

Previews

Bending the Cosmos – New Paintings by Terry Rodgers



The Artificial Boundaries of Illusion, top, and The Clarity of Singular Transformation, below

Torch Gallery, until 28 March

Some read them as excoriating social critique; others find them merely kitsch. In either case, the large-scale hyper-realistic group portraits of US painter Terry Rodgers never fail to polarise opinion and stir heated debate. Is it possible for hordes of half-naked young beauties doing nothing but chilling out in luxurious party settings to be anything but irredeemable bad taste?

Rodgers takes up clichés and flips them on their heads. What could initially be mistaken for advertising material, on closer inspection quickly seems to be an indictment of the so-called 'good life'.

The world of plenty he presents is false; it doesn't deliver the fast-food happiness we expect. Unlike a Bacardi commercial, none of the amazing creatures crowding Rodgers' high-end parties seem to actually be enjoying themselves. A sense of imminent disaster looms as money, physical

perfection and the promise of sex fail to bring due pleasure. In a review for *Art in America* Cathy Byrd described Rodgers' work as an 'elegy of emptiness'. Rodgers has been compared to Eric Fischl and David Salle. All three US painters have depicted in a realistic fashion the overruling bourgeois ennui at the turn of the century.

Rodgers seems to have captured the disappointment of a generation that has turned the obsession with beauty, youth and wealth into a new religion. With seamless technical facility, he presents their gatherings as joyless and hints at the decline of their whole way of life. In this sense, Rodgers endows his depictions of today's conflicted desires with a pathos that was once reserved for great epics and historical deeds. Here the decadence of the empire isn't taking place in Ancient Rome; it's taking place in the contemporary Western world. Rodgers depicts it with jaw-dropping virtuosity.

Catherine Somzé