ken artspace

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JOCELYN CLARKE GATHERING

14th March – 13th April 2024

Ken artspace is pleased to announce an exhibition of new work by the artist Jocelyn Clarke

'You are before the field, although it seldom happens that your attention is drawn to the field before you have noticed an event within it'

In his essay 'Field', John Berger describes his experience of an unremarkable countryside space regularly encountered on his drive home from town, observed briefly, but with quiet intensity as he waited for a few moments at a rail crossing. He goes on to describe the range of low-key events — a voice calling, a horse grazing, etc — that subtly drew his attention to the field itself. Although he doesn't mention it, he implies that this encounter is something like how we might experience a painting.

Jocelyn Clarke's paintings offer a field of events that, equally subtly, acknowledge the boundaries of their space, without rupturing the feeling that what's found there belongs in that painting, and can exist nowhere else. An 'event' in this case can sometimes be challenging to define in words: a plant stem, a raking shadow, a scratched and debris-sprinkled studio floor? Pay close attention to your own surroundings and you may find many more contenders to take up residence within her paintings, if only you had her precision, deft hand and sure sense of space needed to enter into the intricate dance she directs. But although it may be convenient for us to name those elements 'shadow', 'scraped floor', 'clouds' or 'twig', Clarke's elements refuse to play it straight. Actors breaking the 'fourth wall' to address the audience, they declare themselves as a flow of inky paint, pigment smudged into the weave of canvas, a dragged line of pastel or a stab-streak of thick oil. Like an incised question mark, they adopt a shape but open a whole field of mystery.

Berger's 'Field' shares something with Don Paterson's poem 'Almost Nothing', which describes an afternoon moment of waiting on a station platform; a lacuna in which we become hyper-aware of everything suspended, a silence between a dog-bark and bird song, waiting for the clock's hands to click forward.
In Clarke's 'Blemishes 1', we enter a similar zone of suspense: tremulous dark lines are arranged around a grey shape tantalisingly like the silhouette of an old building, except that the surrounding elements constantly bring us back to the macro scale of motes and strands, filigrees and threads. A ragged fringe to the left of the dark mass could almost coalesce into a stony cliff ridge, trailing down to a bay, but we are brought abruptly back to the surface of the painting with a flame-orange finger like a bookmark tab on the edge of the painting. We are never allowed to navigate on autopilot around shorthand visual notation; the painting will quietly insist on our continual alertness.

About the artist:

Jocelyn Clarke was born in Birmingham in 1958. She studied Fine Art at the Slade (working primarily with film) and trained in education. She lives and works as an artist in London. She has also worked as a lecturer at the Wallace Collection, National Gallery, Tate and other public art venues in London. Her solo exhibitions have included 'Small Moon' at Long and Ryle Gallery, London, 2015, 'Jerwood Artists Platform', London, 2003 and Adam Gallery, London, 1994. She has exhibited in 'The Discerning Eye', Mall Galleries, London, 2019, 2016 and 2005; 'Summer Exhibition' Royal Academy of Arts, London, 2009 and 'East International', Norwich Gallery and Norfolk Institute of Art and Design, Norwich, 1994. In 1992 she was Artist-in-Residence at Camden Art Centre, London.

Gallery open: Thursday, Friday – 11 – 5pm. Saturday 11 – 4 pm and by appointment