositions led by catching a Zeitgeist.

A work like *The Balloon* represents the enigmatic moment of sadness that is associated with a fleeting sense of loss. It also depicts a scene of fecundity and regeneration and a time where nature presents itself as something that is truly unknowable. Culture has re-presented nature as a form of nostalgia and we could say that a sense of lost origins has come to define this experience. He doesn't necessarily intend for the work to provide answers as such, as he says, "I am quite prepared for the work to be wrong and for me to have completely missed the point."

For him, the language of paint and painting is emphatically of the world, and yet through its history capable of transcending this material state to be, and to comment on a sense of being that exists beyond the unsayable. For both of these artists a re-enchantment of the world is central to understanding their relationship to the present. The outcomes provide glimpses into dreamlike parallel universes that evoke the rhetorical logic of fairy tales or the absurdist humour of Surrealism. Is this not why we remain drawn to paintings with such inevitability? For all of our assuredness and desire to possess the answers to the world's anomalies, we know that it is actually in those moments where we glimpse the unsayable that we feel truly human.