

## SILENCE

by: Aidan M.D. Ware, 2009

Silence. It is a mid-April day and the rain has been coming down in a constant rhythm. It has been busy. An average day. A lot said. A lot meant. A lot of happening and doing and thinking. A lot of moments. Chaos order hope fear dreams frustrations needs details giving taking wanting knowing and all the gamut of other personal incarnations that we carefully portion out daily into tolerable increments. This is life I think to myself. And it is NOISY.

Silence. I search for the definition: "Absence of sound; abstinence from speech or noise." And the verb: "to make silent, to repress." I pause, considering that life does not have many true silences. And as such, are they something we seek, or something we fear?

Sought and feared; for some the promise of peace, for others a signifier of death. But what does silence mean to Scott Pattinson? Why does he choose this word to describe this body of work?

### "An abstinence from speech"

Expressionism in art originated in Germany, fostered by Nietzsche's work on existentialist philosophy. It was used as a term to describe the graphic quality of paintings by groups such as the Die Brücke and it became a period defined by an emotional response from the artist to his surroundings. German artists Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, Otto Dix, and Norwegian painter Edvard Munch, are among the best recognized examples of this movement. They painted highly charged images in an aggressive style that dominated the eye and commandeered the canvas. Their use of colour related to an emotional spectrum and their delineation of space was narrow, often filled with angst. Following on the heels of celebratory Impressionism and centuries of religious and secular narrative painting, expressionism gave artists the freedom of deep personal and emotional expression in their work and it launched an era of self-exploration and intense psychological painterly introspection. Indeed, this shift continues to inform contemporary practice today, in genres ranging from new media to performance and beyond. Looking inward has become the new undiscovered country for painters; the new spiritual plane. And therein I seek my answers.

The Silence exhibition is tight. It is a family of colours and lines that riff and echo, beat and dissipate. But it is also *tight*. The tension is palpable in the room. A myriad of line and colour, dizzy heights and depths, pitfalls, ethereal balances, and subliminal forms draw the viewer into a colourful void of conglomerate meanings, fusing and ripping apart. Sweeping fissures and lustrous edges mark the boundaries of time and place, memory and moment, with stringency and yet a tender pulse. The electric surfaces, filled with quick cadence and spirited play, are yet sometimes overcast by shadowy forms and dimmer resolutions. Through the intimation of these cimmerian dominions, we become aware that an intensity lies beyond the flamboyant manifestations and chaotic junctures of paint on canvas. At the surface, the work appears to offer the prospect of happy affairs and joyful soirées, the promise of an elated meeting of elements in time, but quickly we come to realize that this hectic frolic is a diversion. In fact, there is no respite from the storm of altered passages, unfinished destinations, skewed perspectives, impulsive changes, or rich highways of paint which dive and turn. There is no exit or space for further action. The moment of painting is the moment of all things colliding. All things dreaming. All things arriving. All things leaving. The images are the NOISE of the in between. The action between actions, they silently haul unconscious myth, harnessing paint to an emotional narrative of split second impressions, moments of encounter, and even years of fallout.

In the space of the exhibition I pause; watching a lone horizon he sparingly relinquished vanish like a lost island in the stream of consciousness. It is but temporary ground. The vivid swirling visions of time wander in paradoxical emotions. I wonder what is really happening here. I collect myself. Yet a multitude of memory pieces, broken thoughts, and complicated scenes impossibly press on me and I can not think of what it is. What *it* is. And that's suddenly the moment that I truly get *it*.

This is the abstinence from speech and sound. This is silence. But it SCREAMS.

I think that if we could not let out our life's thoughts, we would reach an edge of explosive light and dark, a massive expulsion of virulent shadow and dream. If we were trapped in silence and could not somehow say what was in us, we would burst into a wild deluge and be lost. How is Pattinson not lost? How does he submerge into this turbulence and yet manage to keep structure?

## **"To make silent"**

Control. Necessary to life, love, and to success. Emotion must not reckless run. The deluge must have rules.

Silence must have boundaries.

Abstraction came after expressionism, perhaps as a response to the intense and vulnerable exposure that expressionism demanded from its arbiters. I think of it as an equal and opposite reaction; the law of physics. Abstraction found its height in New York during the mid-century with artists such as Willem de Kooning, Jackson Pollock, and Mark Rothko, but it gradually continued to move away from associations with expressionism. Abstract painters became focused on an intense geometry, particularly visible in the work of artists such as Canadian Jack Bush. Although all art is in some way an abstraction from reality, the late modern period of abstract painting was marked by a desire to get away from emotionalism to a removed, more logical place that was architectural in nature. The planes of the canvas became an intense fascination for painters. The contemplation of physical proportions took precedence over narrative and colour became a singular demarcation of depth and light. The process actually became the composition. Gone was the wilderness of the subconscious, the exploration of the self that expressionism heralded in. Instead, painters sought to expose the canvas as a site of physical illusion, a thing of trickery. They sought an authentic experience of painting through angles and steady mathematics. And here I find my second answer; this is how Pattinson manages to immerse and resurface with such ease.

The happy party mixtures and twisty dark turmoil messes are seat-belted by a firm architectural anchoring and a keen awareness of physical realities. Unlike purely expressionist artists, he commits to boundaries and carefully chooses what he reveals. He pulls back the NOISE of life, strapping it to a discernable grid. This keeps order and gives harmony. The bright colours collide in solid streams of directional purpose, withholding vulnerability, withdrawing weakness. Our visceral response is to want to rip them away. To see the emotional spectacle. To turn the flashlight on memory and pierce through the intransigence of systemic order. To take down cheerful skies, undo the sumptuous warmth of glazed strata, stand barefoot in the wind-swept roads of paint, and dig below the blinding snow of whites, to reveal the rawest season. We want to see *it*. To be in the room with silence. To actually see the NOISE of the in between. But we are made to turn away, to exercise boundaries. To return to the carousel unsure what lies beyond the slick surface of reeling paint, glamorous promises, and wayfaring shadows. Invariably, the grid objects to the inquiring eye. A barricade of intangible, ghostly steel, it does not wholly let us in. We too are handed a kind of silence by the exhibition.

This, I come to understand, is what Pattinson does "to make silent" the intimate details of his emotional transactions. He controls the experience. The turbulence of memory is held fast by the strength of order; the architecture buoys it in a solidified suspension. For Pattinson, silence represents all the spaces in life between what is spoken, but it also represents the power "to make silent," to repress and quell. To keep order. To keep silent.

## **"Silence"**

It is nightfall now. The rain has stopped and there is a decided absence of sound. But the lingering memories of the day still reverberate in the stillness of my mind. And I think to myself, life is NOISY.

Yet, I see that this noise is a kind of silence. That life is about the spaces in between speech. That the things that are not said, are the most important. That silence is the land held by our boundaries and rules and lines and grids. It is the space of life and hope, promise and fate, love and death.

It is the NOISE of light and darkness. It is silence.