

'TRAILING THE NORTH WIND'



The Ink Work of Blair Thomson

“Drawing is an intellectual activity that links senses, feeling, thinking and doing. It can be quick, flexible, expressive, versatile and responsive...” (Eileen Adams)

Recently Sandy Moffat wrote, “All art, whether poetry, painting or prose, represents and interprets the world and that art’s role was to “challenge and provoke.” The problem inherent within this agenda is to see art’s function in terms of the political or ideological whereas so much art re-presents the world beyond political ideology and is the more challenging for doing so. There is something exciting about an art that responds to the world empty of ideological intent and tries to live back and forth between matter-space and mind-space. Blair Thomson’s relationship to space and place certainly goes beyond political consideration specifically when he is drawing because he is primarily the type of artist who is open in his contact to the world, prepared to be surprised by what the eye can be captured by. When I look at Blair’s magnificent ink works I am aware I am not looking at trendy pictures that are deliberately provocative or querulous: my heady enjoyment comes from the fact that I can see within them that this artist has an intuitive hopefulness to whatever transpires around him, a trusting expectation to find excitement from structures, spaces, absences and presences anywhere.

In this new series of ink pieces, particularly the large ones on Japanese Washi paper, Blair is at his most spontaneous in his engagement with recurrent and new motifs. Inspired by Tokyo and Amsterdam airport and a three-day castle visit to Matsumoto City in Japan, Blair filled sketchbooks with telecom towers, a huge MD-11 jet tail engine, a cherry blossom tree and castles/temples. Whatever captured his gaze he invested with emotional significance because brush drawings are the art of pure sensation, an art where he bodies forth in Sumi ink his experience and delight in the motif. Their success depends on an instinctive control yet energetic discharging of the ink. Blair is well aware that such large ink paintings carry a high degree of risk and so demand total concentration if he is to crystallize his sensations before nature. What is problematic is that such concentration must be released in a spontaneous, inspirational manner if the intensity is to be achieved. Each of the large inks achieves this dramatic intensity where every brush stroke is a translation of pure artistic emotion. The beauty of them is that their creation seems to be happening before our very eyes! The forms appear to be actually expanding and extending into the space. This is because the large Japanese Fude brushes he employs free the forms from definite outlines so that the marks are more like skeletons with an unexpected inner luminosity – quivering black silhouettes where the blacks juxtapose with white negative spaces creating this quiver and even a suggestion of colour. Everything in these pictures breathes because there is not one superfluous stroke since all is reduced, concentrated and condensed to the last possible element. This is what ink drawing /painting can do that other mediums cannot. It makes images special through the energy inherent in the calligraphic marks and their arrangement on the white surface. However, it only has power if executed by absolute conviction in the persuasive rhetoric of painting to mediate the immediacy of perception. Blair has this conviction and this is why his pictures can give pleasure and delight as they represent and interpret the world.

As Kenneth White put it, “when the contact, the relationship, is sensitive, intelligent, subtle, you have a world in the full sense of the word. When the contact is brutal, stupid, ignorant, you have cacotopia!”