

James Lumsden / Paintings 2006 - 2014

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Essay by Georgina Coburn, from the exhibition catalogue **James Lumsden /Echoes**, published September 2013 to accompany a solo exhibition at Sarah Myerscough Gallery, London (13 September - 12 October 2013).

Echoes

I want to see something brought to life, struggled for, worked, a sense of it having its own history, of the time spent creating. I want to create something positive and affirming, which is filled with both light and moments of darkness, contrasts and possibly contradictions. James Lumsden.

In many ways painting is an act of becoming, a search for resolution and meaning that acknowledges our deepest creative drives and aspirations. James Lumsden's latest body of work reflects the joy of painting as an infinite source of connection and renewal. Led by his chosen medium and a deep understanding of the subtleties and contradictions of the painted surface, Lumsden expands the possibilities of the medium through adept experimentation. His exuberant curiosity and disciplined craft invigorate each new work, transforming raw materials into layered histories of thought and feeling. The glossy immaculate surfaces of his paintings absorb and reflect light, seducing the eye, heart and mind with vivid, beguiling statements of emotive colour and gestural mark. Each layer of experience contributes to fixing the object; physically and metaphorically, building an expansive space beneath the surface for the viewer's mind to wander into.

The meticulous crafting of Lumsden's work captures and expands time; in the suspended movement of the final film through which preceding layers of experience are perceived, and in the history of Western painting distilled in the image itself. The desire to capture light as a human element of illumination can be seen throughout Western Art History; in the works of Carravagio, Vermeer, Turner, Rothko and Bleckner. Echoing the concept of *LeTableau* in French painting and criticism Lumsden's immersion in the layered history of an image and its making reflects the painting as an object, methodology and a set of attitudes; cultural, philosophical, moral, social and political. Contemplating the edges and boundaries of the painting as an object and an idea embraces the contradictory nature of the discipline, creating diffuse veils of perception and alchemical moments of clarity. This poetic distillation of visual language; grappling with notions of truth, illusion and beauty, the materiality of the art object and the art of seeing define the artist's evolutionary work.

Throughout his career Lumsden has consistently pushed the boundaries of his technique, refining his use of acrylic paint and gloss medium to new levels of precision, delicacy and emotional depth. Earlier work skilfully explored the illusionary nature and materiality of painting, juxtaposing finely rendered tonality with formal pictorial devices. In this latest body of work a brilliantly nuanced high octane palette, successive sweeps of gestural marks and the recession of hard edged bisection of the canvas create an experience of emotional suspension in colour and light. The expressive counterpoint of colour relationships inform and define process and object. Alive with fluid movement the unexpected overlay of luminous pinks and acidic lime green, cobalt blue against quinacridone magentas and violets feel like the collision of charged particles in an Aurora Borealis. Glacial blues and flares of turquoise shift like chemical reactions before our eyes, transforming plastic elements into trajectories of thought and feeling. Lumsden's articulate use of incandescent red, that most seductive and symbolically loaded of colours, is tempered with contrasting hues creating extraordinary spatial depth and richness of association. The visual drama and repose of these paintings is dazzling and lucid, drawing the viewer deeper into the inner architecture of the work.

Investment in crafting the image is intensive and absolute; priming the surface to lose the tooth of the canvas with finely sanded gesso and transforming the ground in up to 40 progressive layers of translucent paint and glaze. The immediacy of time sensitive application creates its own rhythm; skimming, pulling and dragging paint across the surface with plastic or metal implements. Variations of resistance, pressure and residual mark together with traces of emergent colour create a powerful dynamic between the immaculate gloss of the surface, formal design elements of the composition and accidental marks of supreme delicacy. It is only when we pause and consider the work in variant light that minutely

peppered, incised or bled marks reveal themselves and we glimpse momentarily reflections of ourselves in the mirror of the canvas.

Each individual painting feels like a living organism with layers of connective tissue beneath; a self-reflexive surface, visceral and cerebral, charged with a shifting palette of emotional depth and complexity. This felt sense, experienced by the artist and viewer, creates imaginative spaces for associative meanings and connections with pure elements of light, colour, form and texture. Like Bill Viola's use of ultra-slow motion video or James Turrell's meditative light installations Lumsden's paintings invite the viewer to pause in active contemplation, providing a welcome alternative to the avalanche of imagery and accelerated viewing that shapes our everyday lives and consciousness.

Georgina Coburn