

Blue, Violet, Pink, Green

Nicola Schrudde is one of the most interesting younger artists working in Germany at this time. Based in Düsseldorf Schrudde is a highly original sculptor. In her recent series of works she has hand modelled clay to create boulder-like forms, in various dimensions, whose surfaces have a highly variegated texture to which she adds pale pastel colours – blue, violet, pink, green. The broken surfaces of these sculptural forms take the circumambient light in ways analogous to its effects on the landscape, being responsive to its continuous change and the contingent play of shadow. Crucial to these intended effects is the fact that these forms are not fired, and the colour is not therefore intrinsic. Schrudde works by a process of continual accretion, finger-moulding the damp clay until the forms are completed by a final closure. Gouache colour is applied wet to the surface as it might be on a work on paper. This brings about the kind of soft luminosity that is the function of a granular rather than of a glazed surface.

I refer to glazing as in both ceramics and in painting. That both usages are relevant to its consideration and are likely to enter into our contemplation of her work (as memory and association are always present in the contemplative act at some point) is an indication of its strangely effective ambiguities, as between object and image, sculpture and painting. For in looking at and negotiating Schrudde's floor works we are aware of a subtle complexity of physical presence: they are at once boulder-like, with suggestions of a hard solidity, gravity and weight, and like clay vessels, have a hollow fragility, an unfired vulnerability. Our eye plays over them, as individual objects and as configurations of forms, to be reminded of landscapes, hills and hallows, and particularly, of that light on landscape forms that is the obsessive subject of Monet, whose broken surfaces, significantly, have that same granular quality that best serves a preoccupation with evanescent luminosities.

In the table works Schrudde compounds these powerful ambiguities by developing a configuration of smaller forms on the bright copper surface of a large simple table. Raised to a height somewhat below eye level, one aspect of their effect is similar to that of the floor works, the apparently casually scattered forms relating to each other as components of an imagined landscape, the copper surface analogous to the surface of a lake. Finger-marks across the copper, however are immediate evidences of the objective actuality of the piece, and are reminders of the hand-facture of the clay forms. Showing a table work at A-Space, London, the artist allowed no artificial lighting, and as the daylight faded the copper gathered light and reflected upon the underside of the clay forms, whose faceted surfaces in their turn absorbed the light and radiated it outward. As the light slowly faded the entire ensemble – tangible objects in a room – took on the elegiac radiance of dusk over lake and hills.

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