

LISSON GALLERY

LONDON

ART & LANGUAGE

Hostages: The Dark Series

15th March - 12th April 1991

This exhibition of new paintings is presented concurrently with an exhibition at the ICA, London, which surveys the development of Art & Language since 1987. The ICA show ends with a series of *Hostage* paintings - *The Light Series* - which complement those at the Lisson Gallery.

In 1989 Art & Language predicted a landscape painting they would execute some years in the future. The prediction took the form of a text. It described the location of the landscape and some of its details. It also stipulated its size and the style of its execution. The scene described was an area of countryside near the artists' studio in Oxfordshire.

The current series of Art & Language paintings appear, at least in part, to represent the realisation of the text's prediction. In each work a landscape is depicted, consisting of a series of poplar trees at the edge of a village playing field. In some paintings the trees recede in a sharp perspective, in others they are placed parallel to the horizontal edges of the picture. They are painted in a style which renders the landscape an atmospheric token more or less appropriate to the prediction.

However, this basic motif has subsequently been worked upon in a number of ways. The completed paintings combine a number of different elements, or types of surface which, through specific processes, are made to interact with each other. Much of the difference between individual works are given by the different weight accorded to each element and the tuning of the relation between parts.

These are complex paintings. The inter-relations between parts are unpredictable and strange. Many of our expectations about how paintings work are confounded. These pictures bring together and seem to test out many of the themes central to painting this century: the relations of figure and ground, surface and space, abstract and iconic, literal and metaphoric.

They do more than merely rehearse the assumed differences between these forms and figures. Rather they disorient the viewer as these relations are turned inside out. In places the literal seems figural and the figurative appears literal. In this they are reminiscent of cubist collage, where the layering of different types of materials and surfaces generates a complex interplay of literalness and opticality.

This sense of uncertainty and instability extends to the object as a whole. It has a slab-like presence, a pristine, manufactured form which rests uneasily with the crafted, localised character of the landscape painting. It is as if an appeal to a form of popular taste - the washable Monet table mat for example - had become trapped within the shiny precision of a minimalist object.

These paintings are titled *Hostages*, the title which has been given to all Art & Language paintings since 1988. The term 'hostage' brings to mind menace and uncertainty, deceptions and false hopes, cruel tricks and disguises. While the paintings in this series looks significantly different from their work of the past three years, this 'psychological' character is maintained. Indeed, it has been one of the most consistent features of Art & Language production since the late 1960's that ironically or referentially contradictory elements are brought together to produce a logical or cultural impasse. The works offer little room for the beholder to exercise his or her 'vision' in peace.

Art & Language was formed in 1968. Their work was central to the origins and development of Conceptual art. The journal *Art-Language*, first published in May 1969, was the only sustained publication of the Conceptual art movement. Art & Language has produced a considerable body of critical writing in addition to the journal, including an opera libretto and the lyrics for several records. More than twenty years of Art & Language artwork has seen the production of texts, installations, paintings, prints, flags, posters and postcards.

Lisson Gallery has represented Art & Language since 1970. They have exhibited internationally for over two decades and have had museum shows in many cities including Eindhoven, Ghent, Los Angeles and Geneva. In 1987 a major exhibition of the *Museum* series of paintings was held at the Palais des Beaux Arts in Brussels.

An 80 page, full colour catalogue *Hostages XXV-LXXVI* documenting the current series of paintings will be available.

David Batchelor

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