

“Below my window...the blossom is out in full now...It's a plum tree, it looks like apple blossom but it's white, and looking at it, instead of saying ‘Oh that's nice blossom’ ... last week looking at it through the window when I'm writing, I see it is the whitest, frothiest, blossomest blossom that there ever could be... the nowness of everything is absolutely wondrous, and if people could see that, you know. There's no way of telling you; you have to experience it, but the glory of it, if you like, the comfort of it, the reassurance ... not that I'm interested in reassuring people - bugger that. The fact is, if you see the present tense, boy do you see it! And boy can you celebrate it.” (1)

The playwright Dennis Potter's celebration of the “nowness of everything” - embodied by the view of blossom through his study window after he was diagnosed with cancer - echoes the underlying effect of Mustafa Hulusi's work. However tongue in cheek, postmodern, appropriated, second hand or kitsch, Hulusi's motifs operate not just as coded, ironic ciphers; his flowers, vortexes, and name paraded publicly as both presence and logo, also trigger ideas of nostalgia, beauty and transcendence, whilst busily acknowledging the baggage that such terms carry.

Hulusi's practice is post-postmodern. It has learned the lessons of postmodernism yet seeks something more beyond the latter's blanket relativism and cynicism. This is not a naïve positivism or humanism but a desire to acknowledge possibilities beyond postmodernism's well-rehearsed modes of irony and obsession with the virtual. In his knowingness, Hulusi echoes Potter's apparently defensive yet sophisticated assertion that he is not “interested in reassuring people”. Yet, the persistent return to the hackneyed appeal of social realist blossom, blue skies and the psychedelic pleasures of starburst vortexes is motivated by the artist's insistence on allowing himself, as much the viewer, to have their cake and eat it. Hulusi's work reconciles itself with a feasible kind of optimism. It yearns for the real whilst acknowledging its corruption.

Hulusi's visual vocabulary can be seen as a homage to Gaston Bachelard's meditations on the subjective experience of place. Places - and things - operate as much as types as instigators of specific responses, becoming repositories of associations and memories and, consequently, nostalgia and the imagination. (2)

Similarly, even though Hulusi's work operates very differently to that of Cy Twombly, both artists share a preoccupation with framing potent and charged imagery or associations within a rigorous framework. Roland Bathes's quoting of Valery on Mediterranean space in relation to the American artist's work is also apposite here: “..this rare space, not apropos of the sky or the sea (as we might initially suppose), but apropos of old southern houses: ‘Those huge rooms of the Midi, very good for meditation ... The great emptiness enclosed – where time doesn't count. The mind seeks to populate all this.’ Basically, Twombly's canvases are big Mediterranean rooms, warm and luminous, with their elements lost in them...rooms the mind seeks to populate.” (3)

Hulusi's penchant for what initially appears as the visual equivalent of purple prose - where the potential convergence of pathos and bathos looks all too imminent - actually

capitalises on conventions and legacies in a quixotic and poignant effort to redeem them as much as possible. Hulusi's work is integral to the knowingness and artifice which, in their exaggeration, open the way for the readings sketched above. As such, it can be said to avoid some of the potential pitfalls that Hal Foster warns of in his review of Nicolas Bourriaud's 'Relational Aesthetics and Postproduction':

"For the most part, these artists and curators see discursivity and sociability in rosy terms...this tends to drop contradiction out of dialogue...; it is also to advance a version of the subject free of the unconscious... There is the further suspicion that, for all its discursivity, 'relational aesthetics might be sucked up in the general movement of a 'post-critical culture- an art...'after theory'." (4)

Within the constant and necessary vigilance of very obvious quotation marks and paremeters, Hulusi's chosen iconography is indicative of an overriding agenda: a persistent acknowledgement and astute articulation of the seductions and pleasures of signifiers of the Elysian, the sublime and the transendent, as examples of shared experience that moves and affects. In its embracing of that which is simultaneously ersatz and resonant, Hulusi's practice manages to flag up the dangers of what Alain Badiou has called Modernism's "passion for the real" and an obsession with authenticity, whilst embracing the desire for empathy. (5)

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"...To the right of me there is a plant in a pot, which I know you would like. It has very dark leaves. Their undersurface is the colour of damsons; on top the light has stained them dark brown. The leaves are grouped in threes, as if they were night butterflies...It's a kind of giant clover. This particular one came from Poland...it was given to me by the mother of a friend who grew it in her garden near the Ukrainian border. She has striking blue eyes and can't stop touching her plants as she walks through the garden and moves around her house, just as some grandmothers can't stop touchng their young grandchildren's heads." (6)

#### Footnotes

1. Dennis Potter interviewed by Melvyn Bragg, broadcast by Channel 4 on April 5 1994.
2. Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, Beacon Press, 1992
3. Roland Bathes, 'The Wisdom of Art', in 'The Responsibility of Forms: Critical Essays on Music, Art, and Representation', Blackwell Press, 1986, page 183.
4. Hal Foster, 'Chat Rooms', 2004, reprinted in 'Participation', edited by Claire Bishop, Whitechapl Gallery, London/The MIT Press, 2006, page 195.
5. Alain Badiou, 'The Century', Polity Press, 2007
6. John Berger, 'I Would Softly Tell My Love', in 'Hold Everything Dear: Dispatches on Survival and Resistance', Verso, 2008, page 27.

