

jessica cooper essays

catalogue foreward by nicholas usherwood
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Cup-cakes on a plate, plums in a white bowl, a house on a bare hill or a solitary white chair in a darkened room- Jessica Cooper's spare, apparently laconic images, often no more than a cluster of painted lines drawn on an otherwise empty white canvas make for arresting, almost graphic, singularity that immediately demands our attention. But, unlike so many attention-seeking people or objects in real life, the "conversation" we then proceed to have with these paintings turns out to be a great deal more interesting and illuminating than anything we could possibly have imagined, these simple, almost everyday and often remarkably ordinary objects and landscapes somehow becoming invested with a density of significance that their wittily tangential titles serve both to underscore and make even more ambiguous still. The cup-cakes, for example, are entitled "Solidarity", the chair "I'm Glad You Stayed", the house on the hill "Those Old Familiar Places", in the process of naming the artist making it quite clear that these paintings are the 'containers' of a whole range of intensely personal feelings, emotions and memories.

They are also very much about a sense of place; having been brought up and spent most of her early life in a remote hamlet perched between the moors and rugged cliffs of North Penwith in the far west of Cornwall and now living, with a young family of her own, just a few miles down the road from there, the place is very much in her blood. Quite simply such knowledge gives her the courage to deal in the understated and easily overlooked aspects of an often overwhelmingly imposing and dramatic landscape (and, it has to be said, with the district now awash with artists, visually cliché-ridden!) with the kind of minimalist boldness that becomes such an innate part of their touching and thoughtful power. Thus, if questioned as to why the sea seemingly never makes an appearance in her paintings, she answers, with absolute truth, that it is everywhere in the paintings-not only in the dark horizons of "Finding You" and "Those Old Familiar Places" but also in those luminous white voids of canvas that lie behind such still life subjects as "Bare Faced Boredom" and "Driven

White". In the same way there are no figures in any of the paintings; there is no need, for human lives and relationships are felt everywhere in these works. For this she feels she owes much to her training in the printmaking department at Goldsmiths, the layering and taking off of surfaces involved in screen-printing particularly, having much to do with the kind of intuitive paring down of images here. In her subtle hands less thus really does become very much more, the objects a quietly poetic metaphor for human existence.