

HYPERALLERGIC



Trevor Winkfield, "Ron Padgett" (2015), acrylic on canvas 38 × 25 1/2 inches

By Stan Mir - January, 2018

PHILADELPHIA — The morning I began this review, my street was littered with used scratch-off lottery tickets from the local corner store. Some were stuck to tires; others were windblown against the gutter. One was smashed flat in the middle of the road. As I walked in one direction on the sidewalk, a guy walked towards me down the middle of the street. When he saw the smashed ticket, he picked it up, brushed it off, and slipped it in his pocket. There was both hope and anxiety in his gesture.

In the exhibition, *Collage as Painting: Kate Abercrombie and Trevor Winkfield*, currently on view at Fleisher/Ollman Gallery, Abercrombie's paintings reflect the financial anxieties and desires I see in my neighbors, and in myself. "Multiplier" (2017) resembles a poster of someone's used scratch-off tickets. It feels desolate and melancholy. Some of the tickets have comical names, but in Abercrombie's painting they appear for what they are, mocking and embarrassing — for example, "Winner Winner Chicken Dinner." Others tease with long-shot promises: "\$1,000 a Week for Life" and

“Cash Time.” Abercrombie’s poster-sized arrangement estranges these objects from our typical experience, reminding us of the fettered hopes accompanying every scratch on these tickets.

In much of the work on display, Abercrombie skillfully depicts the paperwork of our transactional world. “Morning Sun...Evening Moon Part 2” (2017) chronicles a vortex of debt through a messy spread of opened envelopes. Monetary sums painted in large numerals, ranging from \$235.00 to \$761.10, haunt the surface of the painting, along with the official logo of the Philadelphia Department of Revenue, and American flag postage stamps. The words “Past due” are penciled in with paint near the top, while a “PAID” stamp appears on an ACLU envelope along the left side. That slice of activism is nearly drowned under the rest of the debts. One of the great ironies in this painting is the word “important,” which appears twice. What’s important to the billers may not be to the debtors. Abercrombie’s painting offers a glimpse into the financial challenges of the citizen with a conscience.



Kate Abercrombie, “Morning Sun...Evening Moon Part 2” (2017), gouache on Arches paper board, 20 × 15 1/2 inches

“Conjuring” (2017) suggests that if the lottery doesn’t pan out, then perhaps occult practice will shed light on one’s financial problems. The lower half of this painting contains an Ouija board, over which is an image of the human circulatory system. Elsewhere in the painting is a set of lungs, two separate hearts, and a set of kidneys — each organ crucial to the blood. The organs suggest that the spiritualist practice will purify the blood and rid debtors of their debts. Yet this work also seems part and parcel with Abercrombie’s depictions of gambling, in the form of scratch-off tickets, pointing to risks that may cause one’s downfall. Ouija boards, for critics of spirit conjuring, are gateways to demonic possession.

Collage informs Abercrombie’s work in this exhibition. As she describes in a 2013 interview with *Title*, “...I am interested in how pattern, repetition, and the relationship between forms can create tensions

through interaction and color choice.” But it’s clear, in the work discussed above, that aesthetics aren’t Abercrombie’s only motivation. She integrates social burdens, like debt, into her practice as an artist.

In the same interview, Abercrombie discusses the role of words in her work. Words or numbers are prominent in nearly every one of her works in *Collage as Painting*. As she explains to Anne Schaefer:

The work relies on a kind of call-and-response of planning and intuition, each gaining validity when acting with the other. The scale of forms and the overall quality of the work relate to my interest in words on a page. I think a good deal about the viewing experience having a connection to reading.

This comment illustrates a link between the practices of Abercrombie and Winkfield. Both artists begin planning their works with drawings before putting paint on a surface, and both share an interest in language. For Winkfield, however, this interest rarely manifests as text in his paintings.

Winkfield, who was born and raised in England, has had a deep connection with the poets of the New York School since the late 1960s, when he edited the mimeographed *Juillard*, from 1968-1972. He moved to New York in 1969, and has worked with poets such as John Ashbery and James Schuyler on book covers and other collaborative projects.

Trevor Winkfield, “Ron Padgett” (2015), acrylic on canvas 38 × 25 1/2 inches

His painting “Ron Padgett” (2015) is a portrait of the poet, whose *Collected Poems* were published in 2013, and who wrote the poems in Jim Jarmusch’s 2016 film *Paterson*. Without the title, the face in the painting doesn’t immediately evoke Padgett’s likeness; Winkfield uses the legal pad in the middle of the image (with no obvious writing instrument) to convey literary significance. The figure comes across as an alchemist, wearing a folding fan for a hat, and holding an arrangement of cubes in his right hand.

Winkfield meticulously calibrates the surface in each of his works. The washed-out quality of color in newsprint, magazines, and Technicolor film inspire the hues in his paintings and make them distinctly unlike those in the natural world. This, in addition to his very particular arrangement of objects in the picture plane, draws attention to Winkfield’s paintings as created things.

In a 1997 review of Georges Braque’s late works at the Royal Academy of Arts in London, Winkfield, an occasional critic, describes Braque’s placement of objects in his *Studios* series. He writes, “Multiple

entry points are offered the viewer, and it often appears that Braque harbored a wish to have been born an insect and so know different perspectives.”

“The Gallery” (2012), which is divided into three columns, shares the same wish. Thirteen different and fascinating portals are contained in this image. Those in the middle column are set up as framed images. A couple of mushrooms are in one; part of a lobster shell is in another. Winkfield’s work often calls to mind the fantastic world of Lewis Carroll’s *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* (1865). In “The Gallery,” he teases the viewer with enough of a scene to suggest that one could peek one’s head inside these frames and find another room.

Trevor Winkfield, “Venetian Panels” (2004), acrylic on canvas, 32 × 45 1/2 inches

“Venetian Panels” (2004), Winkfield’s earliest works in this show, offers a take on the triptych. The left side includes a pipe — perhaps a nod to René Magritte’s “The Treachery of Images” (1928-29) — while the middle focuses on a quiver of arrows or quills at rest in an ink jar. The right depicts a rather curious looking flower, with pea pods across its stem, growing from a vase. As Winkfield said of Braque, who is perhaps his greatest influence, there are always multiple perspectives in Winkfield’s paintings. A small section of “Venetian Panels,” or any other work in the show, could easily be an accomplished work.

Winkfield’s imagery in much of his work is esoteric, suggesting an elaborate system of possible meanings. It’s more likely, however, that he engages esotericism to imbue particular objects with significance, challenging the routine arrangement of our world, like dream logic for waking life. Abercrombie more obviously references esoteric tradition with her Oujia board painting. But she is no occultist either. She depicts the ways that reality can feel suffocatingly collaged around us, with few releases other than giving to your favorite civil liberties organization or gambling a few dollars at the store.

Collage as Painting: Kate Abercrombie and Trevor Winkfield *continues at Fleisher/Ollman Gallery*
(1216 Arch Street 5A, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania)