

HALES GALLERY

Basil Beattie

Above and Below: Step Paintings 1990-2013

Hales gallery are delighted to present *Above and Below*, a solo show of works by British painter Basil Beattie.

Beattie left the Royal Academy schools in 1961, when the trend in Britain was for American-influenced abstract expressionism and post-painterly abstraction. His initial works of the 1960s and early 70s absorbed these influences but it was not long before Beattie abandoned a purely formal approach and developed his own anxious, edgy form of painting which has served to distinguish his work from many other artists working at the time.

Nowadays, when Beattie talks about his role as a painter he refers to himself as a 'sort of symbolist', one who alludes to but avoids making direct reference to human form. He considers his successful works to be those which have a kind of potency, hover in space and have a sort of molten quality to the paint (as if it has reached melting point). These descriptions serve to highlight a certain elusiveness which Beattie considers to be essential to the making of successful works.

Throughout his career, Beattie has returned again and again in his large scale paintings to motives which can loosely be described as steps, ladders, staircases or even ziggurats in which the motion is upward and on the diagonal. Often firmly fixed to the bottom of the canvas, Beattie sees these structures as rooted to the earth. Not only are these images metaphorical vehicles in Beattie's personal arsenal but also formal tools which have aided him in the creation of some of his most dynamic works to date.

However, although the pictorial elements present in the works hold significant and undeniable psychological implications, Beattie's paintings gain further meaning, and indeed would not be the powerful statements that they become, if it were not for the masterful way in which he works and manipulates the painted surface so that it too is a purposeful carrier of meaning. It is the variety and energy of mark making that makes Beattie's step paintings such individual statements and the worthy subject of this exhibition.

Between 2007 and 2009, Beattie was consumed by the creation of *Janus* series. These works are formally of a very different nature to the works presented in this exhibition; where a quantity of flattened semicircular structures, not unlike the world viewed through the rear view mirror contain the suggestion of a horizon line, a vanishing point. However, even in these work Beattie displays a great pleasure in the moving and manipulation of paint which has been used to great effect in many of his most recent works. In the past few years, Beattie has revisited the step-like structures and made a series of his most successful paintings to date, a number of which were recently shown in his solo presentation at the Jerwood gallery in Hastings.

Above and Below will touch lightly upon the wide variety of uses for which the 'steps' motif has been employed. It is not in any way meant to be exhaustive in its exploration of it in Beattie's work. However, by offering the paintings to view as a brief chronology, it does offer the viewer an opportunity to chart the diversity and command that Beattie has developed over his very own energetic form and the possibilities it offers as a signifier.

Basil Beattie is a renowned British painter whose works have been exhibited internationally. Selected solo exhibitions include Promises, Promises, (Jerwood Gallery, Hastings, UK), Basil Beattie Paintings from the Collections (Tate Britain, London, UK), Basil Beattie, IKON (Birmingham, UK); selected group exhibitions include Contemporary Print Show (Barbican Centre, London, UK), Jerwood Painting Prize 1998 and 2001 (Jerwood Gallery, London, UK and Gallery of Modern Art, Glasgow, UK in 2001), Thinking out Loud (Camden Arts Centre, London, UK) John Moores Exhibition 15', 16', 17', (Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool, UK) and others.



Basil Beattie, *Step Up On*, 2013, oil on canvas, 213 x 198 cm