

August 21, 2017

Gertrude Stein, Roses, and Moses Supposes



View of the studio with *Shodō* on the easel.



The Water Garden, Giverny

The blogosphere has not been resounding to my pronouncements in the last few months. I have been holed up in my French studio working very hard all summer long. This is for my next one person show in October in London. When not painting, I have been pottering around my garden, tending to the proverbial roses and thinking and reading a lot. Swimming. Not writing. Blog silence. Not seeing people or exhibitions. Thinking a lot about painting. Too much perhaps....

Painting, for me, emerges out of an inchoate, turbulent, complex tumble of ideas that come out of looking hard at nature and landscape. I like vagueness. No hard lines. Nothing man-made. No sharp edges. Colour. Expressiveness. Rhythm. Conversely, writing, for me, is different. It's an attempt to be clear, formal and concise. I like to zig zag between these polarities. Hence these (sporadic) blogs.

It's sort of like gardening. Growing things seems like painting to me, and pruning is like writing. Monet knew a thing or two about this metaphor. He created his own subject matter. One of my new paintings is called *The Water Garden* in honour of his paradise at Giverny and looks at this idea of things growing and appearing and then seeming to disappear. All at the same time.

When I work in my studio, I try hard to think about the ways things *look* to me and the way things might actually *be*. Gertrude Stein, the Great Mama of Dada, challenged this thought neatly if predictably ambiguously: "A rose is a rose is a rose." Okaaaay....

So, do I paint what I know, or what I see? Or is it all a meaningless conceptual shambles? Are my paintings about what is actually there?

I have had a gnomonic statement by Ms Stein up on the wall in the studio all summer long.

"There is no there, there."

Is there?

Maybe Arthur Freed gets closer to the nub of the matter:

"A rose is a rose is a rose is a rose is,
A rose is what Moses supposes his toes is"

Singin' in the Rain

Eat your heart out Ms Stein.

Robin Richmond