

Matter Has No Destiny

Fathoming matter we swallow our debasement in it. Inside us we reflexively apprehend an exposed front, a lusty face drawn on an apparently material substrate, bordering an intimate unknown. We are accustomed to various mortal postures spurred by related anxieties, the scrunch and scuffle of pebbles underfoot, on the verge of beyond. A noted habitu  in this area, an enterprising, buccaneering spirit figured memorably by Richard Strauss – in works like *Don Juan*, *A Hero's Life* and *Death and Transfiguration* – is wont to emerge at such moments of adversity. The stark, extended extrusion of the self through the penumbral limits of the material world, in solemn or intrepid style, has a ridiculous beauty.

Matter Has No Destiny unfolds an imbroglio which overwhelms the quandary – or awkward moment – of this afflicted and trite reaction, the tenuous and teetering projection of the hero's life. Delving in matter, Ann Ensor and Louisa Casas do not put their hands on any solid, durable instrument or talisman, but in the currents of untameable trajectories as elusive as eternal sway. An inching, whomping multitude sloughs off its forms, baring, secreting or mislaying them in obtrusive or indiscernible advances which might confound our habits of engagement. Controlling, self-privileging urges, to categorise phenomena while preserving familiar cultural touchstones, are wrongfooted or even offended by the invitation to get tangled with obscure, unreliable agency (*Where will it end...*). Mission is supplanted by haphazardness, autonomy by mutuality. But these qualities repudiating stability are themselves tempered by a quaint and recalcitrant constructiveness. The tenacious integrality of this collaboration's befuddled concurrence is stubborn and compelling. The upshot is that through the gamut of the work's far flung, alien cadences, is articulated an intractable, conjunctive aloofness that avows or threatens its insatiable co-operative capacity, which is already in the ascendant. In this it is comparable to Jane Bennett's idea of the 'agency of assemblages': elusive, transitive, excessive. The work's overall character, such as it is, is discovered in the tensions of this dynamic assertion, in the uncategorizable flabby middle between harmony and disharmony flaunted by the artists' and the works' encounter.

Ensor emphasises an impression left by a spectacle occurring thousands of feet above a Chinese landscape, a prospect of industrial buildings curving 'like a growth on the surface'. This relatively illuminated or objective mindfulness of things characterises Ensor's work here. It evokes a universal plenitude of discrepant qualities in a subtly disquieting fashion, and affords a compelling voice in the material imbroglio, a detached, discriminating view on agential matter at its ancient progress. An exhaustive shadow inventory, of the mutual impressions of flesh-pressing entities, alights like a

cosmic lasso, circumscribing extremes of oblivion and the hiccupped excrescences of nature and culture in between. Its burgeoning contours wax and wane, buckling with tensions, experiencing aggravation and mollification. It seems as if the universal slew of things in general is manifest in approachable proximity, like a stand of conifers at the threshold of a cropped Coillte wood, so placidly anonymous they embarrass our self-awareness and the utility of our enjoyment. Something of the moral snag effected by encounters in nature is reflected here in grotesque exacerbation. We make clumsy introductions in the domain of things, as if for the first time, wrapped in the uneasy, cloying context of threadbare sentiments. It is uncanny and seems to recommend the dubiously reforming effects of humiliation. Humiliation of the human *per se* is observed with fascination as if in a test tube or filthy jar. As desktop technology and its entrepreneurial pilots turn like sea monkeys in turbid fluid, our steely confidence in the exceptional capabilities of human culture is threatened with corrosive degradation. Moreover, the works loiter with what we might describe as a variant of presence, commanding and indifferent, as if to provoke, or portend maturing machinations beyond our faculties.

While an evocation of encroaching ecology sequesters mortal panic in cognizance of a universal context, the jitters are at lively play at the surface of Casas's work. A first impression conveys something like a gardener's province of moist sunlight and mucky, exultant creatures, growing dappled in a dawning, abrasive blend of industrial secretions. The work's notable affinity with the caprice of weather systems is due in some respects to the manner of its making and generally to the logic of its effectuation. Its scruffy flotsam network is festooned all around with the qualified gaiety of bunting made from butchered meat. This cookie-cut freedom to cavort in the space effects a frenetic field of short-term relating that exceeds the many compositional fetters – combinations shift here and there like clouds above or a bedroom fashion show. The violent genesis is an animating inheritance in individual bits. They brim with anticipation of what lies beyond their borders and their own qualitative repertoires, bluntly spurning insular privilege. In a process like self-forgetting they search for a counterpart to trigger with emphasis. The flip side of this restless distraction is the excoriated porousness of these sensitive strips and pieces, their memory of the vagaries of environment. Their intelligence is darkened by the imminence of ending. Ready at any sudden moment to be exhausted in transferral of their payload onto another, this vital, quirky economy of shifting power and erasure renders the whole array like a wandering formation of depth charges, an efflorescent yield of momentary blips.

Words by Danny Kelly