

Incorrigible, Sentimental

Curated by Merlin James

Painting's sense of its own history is essential to its development. In this exhibition I've put works by some contemporary painters with those of an earlier figure – Serge Charchoune (1889-1975).

Serge Charchoune was a Franco-Russian artist who moved at times in Dada, Cubist and Purist circles. I find him one of the most unique and currently relevant painters of the twentieth century. Like many artists of his era he spoke of parallels between music and visual art, and alluded to matters mystical. But the characterfulness and specificity of his works save them from theological platitudes and pretensions, as much as from dull formalism. At once abstract and figurative, he never lets us forget the synthetic means by which he creates visual meaning and mood. Thus he achieves a wonderfully unselfdeceived affirmation. He said, knowingly, 'Je suis incorrigible, je suis sentimental'.

The other painters in this show have affinities with him, in particulars and/or in principles. I think they are all about a disabused reaffirmation – both of painting and of that which can be painted. Like Charchoune they are willing, even compelled, to risk being misunderstood – mistaken for kinds of painters that in fact they are not (just as Charchoune was never really the Dadaist, Cubist, Purist or Tachiste he might appear).

The blatancy of recent abstractions by **Clive Hodgson** (UK) is perhaps a function of the sheer urge to make painting 'difficult' again, in a time when almost anything seems assimilable into the open field of contemporary art. It is hard to imagine any painting creating the sort of unease today that Hélon's or Guston's style shifts did. Yet Hodgson's refusal of any 'touch', his ultra-thin application straight onto white primer, and his use of ornamentation, are all truly and excitingly disconcerting. What emerges is the ability of colour, form, structure, illusion and expressive mark to assert themselves even in the absence of any *simpatico* handling. The pictures come alive; and the mysterious terms in which a painting succeeds or fails (or both simultaneously) are themselves partly the object of the work's investigations. Remarkable, too, is that such empirical experiments are not lacking in wit, humanity even poignancy.



Serge Charchoune
Clive Hodgson
Sylvia Plimack Mangold
Robert Bordo
Sam Fisher
Amanda Thesiger

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08 July 2005 – 06 Aug