

jessica cooper essays

because i love to paint : catalogue forward by carol cooper
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A vase of flowers, a bowl of fruit, an isolated house set in a wild landscape, Jessica's paintings never fail to engage with the onlooker. From an early age she knew exactly what she wanted to be, an artist. Our house was full of her notebooks, drawings and paintings and over the years I have watched her journey from kitchen pin-board to gallery wall. Her deceptively simple images hang in the mind's eye, touching a core in her audience like a refrain of music or a line of poetry, tapping into our own memories and experiences in an uncanny way; not just those of "great moment" but of the little delights of everyday life. Her work is imbued with a significance that answers to both our aesthetic and emotional needs. Blush Pears for example provides us with the luscious colour of the pears contained within the tight outline of the bowl in an elegant and wholly satisfactory composition; it is just right. Her spare images in paintings such as On Old Land and Avocado Yellow Bowl pocket the essence of her subjects as a shell pockets the sound of the sea.

There is a freshness and spontaneity about her work which, together with her sometimes enigmatic and quirky titles, belie the skill of her painstaking technique, which involves multiple layering of the paint and then its reduction by hosing and peeling the canvas. It is this lengthy process that results in the extraordinarily ethereal yet intense quality of her flower paintings in particular.

The rationale for this group of paintings is provided by the title for the exhibition, Because I Love To Paint. This last year has seen a gradual change in Jessica's working practise, as her children are now old enough for her to spend time in the studio when they are at home. Her hours in the studio are no longer limited as they have been. In her words, "it's rather like a return to student days when I could paint when, how and what I chose". As a result of not working to a tight schedule the paintings produced this year are not a coherent, themed body, but provide rather a visual diary documenting the months from January to July. Paradoxically her new found "freedom" has meant some weeks spending less time

in the studio, but when there she has worked with a heightened intensity and sense of urgency. Unplanned paintings for example like, *Daffodils In April*, were the result of wanting to paint daffodils at a time when their season was nearly over. Some paintings have also been produced from memory rather than from drawings, her usual *modus operandi*, in an immediate and urgent response to something seen in a new light, for example *Road To Sennen*. The road to Sennen is a narrow, snaking road where no stopping is possible but earlier this year the fields alongside were cut and suddenly the house, across a wide expanse of land became visible and the need to record it was overwhelming. The memory had to be painted.

Other influences are noticeable in her work this year, too. The idea of the "controlled accident" has been effectively applied in several paintings: "accident" because some marks were not originally intended and "controlled" because Jessica has chosen not to remove them. In *Spontaneity Is Good* the rim of the bowl was painted last, using thin paint, so the run was almost expected and it was left to become an effective signifier, relieving the intensity of the rest of the canvas. *Carn* is a depiction of the landscape near her childhood home and we find ourselves looking into a vast space, only for our eyes to be drawn to a small mark which came about accidentally, but which was kept deliberately to "break the silence" and to allow us to focus on other small textures in the paint. Her landscapes have become more abstracted this year but Jessica still manages to invest them with intense psychological meaning just as she unerringly captures the essence of all her subjects be it a vase of flowers, a bowl of fruit or a lonely house, because she loves to paint.