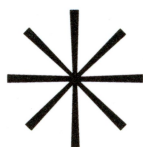


200 GERTRUDE STREET

PAINTINGS IN OPPORTUNITY SHOPS

OPP ART



CURATED BY STUART KOOP AND MAY LAM

Opening 6.00 pm Friday 31 March – Saturday 29 April 1989

REINCARNATION

... to pursue beauty in this not-quite rubbish, rummaging through the jumble of dead people's clothes that wait, as we do, to be loved again. A drycleaning ticket is no foil for the reek of human history, the ghostly vapour of other anxious faces in mirrors, pulling and tugging after the elusive transformation. A shortened dress, a dyed jacket, gloves cut off at the wrist: traces of redundant obsessions, ideal selves handstitched in filmy blouses.

From mirror to canvas, echoes of this questing whisper in reflections on art and nature, small pieces mostly, sorted regretfully after the funeral or nudged by their makers into limbo. Perhaps one will surface in the dream of a child grown up, who looked hard at the tree on the horizon, or the face in blue, and wondered why.

May Lam 1989

'WE WOULD LIKE TO TAKE THIS OPPORTUNITY...'

An opportunity is a chance, a favourable juncture or opening in a series of events. It may be given, taken, even seized, or it may be lost, missed or stolen away. The recognition of an opportunity demands a decision or action.

In an opportunity shop this meaning is embodied in the consumption which takes place wherein objects for sale – considered to be of little or no value by their former possessors – are recirculated as goods without a fixed or determined value. What unites all objects in such a context is an irresolute commodity value. Thereby arises an opportunity, a chance, for an object to become valuable again, or in a new way for a new reason, for someone else.

Paintings are subjected to the same rigours of the concept as any other object, giving rise to an alternative mode of retailing the work of art; one which postpones any declaration and attribution of artistic value pending an individual's own judgement. It is because the question of a painting's economic value is held in abeyance that provides the opportunity to ratify one's own values, one's own conception of art, without acknowledging the capital interests of commercial galleries and auction houses.

In the concept of opportunity lies the possibility of reappraising the work of art outside of those insitutional parameters, particularly the major retail structures, which perpetuate the exclusivity of the art object through exchange value.

The same possibility is provided by a non-commercial public art gallery dedicated to the exhibition of contemporary art and ideas, which under the momentum of its founding premise is obliged to consider proposals for the exhibition of art in all its forms and guises.

Indeed, these are works of art and there would be nothing unusual about looking at them in an art gallery except that they have little or no monetary value. If there is a contradiction here it derives from the breakdown in the synthesis of art-value-money which regulates much of art practice, appreciation and consumption. Value is the nexus between art and money, the ground common to each upon which an equivalence between them can be predicated, promoting the smooth interchange of aesthetic and economic terms of reference to the work of art. In short, artistic value = economic value (or, after Beuys: KUNST = KAPITAL).

Here is the point: to propose a scenario in which value loses this power of explanation and arrangement in order that its affiliations with art and money might be exposed. At the same time, an alternative art practice reveals itself in the margins of art economy, since it is here that we find what has been devalued or remaindered with the passing of time: certain ideas, styles, genres and techniques.

In these works one may find vestiges of this passing – some paint and canvas, the name of someone we don't know, a landscape or still life, a fondness for Vermeer – traces which represent the multifarious effects of a discipline or practice on the lives of different people. More than this can only be gleaned from small clues on the works' reverse sides: the entry number of a local art show; the school of an art student; the name of a framer; an overseas address...

After all, the contradiction in exhibiting these works in an art gallery is nought but another opportunity in disguise; the opportunity to conceive of things differently.

Stuart Koop 1989