

# LISSON GALLERY

LONDON

## PRESS RELEASE

JOHN MURPHY

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SILENT VERTIGO

Since the late 1960s, John Murphy's work has focussed on many of the complexities of the relationship between texts and images. Among the many formal and technical differences in his considerable output of the last two decades this remains a strong thread of continuity. In what could be described as a fifth work for the exhibition, a booklet of works and images, the viewer is reminded that the current work relates more to Murphy's long engagement with the relationship between vision, images and language than to traditional painting. As Michael Newman wrote in the catalogue for Murphy's shows at the Whitechapel and the Arnolfini in 1988, the work thus indicates his "lineage within a specifically European Symbolist-based tradition which descends from Mallarme and Jarry, through Duchamp, Picabia and Magritte, to Marcel Broodthaers, Yves Klein and Piero Manzoni. The desire for an absolute and necessary relation between language and the world figured in the metaphor of the hieroglyph is the counterpart to the acknowledgement of arbitrariness and the fall from grace that this involves".

In each painting an all-over grey-brown surface of swirling, crusted oil paint has embedded in it an elusive image. All four works refer in different ways to the same theme of corporeality. In one work a donkey appears to be falling through an undefined monochromatic space, in another an ass is depicted teetering on its hind legs. These images seem to hover in a state of suspended animation. In the other two works, a single feature of the animal - the cruciform pattern on its back in one, and its anal orifice in the other - is placed in the upper centre of the work. The relationship of the image to the ground in these works is one of tension and uncertainty: in places the figure is almost lost in the dense currents of paint; it is elusive, almost not there. The ground itself is ambiguous, but related to a magnified view of the animal's matted grey-brown hide.

Both pictorial and verbal elements of the work are often fragments culled from historical sources (in this case the animals are taken from graphic works by Goya). Each element is thus cut off from its original meaning and placed by Murphy in a suggestive but unspecific new relationship. In this way the titles serve not to resolve the uncertainties generated in the paintings, but to continue and exacerbate them. The sense of uncertainty and instability in these paintings - their "Silent Vertigo" - seems to convey the sense of the vertigo that overwhelms a person teetering on the precipice of his or her own psyche.

John Murphy was born in 1945 and currently lives in London. He has had numerous one person shows since 1971, and his work has featured in many group exhibitions in Britain, Europe and America. He has been represented by the Lisson Gallery since the early 1980s.

For further information please contact Caroline Mockett.

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