Idyllic essay in Sorrowfully-sweet oxymoron

Hockney denounces tunnel vision

David Hockney, speaking at the Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts, Harvard University (Quincy Street, Feb. 6; exhibition of some of his recent prints, through Mar. 2.

Serious air-conditioning problems surfaced in Le Corbusier's restored Carpenter Center last Thursday, as an overflow crowd congregated to listen to David Hockney. The congestion was clear testimony to show what things "really" look closely to "reality." Photography has been traditionally blamed with singeing, illuminating and embroiling the meaning of the song.

The concert began with Salomone Rossi Elbbo's Cio e la morte e pianpian, in which the purity of harmony and perfection of ensemble-work became specially apparent. The inspired free-flowing viola da gamba playing of Laura Geppen was particularly well highlighted here.

One of the more attractive aspects of Camera concerts was the entertaining and informative commentaries of Joel Cohen. Following the introductory music, Cohen explained that modality is fuller complex than "Verismo and Shepherds doing 'Fatallallala4' and doing other things as well." and proceeded to prove his point with a set of beautiful Lachrimae. Monteverdi's Duri i mit sapeo, had a relaxed quality underlined by Richard Clemmitt's accomplished spinnet playing. After the meditative War athena will by Jacob Regnart, Cohen movingly played Dowland's Lachrimae on lute.

Clearly, he stated, "Infinity is everywhere, surrounding us constantly" — an interpretation that seemed to him "teleological and circular.

Hockney's art reflects his concerns. The concept of lines converging toward a vanishing point is emphasized in his work; instead (most strikingly in his many depictions of chairs), he has lines diverge to evoke extension and substance. Often, he shows objects from a revolving viewpoint in his photos. He applies collage techniques to add an element of time.

This denouncement of linear perspective is not exactly revolutionary. While photography, for obvious reasons, has felt perspective's spell most intensely — indeed, it is in this medium that Hockney's contribution is likely to make its major impact — most other 20th-century art takes its visual experience rather like this:

Its strict frontality, absence of temporal development and convergence of lines in a single vanishing point at infinity made Hockney conclude: "Perspective is tunnel vision." Once outside the tunnel, he felt rather like this:

Shakespeare well-knew the power of oxymorons to add extra interpretive power to his work. It is no accident that he repeatedly used the phrase "we are not here to gather laurels." But the aesthetic rigour of Hockney's art is not exactly revolutionary. While photography is, in itself, a form of representation perfectly valid in its own right, Piccasso's creed still needs to be preserved by "poetic vision."

The Hockney prints currently on display at the Carpenter Center fit perfectly in this program. Colorful and pictorially simple, they exhibit a kind of middle of the road eclecticism that owes as much to Matisse as it does to Picasso. But the aesthetic rigour of the Hockney models have been watered down quite a bit, and the results are often somewhat bland. There is enough to please the eye, but one wonders how long in impression will last.

Michael Bin

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