

Still-lives by Éva Köves
2001-2003

Perhaps it is the appearance of human forms, of the human figure that will surprise the viewer at first glance if acquainted with her earlier works. The geometric forms of manmade environment, the structural components of her pictures such as the images of scaffolding, bridge structures, railings and paving stones, along with her picture installations first made Éva Köves known to us. While the change from the first appearance of twisted and floating tarpaulins through the organic forms from nature in her work is easy to follow, the arrival of the human figures in the shop-window pictures painted recently still takes one by surprise. Not to mention the mannequins modelling the human form, and the more or lesser-known figures and faces of the fashion world in attendance.

Köves utilised the view of shop-windows lining the city street in the pictures she has produced over the last years. She paints pictures displaying shop-windows she found in streets of London, Paris, Rome and Budapest, using photographs she has made of them. One of the particularities of the shop-window pictures is that they capture an arranged space, a staged visual spectacle familiar to all city dwellers, and all pedestrians as an everyday sight. In fact Köves has not taken such a huge stride in so much as her receptivity to her environment is concerned, especially with regard to the urban environs concretely. The sight of shop-windows determine the city and street environment at least as much as the forms of the buildings that accommodate them. The buildings that are also reflected by them. For the architectural components that formed an organic part of her earlier paintings also crop up here, to create a progression, a line of communication with the earlier paintings. The entablatures and balcony railings of facades are not at all so palpably represented in the new pictures, their presence becomes more enigmatic, less tangible as mirrored reflections.

The articles and photos on display and the details of buildings and the street mirrored in the glass window merge, interchange and converge. Formidable distances of space are aggregated on a single picture-plane, and the elements of the scene blot out, cover over one another

in the reflections which are determined by light factors. The images composed of objects and visual motives situated in numerous spatial planes projected upon a single plane at a single moment of time produces a dynamic visual scene. Such animated spatial play is also reminiscent of earlier pictures by Köves, where she created installations that combined city-spaces and buildings captured in images shot from various angles, producing spectacles in imitation of spatial movement of a similar animated kind.

The new appearance of human figures in paintings by Köves does not only give evidence of a current tendency in figurative painting, but also marks a change in her own oeuvre: a shift from stricter, more regular geometric forms to looser spectacles with a greater element of chance. She has become more sensitive, capturing the finer movements, outlining more delicate variances and working with a more variable imagery. This is also a result of the subject itself of course. A particularity of the visual style of shop windows, which is closely allied to the world of advertisement is their mutability, their being up to date. Even so the artist's choice of shop-windows must be examined in a variety of aspects. An example of such an aspect rests in the case of the figures typical of the show-windows, who are hardly any longer even noticed, but go through a transformation in their meaning by appearing in a painting by the change of context. Instead of the indifference elicited by the sight of shop-windows in streets, the cliché smile of the models of the fashion world, and the frequently literally faceless, headless mannequins lacking any expression draw attention in the painted picture, and involuntarily call forth an antipathy to advertisement. This throws open a number of lines of interpretation and association following upon an examination and the controversial nature of the phenomenon of advertisements and logos, which has a definitive influence upon our environment.

Köves calls these pictures of the bustling, noisy street still-lives. A thought upon what this word exactly signifies may be of some assistance in resolving the contradiction. Still-lives known from the history of art can be divided into two groups, where the captured moment and the set up still-life are delineated. Take still lives from what is known as the golden age of the genre, the 17th century. Even if they do seem like images snatched from light hearted moments of

everyday life, it has been an established fact that they brim with meaningful symbolism and significant associations. They are highly thought out, prearranged and exclude any chance element or any given factor. They carry a message. A naturally occasioned situation from which a moment is captured in an image, such a definition would be truer of still-lives from the art of photography, and in turn of the twentieth century, from whose main artistic movements it has, with the exception of the earlier, by and large been excluded.

The still-lives by Éva Köves provide a particular mixture of the two above-mentioned situations. They capture the prearranged, static, more-or-less perpetual spectacle of the shop-window, showing a deliberate, arranged sight with a concrete message attached. Yet the artist works upon a photo base, building upon the spectacle that has been fixed using a camera, and defined by numerous factors, such as the change between parts of the day, the peculiar changes of light effects resulting from this, a car or pedestrian just suddenly popped in front of the lens at the moment the shot was taken, to make it the picture of an unrepeatable, captured moment. By these means she draws her work closer to that group of still-lives, which show a slice, a genre painting caught mid stream in the continuous story, the flow of life.

Another contradiction is found between the title and the pictures, for whereas the still life is an intimate genre, the subject of Köves's pictures originates from the least intimate of areas. They mediate the sight of the most public spaces possible, views we partake of day to day. Witnesses to an age and a way of life, to which we are all bound in some way, from which we have all received impressions of one kind or another. Éva Köves's still-life pictures are public and common still-lives, the shared still-lives of the inhabitants of big cities, who are only just beginning to get a taste of the twenty-first century.

And though they are typically images of the present day, still at times one might feel that the pictures inspire emotions close to remembrance. The reasons for a sense of time overlapping and converging in these pictures as in memories, in a way similar to the play with space, may be that the black and white pictures are reminiscent of old cards and photographs; that deliberate allusions to

the styles and visual world of past ages are made in shop windows and articles chosen for them; and that they are over painted, and the view we apprehend is as a result stabilised.

Anikó Erdősi
April, 2003