



“With Feeling”

We never know the pleasure that consumes the lotus eaters. We barely even see the sailors who waywardly partake, Odysseus is so busy hog tying them under benches to get back to sea, on course, towards home. The problem with these fruits is not just lethargy and hedonism. This pleasure arises when homeward-ness, the whole point of the epic, is abandoned.

Pleasure as the state of emancipation from the need to return: this is an apt way to describe the ethos of Drea Cofield’s paintings and ink drawings, which is not to imply a disregard for consequences. The work is often on the cusp of spilling over into whatever is next emotionally and physically, the particularities of how the scene came to be eclipsed by its momentum. When were the apples *not* ripe? Everything is ripe in these paintings. Ripe tears and dew, ripe afternoons; figures which ripely chase and tumble into watching shades and leak; limbs ripe for climbing.

See: Boughs who threaten heavy drips onto the action of “The Noble Bliss” from that top left edge. The baked saturation of “Heat Blush” only heightened by the darkened figure in the foreground, which absorbs the glazed, warm atmosphere like a mass of buffed ballpoint ink. The way “Shame with Candor’s” pink river blushes around its peeping and disrobing protagonists.

The paintings can be saturated with sex but are not about sex, exactly. Or, they are about sex sometimes, as con-sensation—the works are filled with the evidence of scattered sentience, a kind of connective tissue. Butts blush and wink. Pools blink, nipples peep, and of course eyes do. Impressions layer like paint and the paint is into it too, as though the surface of each painting were the body in question, reddening from the exertion of producing the tableau and a self-aware pleasure in its content. Cofield’s process of making the paintings through layered glazes feels like an extended blush biological or cosmetic, liquidly emanating a warmth toward these routines in their strange play, moments of sexiness and banality. This self-awareness spreads to the viewer, who, casting a gaze upon these paintings, becomes enmeshed in this network, yet another shrub looking on.

Homeward-ness is one way of thinking about allegories, which draw faraway scenarios with homeward lines. They are like daytrips just far enough away that we begin to long for the newly visible contours of the familiar. Most allegories travel back well, and the abstract weirdness with which allegorical texture is built can be tempered rather quickly by the objective to become useful through interpretation and application in real life.

Though filled with recognizable gestures and games, Cofield’s allegories don’t quite work this way. I could bring back an image or gesture from the works the way one might carry around an obscure icon, compelled by the image but detached from its function. In Cofield’s works, this is by design. The iconic spools outward, turning into game, myth, the obstinate unintelligibility of the present. The longer I spend with the paintings, the more I settle on the parts of the work that pause, like the expression of the central figure of “Heat Blush.” That

face is framed by the limbs of others—the very architecture of these bodies dependent on the figure—and in this spotlight they look away in some daydream or bittersweet thought, lightly un-invested in the proffering of fruit. Or, the faces and thighs of figures, doubled over and stacked but not coupling, which seem as certain in their positions as they are in questioning what, exactly, this might mean. Figures that doze oblivious and those wedged below pyramidal tangles of bodies, participatory but not ecstatic.

Because one thing is for certain: these paintings, these gestures, do not add up to a traditional concept of rapture, hellish or edenic. In this world, there is nowhere to be carried away *to* (for this is the away), yet there is a lot of carrying. This sense of circularity, even ambivalence, saturates many of the rituals in evidence here. What happens beyond puritanism and playing hard to get, when desire is characterized not by yearning but by access, when Sappho's apples are within reach, to be snacked upon casually? Cofield's paintings propose a way to move through these ideas. Don't look back.

— Gaby Collins-Fernandez, 2018