

Ally Morton – ‘Alchemy’

Ally Morton's paintings tell stories about a place that we cannot completely fathom, because they describe a world that is a product of the artist's imagination. We recognise some aspects of this world: the sky, the ground, the sea and some of the animals, so that there are some points of reference from which to navigate their inherent strangeness.

Morton's ideas are generated from all sorts of stimuli; folktales, popular culture (music and film) and mythology, and he uses reference material from a range of sources including newspaper photographs or images found on the internet. Like a magpie, he decorates his nest with the trinkets that he steals from the clouds of influence which float around our own daily lives, so that the paintings connect to a shared repertoire of memory and imagination.

It is telling that the symbolism involved in alchemy was the starting point for some of this work, because it can evolve dramatically in the process of making. It is shocking to witness; a painting seen in the studio in an almost finished state appears as an utterly different image on the next visit, changed as new directions and ideas have taken hold. Forms and shapes, with their narrative potential, emerge from the paint itself, as if the artist is a medium or clairvoyant channelling another dimension.

Here, a boy huddles in the darkness as a lion begins to materialise behind him, but it is difficult to know whether this is a benevolent or a malevolent apparition; a phoenix explodes from a galleon on fire, and a decapitated head wearing a crown chats amiably to a gaping pelican whose chest feathers are covered in blood.

Do these paintings make sense? They do, in the same way that the fragmented, distorted logic of a dream makes sense. In dreaming we process the waking world through the subconscious. If the other side of this is that dreams don't seem to make sense at all, then we need to see them as sites of mystery and imagination where different kinds of story can be told.

Mike Golding, June 2010

Text written for 'The Sleeper / Alchemy' exhibition with Huw Dampney at Moving Gallery, 67b Westgate Road, Newcastle upon Tyne, July 1st - 14th 2010