



'PAINTING'

, FORWARD TO THE 2013 CATALOGUE

GABRIELE FINALDI, DIRECTOR, MUSEO DEL PRADO

"After their expulsion from the Earthly Paradise, Adam set himself to dig and Eve to spin. And among the arts they developed to survive is that which is called painting for which it is necessary to have imagination and an able hand to reveal things which are not there, capturing the shadow of their essence, to demonstrate that that which is not, is."

That's my version of the origins of painting as recounted by Cennino Cennini, a third-generation Florentine disciple of Giotto, around 1400.

In common with Cennino, James Gillick has a medieval reverence for his craft and his materials: wood and linen, glue and oil, pigments and varnish. He strives in his work not to betray their fundamental honesty, their inanimate authenticity. Through the recent hard and blustery winter months, in his freezing studio, he has refined his own oils, mixed his own paints, stretched his canvases taut over small wooden panels and lovingly applied layers of gesso to produce the smoothest and most gleaming of surfaces. All this in preparation for the silent glide of the sable brush, the pig-bristle dab of impasto, the feathered finish of a discreet shadow, in the service of capturing essences and the "being there" quality of objects which are not. They are the humble essences of everyday life: a bowl of sprats or chicory, some hard-boiled eggs, snowdrops in a silver pot, a knife, a cup.

Gillick's concern for simplicity is combined with an instinct for mathematical precision, but the resulting compositions are not cold or cerebral; they suggest dialogues between forms, conversations and complicities. Perhaps a man who has a large family, as he does, cannot but think in these terms. Striking too, in his work, is his tendency to discipline the exuberance of his virtuoso talent. He is suspicious of art for art's sake, because painting is necessary, it matters and it has an ethical dimension ordered towards the good of people.

To finish with the fifteenth-century Cennino: among those who turn to painting, "most to be commended are those who come to practice the art because of love or on account of a kindly disposition. They must clothe themselves with the following virtues: love, fear, obedience and perseverance."

Gabriele

Director: Museo del Prado

Finaldi