

Duane Nickerson: Trivial Pursuits

GALLERY ON THE BAY, HAMILTON, NOVEMBER 20 TO DECEMBER 19, 2010

by SHELLEY THOMAS

Nickerson's latest exhibit, *Ephemera*, challenges Nietzsche's belief that the universe and its affairs will simply repeat themselves *ad infinitum*. His paintings flip this concept of eternal recurrence by revisiting the rigid tenets of classical realist still life painting in a way that questions the philosopher's premise.

His paintings are individual meditations on this theme, suggesting the alternative, that the heaviness of regulatory life can be arrested and dismantled if we embrace the transience of fleeting moments within the larger framework of routine. The burden of conventional life is suspended, lifted, if only momentarily. It is this interplay between "the transitory nature of lived experience and the often oppressive regularity of daily life" that Nickerson paradoxically captures in this current collection.

Nickerson's *Ephemera* explores and celebrates the elegance found in the flotsam and jetsam, the overlooked and unconsidered, the debris and clutter of everyday items. He breaks from traditional subjects of still life and turns to commonplace objects for inspiration, "objects", he says, "such as empty bottles, glasses, stacks of drywall that are temporary, in the process of being moved, cleaned up, rearranged".

Single items, or an assortment of casually placed jars, or castoff papers and wrappers set against an empty palette of blue or soft grey become the subject matter of a traditionally stylized genre. Through the dissociation and dislocation of these objects from their familiar surroundings the viewer is struck by the bareness and poverty of the estranged object. The temporary, provisional nature of the subject drives Nickerson's perspective on the experiential nature of life.

While there is weightlessness and lightness to Nickerson's transitory subject matter, there is also a haunting permanence as the fleeting image is captured and set in oil paint. This counterpoint in Nickerson's work fully expresses the impermanence that is found in ritual. "The ritual of making marks slowly and methodically is at the core of my practice," says Nickerson. "The tension between the heavy material of ground pigment and oil and the weightlessness of vision is the stimulus for my work and creates, for me, an arena for endless exploration."

Ephemera embodies and transforms the classical realist still life form as it captures the contradiction within eternal recurrence. Nickerson's work defamiliarizes the routine and the mundane, as it lifts the pall of life's deadening regularity in celebrating the transient moments that pervade our lives and define our experience.

Shelley Thomas is an internationally recognized Canadian educator and writer. Shelley has won international awards for her contribution to ideas in education, and her considerable experience has included working with Greenpeace and the United Nations. She is a painter and illustrator with a deep interest in and knowledge of the visual arts.