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Different strokes - Altered States of Paint

ALTERED STATES OF PAINT Dundee Contemporary Arts

THERE'S been change in the air at Dundee Contemporary Arts for some time now as the visual arts team of Judith Winter and Graham Domke have begun to establish a new house style. If Domke's first major group show as curator at the venue is anything to go by, that style is going to be fairly eclectic, uncompromising at times and, well... pleasingly bonkers.

This year the media has been obsessed with examining the changed social and cultural landscape in the four decades since 1968 as the baby-boomers, ex-revolutionaries and eternal students who came of age in that period look back at their own watershed moments.

Domke's show is a much darker reflection of the period, picking up where it all got a bit messy at the fag end of the Sixties. Spinning its title out of Ken Russell's hallucinogenic 1980 movie, *Altered States*, *Altered States Of Paint* is an exhibition of contemporary painting that owes a lot to the transformations wrought by rock music, reborn romanticism and Sixties psychedelia. But it's a bumpy ride: more Manson murders than Paris barricades.

This is a show that incorporates a whirlwind of references from Thomas de Quincy to Kenneth Anger, Aldous Huxley to the Rolling Stones. Heck, as it's Scotland even the dear old Wicker Man features in the iconography. It brings together six artists, some often linked, some fairly incongruous bedfellows. It crosses generations wildly from figures like Jutta Koether, high priestess of the art/rock crossover as a painter who also works with left-field royalty such as Sonic Youth's Kim Gordon and Thurston Moore to young Glasgow painter Neil Clements, still in his mid-twenties and carving out a place for himself with monochrome canvases based on guitar shapes and steeped in the lore of death metal music.

In his previous role at Inverleith House, Domke worked largely with the gallery's roster of big name, big league artists. Pleasingly he's taken this opportunity to mix big-hitters with far lesser known names. Rabiya Choudhry is in her mid-twenties, a fairly recent graduate from the master programme of Edinburgh College of Art. She's one of the wildest and most distinctive young painters to come out of a Scottish art school in a while but she's at a very early stage in her career, and her art – a maelstrom of disparate images and scrawled personal references – is often explicitly about self-doubt. Instead of offering her some small corner of the space, DCA has commissioned her to paint a huge mural on the gallery's exterior wall, meaning that while the exhibition sleeps, Choudhry's work is still on show. The work, entitled *Rhabdomancy*, is an extreme confection of pink and gold paint, psychedelic images and graffiti-style pen work.

Jutta Koether's paintings are mixed tributes to counter-cultural figures, small canvases are scrawled and scraped with brutal brushwork, coated in liquid glass and studded with drawing pins, each one acting as a tiny convex mirror. The work picks up on traditions of mirroring and reflection as a means of personal transformation, but it is deliberately raw and clumsy.

Andreas Dabler dabbles in dream images, figures undertaking arcane rituals, and weird landscapes that might be inner eye or outer space. Whether this is high camp or erudite artistry can be a little hard to tell. Till Gerhard's paintings are messy hallucinations, reworkings of pop-culture images that are oddly truncated, blotted out in patches like ill-remembered dreams.

The star of the show is undoubtedly the mid-career painter Angela de la Cruz, who for some years now has taken painting quite literally beyond the frame. Her stretchers are bashed and broken, her canvases thickly painted and scorched so they resemble abandoned tarpaulins rather than handmade works of art. For all de la Cruz's provocations, she is an artist often shown in pristine and cool, high-art surroundings. There's something really pleasing about seeing her abject paintings so explicitly linked with the underground.

The show closes with her black tour de force entitled *Stuck*, a vast canvas that has been wedged awkwardly into an aperture at the back of the gallery. If *Altered States Of Paint* continually refers to the idea that visionary experience is a doorway to esoteric knowledge then it ends with this suggestion that the destination may be darker and more dead-ended than we realise.

It will be interesting to see if DCA can continue to take its audience with it with this exhibition. Those used to the venue's hard-edged style and ultra clean presentation will find Altered States Of Paint a different proposition altogether. It's hard to like everything in this show, but it's also hard not to love its scattergun ambition, its crammed aesthetic and its attempt to take a serious look at one of the more exciting threads in contemporary painting.

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