

Text by Christopher McHugh

Nick Bodimeade's paintings make it easy – his familiar range of beach figures, buildings, dogs, trucks, etc., present us with something to grasp at once. The selection of subject matter is important – 'these days it's all about finding things that work as starting points' – and all have a basis in experience (from a poacher's knowledge of lurchers to a commuter's intimacy with the rear end of lorries). But Bodimeade strikes a canny balance between effectively rendering something of the subject and engaging with the visual dynamics of painting (talking to him about his work, you're more likely to hear about how the eye is directed around a painting than anything else).

The images are, like so much painting today, derived from photographic sources. Never happy with slavish translation, Bodimeade forges from his material something lucid and powerful, and like Degas before him, wrests from these 'starting points' something completely painterly.

Julian Bell has talked of Bodimeade's inability to produce 'art that's less than handsomely made' and the works in this exhibition forcefully bear that out. He constructs compositions that combine all-over cohesion with a taut across-the-surface logic and an 'in-and-out' pictorial space. And then there's the paint itself – the substance of a painting. Transcending diligence and correctness, his handling is assertive, speculative and propositional – it's a form of concrete poetry, a visual onomatopoeia.

Take the beach figures. Glimpsed turning edges of flesh, realised with a smear or splatter, catch our lazy eye. Squinting in the glare, we allow bodies to melt into a drizzle or stain that simultaneously swallows and yet articulates form moving in space. The marks that knit a matt of lounging bathers skid around like seals' bodies, over one another, losing the distinction of forms. The light, and the light-wracked air, are forever poking in – between twisting fragments of body and at their margins. In thick daubs and exorbitant reinstatements, light bites into outlines, chews on tissue, probes orifices ... it fills gaps, becomes the positive, the object depicted.

The dogs, a contrast with seething seaside crowds, present us with something of the symbiosis of man and beast. Like Ted Hughes' *Thought Fox*, they offer a metaphor of the search for an image/gesture quarry that binds explosively in the moment of the catch. An anecdote about a night-time demonstration of lamping, years ago, on a bowling green in Arundel, vividly highlights this notion with an unforgettable mental snapshot of dog, rabbit and arc of spray caught in the darkness, by the lamp's beam, as a three-dimensional cartwheel in mid-air.

These paintings are 'dog frendy'; instinctively they convey a world of scent, sound and movement. They seem to sniff out a range of habits – pawing, chomping, scratching, drooling, even leg-cocking – and eloquently mark the territory of the canvas with a canine presence even as they purport to depict it. They twitch and skitter, stretch and snarl, pant and loll, yelp and snap, walking a tight line between wildness, work and the sentiment of homestead and hearth.