

Kim Fisher

The Modern Institute, Glasgow

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Reviewed by Mick Peter

Preciousness is dismantled in these paintings. You'd expect to fall back on creaky old debates around painting to engage with work like this, only I think Kim Fisher doesn't care too much for them, and who would blame her? Rather more interestingly, a kind of psychological/psychedelic abstraction leaves us looking through picture plane windows that have been carefully turned through various degrees, and the former position of the stretcher remains, on occasion, embossed into the canvas, as it does in *Dolomite, 7* (2005). Each facet is a view or reflection that has been spun out by some gyroscopic decision-making and then reassembled in a new and hermetic cogency. There is a dogged feeling to the laborious nature of the work's construction that somehow manages to feel rather exciting. The meta-method of this endeavour is an exploration of the gemstones to which the titles refer. As a function of the kaleidoscopic effects and recognised fragments that drift in and out of these works, we get a sense of someone for whom gems become punkily incidental, a source of intrepid angles and sci-fi titles.

Stones seem to be pertinent subject matter (or just matter) on which to base a UK solo debut for Kim Fisher. Having made more overt references to design and designers in the past, Fisher has now done away with these historical crutches. Instead her pieces enlist the viewer's fascinated unease at the symbols of ultra wealth and glossy celebrity magazine horror. In tandem with this are the evocative names and quasi-precise number couplets that are the painting's titles. As much as the stones reflect coffee tables and their cluttered surfaces, we also get curiously lovingly crafted passages of openness; of a Magritte blue sky remembered and replayed through the nozzle of a spray can. The reassignment of this candyfloss dream in a rhomboid is a process that suggests an interest in architectural decoration at its most ambitiously odd. Fanciful and excessive interiors from decadent fiction glint in these layered paint and frilly canvas confections.

Like Des Essientes in J.K Huysman's *A Rebours* Fisher dreams of a syntax of precious stones. The picture frame boundaries have burst their banks in pursuit of ever richer and more dazzling pleasures. Fisher reflects on the obtuse desires that drive the world of gemstones. Rather than emulate the idle Essientes she uses painting's angsty industry to reflect a brand of geological or perhaps cosmic time; diamonds are named as their chemical cousin, carbon. Periodic tables become tectonic cubist notions of permanence and decay that collide in image making. Another sleight of hand trick also inhabits the naming, and stones we would expect to find presented to us by a jeweller, with their pedantic use of a tiny polishing cloth, are substituted in some works for the more prosaic fluorite and sunstone. These stand-ins are knowingly casual; the cheap stones know their richer relations whilst at the same time being amongst the baubles and beads that any kid with a passing interest in studded belts and striped wristbands might buy in a shop.

Beside the gallery, in an auxiliary room, there was an opportunity to confront a canvas with several unsettling characteristics, *Zircon, 30* (2005). Curiously when looking at a symmetrical jumble of planes well within the canvas boundary, a mask face is the immediate association, though one that is as ominous as a monument to some unknown figure. A vision of a Feininger church also springs to mind, a reference that does away with academic dryness again and replaces it with a feisty desire to smash up a picture postcard relying instead on the mind's ability to crystallize what it sees. Feininger rather obtusely calls this approach to painting 'prism-ism' and describes it as being based on monumentality. This hybrid friction drives Fisher's work and helps it to elude tiresome formalism.

The handout for the exhibition quotes Pavel Janak's *The Prism And The Pyramid* (1911); what amounts to a Czech cubist manifesto. It's a very apt point of departure for looking at these canvases. Janak was concerned in the main with the architectural possibilities of cubism. The transferability of the genre to architecture is very much like Fisher's illusiveness with stones and their possibilities for picture making. We are left with a delicious ambiguity. Janak was busy making desks that look like cliff faces, unrealised

dreams sketched out in the most delicate graphite inspired by bohemia's gothic diamond vaults. Fisher leaves us with a similar feeling: all the interlocking rhomboids and swathes of paint never point to out and out decoration, but instead levitate in a technicolour haze as deconstructed spatial data. Bathed in their own eerie acid light, the sun streams through the paintings chromatic panes making each refracted picture swim in woozy colour.