

Mike Silva***Interiors*****28 May – 20 June**

It is with great pleasure that Galleri Bo Bjerggaard presents *Interiors*, an exhibition of new works by the English painter Mike Silva. This marks Silva's first solo exhibition at Galleri Bo Bjerggaard. The exhibition features paintings of uninhabited interiors and male portraits.

The subjects are all from Mike Silva's personal photographs, mostly taken over 20 years ago. He has a stack of these old photos in his studio, which he occasionally selects a few from and pins to a board on the studio wall. The photographs of empty rooms, and of the men who inhabit them, occupy an odd status as subjects for paintings. They fall somewhere between personal, intimate memory and found image. It's an odd thing to live in a time remote from your subject. Artists often find images in the world around them. Mike's subjects are personal but distant; his paintings allow him to reacquaint himself with them. He's been there. We haven't. We may have been around the corner. But not there. Not in that room when the light hits the wall. Not when they met. The paintings invite us into those places now, into those times.

The time of painting is a curious thing. It's a Long Now. Painting is always in the present, always now. Photographs are different; they depict a specific moment which is constantly receding, fading into the past. Holding on, letting go. In sitting with the images Silva allows himself to access the bubble of time they contain, the moments leading up to and immediately following his taking of the photograph, which only he can know. They act as portals for him to re-enter that time and place.

Looking at this new series of paintings, they begin to appear as protagonists and stages. Actors and sets. As with painters such as Caravaggio, the characters in the paintings become familiar to us, playing various roles, becoming different characters through the artist's paintings. For example, in Caravaggio's work, Mario Minniti appears repeatedly, playing various roles - Greek God, Soldier, Musician. As the men in Silva's life become images, they similarly take on roles: sleeper, smoker, lover, partner. The rooms they have shared with Mike also take on roles. The difference between the models in Caravaggio and Silva's paintings is that in Silva's they feel like actors captured off stage. The stage is portrayed unoccupied. We are invited in, but slightly before or after the play is performed. We see the unmade hotel bed, the sheets played like exhausted, post-coital lovers. We see the washing up but not the meal. The paintings give us intimacy at a remove. The images are of the quiet moments, the in-between times. Not the drama but the interlude.

Silva chooses to make images of very specific types of spaces. They have an intimacy, a domesticity; they look safe, homely, comfortable, quiet. Mostly they are private. Some are transitory, transactional - hotel rooms. Others are places Silva has a deep connection with a private members club in Soho he worked at for many years, flats he and lovers have shared. They all have a feeling of refuge, personal sanctuary, belonging.

Hammershøi's paintings of the rooms in his home often provide a useful example of the difference between subject and meaning in art. There is an instinctive presumption that the subject of a painting is the carrier, the container, of the message. It seems obvious that what the painting is of tells us what the painting is about. Then there is a Hammershøi painting of an apartment wall with a door, half open, revealing an empty room. The subject is barely there, almost nothing.

The meaning though is devastating. Time, love, life, death, togetherness, isolation.

The painting *2nd Floor Interior* portrays a room at the private members club Silva worked at in Soho. The room is a social space, usually associated with the night, bustling with people, a bar in the centre of London. Silva paints it as a quiet place of solitude, a space that is momentarily his, his alone. This feels like a key to the paintings: they depict people and places the artist can lay claim to, places he has belonged to, shared, known intimately, however fleetingly.

Viewers of Silva's paintings often mistakenly call them photorealistic. There is a looseness to the drawing which betrays this characterization. The images are not painstakingly projected or traced. Silva grids up the small photograph and transfers the information onto the gridded canvas by hand. The squares making up the grid on the canvas are surprisingly large, giving only a rough guide to the artist; they don't strictly guide his hand, that is left to his eye and judgement.

Light plays an unusual role in the paintings. Light in painting is usually thought of as functional, helping us to see the subject. It describes the surface of what we are seeing. Things hide in the shadows, not in the light. Not here. In these paintings it obscures, it bleaches, it burns out. The overabundance of light doesn't clarify, it destroys information. In *Kitchen Wall*, the light becomes a surface or an object in itself. It has a physicality, as if it is laying across the scene, covering rather than illuminating.

These paintings are deceptive; Silva uses light and time to imply access and intimacy while keeping the viewer just off stage. The paintings create the impression of access to intimate moments, but only on Silva's terms. He seems to show us everything, but he hides it in the light.

Mike Silva is a Swedish-born painter (b. 1970, Sandviken, Sweden) based in London. He received a BA with Honours in Fine Art from Middlesex University in 1989 and an MA in Fine Art from Royal College of Art, London, in 1994. Silva's works are represented in several collections, including the Government Art Collection (UK), the British Council Collection (UK), the British Airways Collection (UK), the Simmons & Simmons Collection (UK), the Saatchi Collection (UK), and Tate (UK).