

The 8 Artistic Principles, recently staged at The Attic, One Thoresby St, brought together four artists under a curatorial interpretation of eight artistic principles, proposed by V.S Ramachandran and William Hirstein as a means to deconstruct and understand aesthetic experience. The exhibition comprised the work of Benjamin Brett, Jack Brindley, Alice Browne and Jess Flood-Paddock, each of whom either consciously or unwittingly evoked one of these artistic principles.

Situated on the fourth floor of an ex-industrial, Victorian building the Attic is reached via a concrete staircase that spirals upward to the top of the building. Once in the space the physical exertion required to get there makes visitors aware of their, for the most part, exhausted body. This awareness was strangely befitting in relation to a show which discreetly nods to physicality in relation to site-specific installation and abstract painting. Upon entering the show visitors are confronted with the work of Jack Brindley. Two solid rectangular structures stand firmly in place, obscuring the view of the show. Placed within close proximity to each other they manipulate the flow of bodies through the space. Facing outward toward the entrance a framed paperwork, made from the transfer of ink from a sheet of carbon paper to a blank recipient, hangs on each of the structures. The opposing sides are perfectly plastered surfaces. Under explicit instruction from the artist, a local builder is employed to carry out the plastering. Brindley's piece is aptly named 'These Hands' and in previous iterations of the work the materials are listed: 'plaster, collaboration'. In an exhibition comprised primarily of abstract painting, Brindley's work poses an interesting counterpoint. With painting the viewer is always conscious of the paintings making and artistic labour is easily observed. In 'These Hands' Brindley, as artist, actively removes himself from the production of the work. Even the framed paper works lack any sense of human contact.

The rest of the show appears once I'd navigated between the other bodies and structures. 'Fallow', a large canvas by Benjamin Brett, dominated the back wall. A chasm of empty space in front allows the work to breathe. The bodily relationship of the artist to the work is evident as swooping strokes of army greens and deep brown stretch from one corner to opposite. Murky colour vibrates below the surface. Floating to the top are repeated outlines of a German soldier's helmet, a recurring motif in the artist's work. Brett's exploration of the space of the canvas results in a multilayered narrative which seems to slowly reveal itself over a quiet passing of time. On the adjacent wall Alice Browne appears to embrace a more intuitive approach. There is a strong sense of movement in her work, quick and gestural, relishing in the suggestive rather than descriptive. In 'Blockade', through an economic use of colour and employing minimal shapes, Browne toys with the orientation of the picture plane, somehow inciting the foreground to fold back away from itself retreating from the audience's gaze. Similarities abound between Brett and Browne, their use of muted colour and animated brushstrokes, fuel a conversation between the work which flows through the exhibition.

Sandwiched between the canvases of Brett and Browne hangs a moka pot; the work of Jess Flood-Paddock. A modern day kitchen utensil, the pot has been intentionally rusted by the artist. Three small, tired looking bells hang from its base and attached to its side are several shells. Only the pristine handle belies its falsified history. Ramachandran and Hirstein observe in their thesis that art should enhance, transcend and distort reality. Removed from its original context and devoid of function Paddock's obsolete coffee maker distorts its reality and the passing of time. This idea of distortion could also be applied to Brindley who in many ways distorts the role of an artist.

Surveying the show I felt the dense weight of the history of painting loom overhead, conscious of its supposed death in the late 1960s as post-studio practice took hold. Digital technology now provides endless possibilities for the immediate construction of images which begs questions surrounding the role of painting, its relentless persistence as a medium and, in equal measure, its allure.

The eight artistic principles were first proposed by Ramachandran and Hirstein in an article titled 'The Science of Art: A Neurological Theory of Aesthetic Experience'. Driven by a want to understand the incomprehensible i.e. why do humans create?, Ramachandran and Hirstein carried out an analytical study more in line with scientific research which included comparisons made between lab rats tested for adaptive behaviour and a humans escalating emotional response to repeat images. Their proposed universal laws derived from what could be read as too generalised and conservative a definition of art, one which fails to allow for consideration of conceptual, ephemeral, performative and tenuous collaborative works.

Instead of posing questions on what art can and does do for us, Ad Reinhardt, whose Black Paintings of the 1960s represented abstraction at a nihilistic high, inverted the focus. In Reinhardt's drawing What do you represent? (1946 -47) a grinning, well dressed man points at an abstract painting "Ha Ha what does this represent" he smirks. In the image below, the painting points back demanding of its astonished viewer "What do you represent?".

Emma Moore