

The approach

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Patrick Caulfield: Stillness And Drama | Art in London

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Art , Painting ★★★★★ ★★★★★ Add review



Patrick Caulfield, 'The Register', 1993. Copyright the Artist 2016, courtesy The Approach, London.

TIME OUT SAYS ★★★★★

The late British artist Patrick Caulfield had a knack for painting social spaces during moments of calm, from intimate bar nooks in the daytime to a tandoori restaurant poised before the evening rush (he was also known to like a drink).

So it's fitting that a selection of his works, painted between the late '80s and '90s, are being shown at The Approach, a gallery handily located above a pub. Like much of his work, these paintings are empty of people but full of atmosphere. Four large-scale paintings in the main gallery feature various items – lampshades, a chain pen, sprigs of flowers – painted either photorealistically or as flat blocks of colour, on backgrounds of yellow or burgundy. Flowers and fruit appear to float in space. Depth and mood are telegraphed via colour combinations and areas of light and shadow, with recognisable objects, decorative details and geometric shapes seeming to exist on different planes. Smaller works on show play further with depth and perception, featuring panels placed on top of sections of paintings depicting a menu or a lamp. The works in the main room suggest in-between places, portals to an alternate reality containing some of the same banal objects as ours but where things are slightly off or missing.

Often grouped among the British pop artists, with whom he emerged in the '60s, Caulfield had a love for the bland and the everyday, but his treatment of it is subversive, even magical. The paintings on show engage best with their environment on a busy day, when noise from the pub filters upwards. Like stage sets, or empty rooms at a party, they evoke a drama that feels tangibly close.

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