

Tom Blackwell:



Hudson River Landscape
1984
Oil on canvas

First impressions:

At first sight I notice the cold feel of the painting, and I see a car beside a wall with graffiti on it. There is pond with a still reflection on it beside the car. This painting makes me think about the slums of a city – the dumps.

There is some sort of cloth like material protruding from the windscreen of the car which I find quite strange. 5 words I would use to describe this painting would be; cold, lucid, observational, run-down and urban.

Basic elements:

The colours used in this painting are quite cold. There is a strong blue glaze over the painting suggesting it's set either around dawn or dusk. The colours are quite dark yet not dull. Blackwell brings out the light in the reflection in the pond beside the run down car. The colours are very much realistic; however they give an almost surreal effect, because of the reflection in the pond and the 'twilight feel to the painting'.

Tonal shading is quite an important aspect of this painting, as different hues of blue have been used to bring out certain parts of the painting while other darker tones have been used to bring back parts of the paintings into the shadows.

Content:

When I first look at this painting, I see a typical urban scene. It seems dusk has arrived; giving everything a deep blue glaze. I see a run down car beside a pond, lying next to run down wall infested with graffiti. Cracks are visible on the wall at closer inspection.

The scene seems quite still and we can tell this is so by the still unmoving reflection within the pond beside the car. The lack of people within the painting also emphasises the tranquillity of the still life within the painting.

I think Blackwell intended this painting to retain this stillness as if to emphasise the contrast within a city; part of it can be constantly alive as in his other paintings consisting of reflections in shop windows and cars – while another part is hidden, left to decompose, alone.

I believe this painting was done by observation as it seems Blackwell purely wanted to convey the truth about today's modern world – through this painting he reflects corruption in the world which could possibly be interpreted from the run down car and the graffiti infested wall.

If I was to name this painting, I would call it '*Twilight slum*' because of its visual nature.

Mood and atmosphere:

This painting gives me a deep feeling of serenity; the deep variety of blue hues and the stillness of the painting emphasise this almost 'surreal' twilight light zone. Blackwell's painting here lacks any human presence much like the works of the photorealist Richard Estes, and so in this sense he opens up our senses and makes us more aware of these often neglected every day urban scenes.

It seems like the scene has been captured at dawn where most people are still asleep and the streets are quiet and so in this sense, Blackwell emphasises the feeling of serenity that suffuses this painting.

Blackwell challenges our view of the busy modern world in which we live in by capturing this typical urban, yet rather calm tranquil like scene.

Materials and techniques:

Oil on linen was used to paint this image, with what seems to be quite a precise technique, to create the stillness of the scene.

Composition:

This work seems to be quite carefully planned as it isn't just a random depiction of an urban scene, but its overall aura contributes into conveying a deeper message; the stillness, with its lack of human presence and precise painting technique and the time of day that this painting depicts all contribute into conveying its tranquil twilight light setting..

In the foreground of the painting, the run down car is visible, and this is the main dominating object within the painting, towards the background, we see the silhouetted trees that help to bring out the car within the foreground. The contrasting use of colour also helps to push and pull certain aspects of the painting into the fore, mid and background. The light tinting to the blue sky contrasts with the dark silhouette of the trees, and the pond depicts this part of the image creating a mirror like reflection.

Context:

Photo-Realist painter Thomas Leo Blackwell, born in 1938, started out as an abstract painter influenced by the Pop Art movement. He moved on to a primary interest in painting large-scale works featuring the gleaming surfaces of machinery, metal and glass, mainly in airplanes and motorcycles, but later in urban store fronts and windows and so this painting 'the Hudson river landscape' is quite different to his other works. He has used photographs from magazines as the source of his subject matter, as well as taking his own photos.

Links:

I chose this unique piece of work, because not only is it the only painting that depicts such an urban scene, but it links in with my project; I want to convey my views on modern life and I would like to show these by encompassing the wider world; I want to do this by showing not only the richer more modern parts of the city, but also the more hidden, bleak and more subtle aspects of the city which I would like to be incorporated within my project. This creates a more realistic view as today's modern world is not perfect, but rather blemished in some places; for example the graffiti and vandalism on the walls and the run down car. The rather dark theme within this painting is a quality which I might implement within my final piece; whilst depicting the big city, I might for example have a run down car retreated into a dark alleyway which can just be picked out within the mid ground to give the subtle hint of poverty and corruption maybe.

What's different between this piece of work and my work is that I want encompass the city as a whole – not just part of it as Blackwell does within this painting (and his other paintings which are subject specific, for example his paintings of motorcycles, or the shop fronts).

Evaluation:

I think Blackwell would be pleased about this piece of work; although it doesn't seem to fit in with the other themes Blackwell has focused on (such as the shop fronts and motorcycles), this painting still depicts an urban scene very well.

I like the calm serenity that suffuses the painting created by the lack of human presence and the deep blue hue that glazes the painting and.

I also like the fact that the painting seems to have so much, yet seem so simple; Blackwell intended to depict an urban scene so that it includes the run down car and the run down wall with cracks and graffiti on it, which creates a sense of realism that I find quite appealing.

If I could ask Blackwell a question, I would ask him what inspired to paint this painting, as all his other paintings are quite subject specific in that they focus primarily on things like motor cycles or shop fronts for example.