

POYNTON, WINNICOTT & THE 'HIDE & SEEK' SELF

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ABSTRACT

This study deliberates the transposition of the affects of abandonment and adoption into the realm of art-making, specifically the practice of hyperrealism. In this research I examine the recent paintings of South African artist Deborah Poynton, and reflect upon aspects of my own work. I analyse how Poynton's articulation of themes underpins an affect of absence and unenlivenment, through drawing attention to the artifice of a highly realistic mode of painting and her particular approach to depicting people. The work selected dates from the Everything Matters exhibition held at the KwaZulu-Natal Society of Arts Gallery (2010). I assess Poynton's process, how her aesthetic aperture is set for clarity, at all depths, and her obsessive reproduction of the image, drawing a comparison to hypervigilance. I investigate the complexities that complicate the reductive notions of hyperrealism and illusionism in these paintings. I scrutinise the out-turned revelations and the insulatory disguises, so obviously at variance, which manifest such a peculiar vacancy of affect. In foregrounding Poynton's biography, my approach relies on the writings of British Object-Relations theorist, Donald Winnicott (1896-1971), for the terms of its analysis in examining her need to call attention to artifice as a need to make an impact and to be seen. I argue that these works are peculiarly suited to a psychoanalytic critical approach, in particular the hide-and-seek qualities of Winnicott's notions of the true and false self. This project concerns itself with the formative nature of looking; how the self is first made real through recognition. I question whether early failure of mutuality with the environment might predispose an artist to a hyperrealist mode, extending Winnicott's ideas regards precocious perception.

KEYWORDS

Donald W. Winnicott, Deborah Poynton, early development, precocious perception, mirroring, transitional objects, creativity, holding environment, impingement, adoption, dissociation, depersonalization, true and false self, hide and seek self, hyperrealism, artifice, absence, painting.