

Fading to Nought

John Murphy, *Fading to Nought, Fading to Nought* exhibition catalogue, Martin Browne Fine Art/ SEL, August 2001

Clouds have been called upon to invoke the idea of transience. Their brief, silent lives seem to demonstrate the impermanence of an individual, and the vanity of an entire epoch, proving that everything 'shall fade to nought', as Edmund Spenser phrases the passing of the Roman Empire. Clouds, weather and the atmosphere have also been universal images for the variable conditions of the emotions, and the state of the human spirit.

The changeability of feelings, the indefinite and the distant are the subjects of Chris Langlois' paintings. The weightless excursions of his paintings pass easily between abstract and naturalistic themes. His sky and colour studies, seascapes and abstract landscapes enter regions of profound subjectivity and emotion, without making personal disclosures. While the illusory boundary of the horizon is the most emphatic line in the paintings, the landforms in works such as *Landscape (blue grey & yellow) No.7, 2000 – 2001*, are indeterminate; landscape becomes as porous and suggestive as clouds.

Whether portraying imaginative or natural terrains, each work is an invitation to contemplation, evoking a sense of privacy, and expressing motion between the spirit's confinement and release. His seascapes balance mass and vacancy, nature and abstraction, giving shape to the momentary currents of sea and sky. Their shifting form is often contained within a square canvas, the stubbornness of the shape seeming to resist the flux of its subject, to contain the suppleness and agility of the human mind.

Although the scale of his painting, *Rain (blue, grey and violet) No. 45, 2001*, recalls the form of a panorama, the scene is untouched by landmarks and topographical information. Its vista is defined by the mood of hesitation which accompanies rainfall. The work progresses through successive washes of paint over its linen surface, permitting varying degrees of transparency. The vast passages of overcast sky govern the painting and convey the diffuse, abstract domain of human emotion, the opaque quality of its consciousness. The sky simultaneously consumes and empties itself; it nurses a sensibility which refrains from direct expression, turns within itself and is freed, released in invisible rain. Recognisable structures, such as clouds, seem to dissolve optically and to reform, suspended in a solution of pigments. The painting's landform becomes a sedimentary layer of the atmosphere, and suggests that the earth is an uncertain foothold to the unfolding expanse of changing feeling and thought.

Like abstract paintings, the seascapes are identified in their titles by the palette of colour. Unmarked by the lines of the longitude and latitude, they are not specified as particular

locations. The markings of Langlois' brushstrokes are also invisible; they are blended so finely that the painting appears to fall through the woven texture of their surface. They reside in a pure, intangible atmosphere behind the canvas, like afterimages imprinted on the eye's lining, and settings which already inhabit the viewer's mind. Their refined and resolved quality recalls the belief of the Latin poet, Lucretius, that nature sheds perfect films, or simulacra of itself, which travel through air and become the source of our vision and thought. The images enter our minds and set them 'in motion with a single touch; for the mind itself is delicate and marvellously mobile.

¹ Edmund Spenser, *The Ruines of Rome: by Bellay*, stanza 20