

Craig Fisher 'Flat Space' – 2022

Abingdon Studios, Blackpool, UK



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Article written by Ann Carragher

For reasons beyond my control, I missed Craig Fisher's 'Flat Space' private view at Abingdon Studios, where he had been in residence to complete a commissioned solo exhibition. I later got to see some of Fisher's work at The Manchester Contemporary (represented by ABS) and was immediately intrigued. On show were a series of small 2d collage works, depicting geometric abstract shapes. These shapes seemed to float and form, creating a sense of space; through a limited spatial delineation and intuitive visual assumption.

Contrasting the limitations of the geometric flat space, is a mesmerising, undulating surface of striated blue, grey hues that add a sense of depth to the flat shapes and hard edges. This disruption is hypnotic and rhythmic, helping create an enigmatic charge and sense of forlorn.

The 'Flat Space' series continues to enchant. I eventually got to see the rest of Fisher's works in-situ at Abingdon Studios last weekend. My initial response was one of surprise, I had assumed the works here would be similar in scale to what was on show at TMC. Four separate large compositions occupy the gallery space; they dominate, but do not overwhelm; their subdued and enigmatic presence provoke contrasting responses. The two larger works (*titled 'Teaser I' & 'Teaser II', 2022*) hang and float from the gallery walls; one vertical, the other horizontal, whilst the other two compositions partially encroach onto the gallery floor. The large hanging works employ similar geometric images, and on closer inspection, I am amazed to discover each of the shapes, that help form the central image, are stitched together and not painted. This takes meticulous planning and accuracy. The thick canvas are swathed in the similar blue grey hues; the sweeping brush strokes reveal a sense of order through energetic, directional gestures. The directional gestures and consistency of the paint, create a flat colour surface, as well as a variegated tonal surface (at times resembling a mottled, marbled effect). A complimentary flamingo-orange hue is sparingly juxtaposed against the blue grey tones. The geometric shapes on the larger hanging works, depict stairwells; one ascending, the other descending. The central stairwell images are somewhat framed by a broad stitched canvas border; this border creates a sense of distance through a tantalising threshold of order, function and progress. Is this an ordered utopian ideal that we as a society strive for? Or, are these nostalgic glimpses to a past that we yearn for? The other two works (*Titled 'A Flat Land' 2022*) occupy the peripheral margins of the gallery floor. Architectural fragments and detritus, spill from a stage-like backdrop, whilst the other alludes to a layered landscape of flat and playful stage props; shapes wrapped in the same painted canvas. A sense of unease and abandonment is prevalent.

Are these the ruins of imagined futures or the past encroaching on the future; telling, reminding, beckoning? The ambiguity and contrasting perspectives create lamentations, where failure and progress manifest through aesthetic pleasure. This work was completed amidst the backdrop of both the new and tired facades of Blackpool, where the past and future collide, and the present seems compromised. Amidst the crumbling facades of the past and the new hopeful plans for the future, Blackpool, once described as a beacon of progress and the Las Vegas of the North, remains a playground of pleasure for the intrepid visitor. However, the grandeur and splendour of the past lie in abandoned architectural mutations and the ruins of modernity.

For me, this work embodies a dichotomy that is a poignant reminder of our need for positive sustainment, now more than ever, amongst the chaos and precarity that is currently pervading our reality.

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