

Foreword

ALL THAT IS THERE is paint on canvas; yet, the seeing is inexhaustible. By some magical combination of brushstroke, color, shape, scale, line, and layer a vision-field of limitless fascination is generated. It begins in some paintings with lovely and unfamiliar color harmonies, in others with geometry - not measured but precise, in others with idiosyncratic marks (unexpected dabs, incisions, erasures), and in others with sheer obdurateness - the picture plane as wall, as body. Each picture meets us with a gift, some strange pleasure that welcomes us to reverie.

The philosopher Colthold Lessing distinguished between the temporal nature of poetry and the static nature of painting, yet works like these unfold in time. Precisely like poetry, or even music, they “play” as the eye rests, wanders, and awakens. You can’t see these paintings at a glance: they lack a punctum, focus, or even 2 discernible gestalt. There is no way to see them but to take time looking.

They are like music and poetry in other ways too, in their evocativeness and atmosphere. Not that they are evasive, on the contrary they are quite discreet: especially seen in juxtaposition we notice the unique proposition of each and the certainty of its resolution. Not that green but this. Not there but here. Every decision lends itself to the works’ visual eloquence. The tropes are those of the heart: longing, denial, restraint, allure.

The paintings are not nostalgic for anything but they create nostalgia. They do not represent but are the place where we wish we were. Thus, presentness, memory, and imagination are collapsed. It’s almost embarrassing, to fall in love with a painting. We should know the difference between a person and golem, between a lifetime and distemper on linen. But we can be fooled.

The critic Andre Furlani once wrote that all great literature aspires to the condition of pastoral. Perhaps the same is true of painting. The pastoral is simply civilization stripped of all that makes it uncivil, which generally means minus the cities and minus the people (at least most of them). Since 2002 these paintings have followed the artist to Iceland, the most pastoral of places. The rivers, the glaciers, the fog. There is nothing transcendent about indoor light, and everything under the sun is nature.

The erotic dimension (essential to the pastoral mode, however stylized it may be), does not take place in the paintings but in us. It happens because we imbue their uniqueness of touch, their tender recitation of things as they are, their vulnerable - even wounded - intimacy. These sensations linger as an afterglow to seeing. We are never so certain of love as when our eyes are closed.