

Ancient and Modern – A short essay about the artist Martin Greenland.

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How best to describe Martin Greenland's work? Let's start by exploring what means of expression it deploys. Greenland's chosen medium is landscape though he is no ordinary landscape painter – truth be told he is not a landscape painter at all, certainly not in the traditional sense as the overwhelming majority of his paintings demonstrate.

In other classical paintings the objects and forms represent the forms given in life. In Greenland's pictures all forms are ideas or at least give the impression of being ideas, perhaps because they are not literal interpretations but imaginative re-fashionings of remembered places - landscape as an abstract concept, landscape re-imagined, reminiscent of some wonderful place in the imagination that we recognise but cannot clearly see. Not a pastoral idyll, but something profound yet also beyond reach – like a childhood memory of a place once visited but not entirely understood, and like many such memories warmed through by time and experience such places seem to glow strangely in our imaginations. Many of Martin's paintings 'glow' like this for me, yet his paintings completely avoid any hint of sentimentality, moreover there is something oddly provocative about many of them. Colours and textures of things given in life seem to be emblematic of moods; yet set in the re-imagined world of his vision they transcend mere description becoming wholly expressive.

The fundamental difference between Martin Greenland's work and the work of 'Landscape' painters such as Constable, Turner, Corot, Moran or Bierstadt is that their work sees the possibility in what is there and beautifully expresses it, each in their own way, whereas his work goes far beyond - it seems to be as much about expressing something unseen, that which is behind the eyes rather than just what is in front of them. In this sense his work is demonstrably modern in that each piece represents his unique vision through landscape or forms in relation to landscape, not of landscape.

Hence the title of this essay for Martin Greenland's paintings are both Ancient and Modern reaching back into a past that we 'know' yet which we also know never existed, except perhaps in the collective imagination. Such a world, whose vistas have only previously been brought forth by painters like Arnold Böcklin is long overdue for another visit, and now in our age Martin Greenland's work provides a clear bridge between the ancient and the modern - no classical painter, not even Böcklin, would have thought to paint an image such as 'Between Two Seasons' and no modern painter, disconnected from the timeless essence of landscape could have painted 'Places of Silence and Antiquity' or anything like it.

He is resolutely modern in his attitudes also, no follower of fashion Greenland paints what he wants to paint, yet he could not be further removed in outlook from that which informs what is currently termed 'Modern Art'. The creation of 'Art' is an expression of a philosophical outlook, yet many works, seemingly expressive of just this individualistic viewpoint quickly become outdated for, it seems to me, they are seeking to be 'in the moment', 'modern' or worse still 'relevant' (to what it is never clear – the lives of ordinary people obsessed with sharks trapped in formaldehyde and the contents of unmade beds perhaps?). For many artists, seeking to be current and fashionable, their work risks being stranded 'in the moment' with nowhere to go, for when the moment has passed today's fashions rapidly become tomorrow's tired memories – of passing interest certainly but not really worth revisiting.

People have a relationship with paintings, particularly those that they buy, and a painting, if it is to be of lasting value to its owner, has to remain fresh in order to repay repeated viewing. To my mind, Greenland's work, imbued with an imaginative perspective rooted in the eternal, effortlessly achieves this both in the vision presented and in the manner of its execution. More than that it is wholly expressive of his artistic philosophy, that the imagination is King, he does not merely recreate in paint he re-imagines. Relentlessly modern, Greenland's vision continually engages the viewer in that which is timeless, of the moment yet which looks both to the past and beyond the present - Ancient – modern – eternal.