

KristyGormanGlimpse



"Born to see. . ."

I take this picture of myself
and with my sewing scissors
cut out the face.

Now it is more accurate:

where my eyes were,
every -
thing appears.

Margaret Atwood

If it is true that we live in the age of the spectacle it is equally true that now is an age that demands instant gratification. I want whatever intrigues and dazzles me, whatever lures me into surrendering my desire. The object must be immediate, available, a one-hit burst of satisfaction. And what of the images that persuade me to linger before them for a moment, to look but not to touch? They too must be in your face, bold, insistent, reflecting parochial stridencies. Kristy Gorman resists the phenomenon of the saturated, shallow image as much as she resists the canvas that draws attention to its painter's smock, to the moody rain of brush strokes from the painter's hand. When we look at her paintings we have to *work* at looking. For Gorman teaches us how to look at what we see. Because there are complex levels in front of us that demand intense and prolonged engagement, we experience a profound visual, intellectual, and emotional concentration. To the point of labour.

It is well-known that Gorman's signature lies in an intense attention to detail. What is less recognised is that a similar attention to detail is demanded of the viewer. Gorman requires that we 'dwell' with the work; that we 'attend' to it. In so doing we come closer to sharing the artist's painstaking vision and her attention to process.

Glimpse is Gorman's most recent offering.³ On the one hand, it reflects a subtle development of the debates rehearsed in earlier shows. The main collection of paintings shows quiet incremental refinements on those in the 1998 *Filter* and *Filament* series. Ephemeral stains and embossed shapes continue to emerge from and disappear under other forms and surfaces. A ground supports the emergence and disappearance of a figure that suggests the fading of the subject. In the earlier exhibitions *Lumen*, *Surfacing* and *Residuum* (1995–6), these evanescent figures had been recognisable in the fragments of plant, bird,

body, flower, ribbon, ruffle, honeycomb and butterfly, and in the suggestion of a face.⁴ However, Gorman has been slowly moving away from anthropomorphism. Last year's *Filter* series revealed a staining that is more like an obstruction on the lens.

Impediments, water marks, and cloudy precipitates gather against a mobile ground.

Invading the active grid pattern, they produce a dialogue between the potentially natural and between marks reminiscent of computer circuitry or braille. *Filament* continued to make use of rectangles formally arranged but showed lighted objects suspended in depthless space like holographic hallucinations. Here too Gorman used light extremities, in this case fluorescence, to produce the strange markings and mottlings visible sometimes on the surface of the painting, at others in its depths. In both series, the process of layering, alongside the volatility of figure and ground, nature and supernature, invited us to consider the archaeological qualities

of memory. The vanishing point of the painting embodied the vanishing point of human memory — a flashing glimpse, a fragment of sound, a tactile warmth, all ultimately irretrievable.

In this exhibition, Gorman's restraint and subtlety are still apparent. Her work is fine and meticulous, and form has to do a lot. There are gestures still towards haberdashery: towards stitching and needlework, cloth, mirrors and hair.

There is the same inclination towards tinting and leaching of colour and to old photographic techniques. Gorman's new paintings exemplify the discipline of the daguerrotype's observation, its appetite for the minute; and show the same care for surface that led early images, easily scratched, to be protected by velvet covers.

Unlike the daguerrotype however, with its deadening exposures, her work has always resisted the fixity of the object in exchange for preserving the trace of the object's

disappearance. Contra Roland Barthes who argues that photography mummifies the world of objects, Gorman keeps the world of objects enigmatically present through reiterating the moment of looking.⁵

And the enigma is increasing, her use of imagery becoming more fragmented.

The paintings in *Glimpse* have an almost imperceptible negative quality in common which demands an oblique approach.

The viewer must frequently gaze up or down but not directly at the work. What emerges from this moment of tricky looking is a field of aberrant marks. All the pieces on display feature out of focus, non-uniform dots, apparent as shiny residues under layers of paint. The traces of inscription remain, one laid on top of another.

Nothing goes away. Areas of density, these marks resemble bead curtains, pearl drops, rain or pinpoints of light. In 'Slide (lightly)' they become the corrosions of age in different stages of deterioration.

In 'Linger (darkly)' they are visible in one half of the painting as clustered surface irruptions, painted in ink with the tip of a fine brush against a gleaming Van Dyck brown. Our gaze is caught and held by them; meaning gathers around them.

A similar suggestiveness is at work in 'Slide (darkly)'. Blurry dots stroked over with paint feature in the matt brown left-hand panel while on the cooler-toned right of blue-grey we are lured by vertical slashes. These marks produced with fine masking tape give the impression of a variety of embroidery techniques: counted thread, hardanger, bargello. We have the space here too to range more widely, to see more formal registers at work. Seismic indicators, digital markings, the discipline of the bar graph, all correlate with the precise nature of the disruption to the painting's surface. At the base of each slash is what looks like a trail of vapour. Here I think the actual process of work is being foregrounded: the cutting, the

