

Edgeways Miscellany no. 2

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## *A Genuinely Critical Art Magazine*

If value is measured by auction prices, there is no such thing as true judgement left in the art world, because work of no value will often fetch huge sums of money and conversely genuine work will be virtually ignored. The art critics of the national dailies and weeklies do not by and large give to the constant supply of non-art the steady ridicule which might do something to restore judgement (and, in consequence, sanity to the market). *The Jackdaw* is a magazine which maintains standards of judgement in its treatment of art old and new. The November 2007 issue leads with an article called "Prize Failure" identifying "London as the world capital of State Art". This, alas! is "not . . . London as the breeding ground of a profound and vital new art but instead of champagne piss-ups, celebrity razzmatazz and shady Russian hillbillies forking our phone numbers for trash".

To be able to say so you have to have a sound notion of what is trash and what is real, which *The Jackdaw* has. Being real criticism its judgements can be challenged, but within critical discussion, not by the kind of rude noise often invited by establishment criticism. The magazine is not hidebound to endorse everything old or pour scorn on everything new. For instance on "Mr Hu's Pot Army" "Perfectly astonishing *en masse* trooping the colour in their subterranean mausoleum, yes, but individually they are not in the same aesthetic league as works carved and modelled coevally (and even much earlier) in the Mediterranean in the 3rd century BC."

In the same issue (October 2007) I was cheered up to have encouragement for my amateur judgement of the writers' mural at Barter Books in the former Alnwick railway station.

Each of the individual sitters is a portrait in its own right. Each of the individual characters is integral to the overall composition. The composition itself is a subtle solution to the problem of involving the actual architecture of the site with the painted structure that is being introduced. A gentle form of trompe l'oeil is used as a mediating device. Nowhere does the act of painting fall into the trap of turning to the merely stylistic solution. The problems are met head-on, and it is this that might attract the attention of some seemingly more experienced fellow painters.

It is a pleasant surprise to come across genuine criticism, anywhere. Has there been a better review of the recent Royal Academy exhibition of paintings from Russia than *The Jackdaw's*?—fresh, individual, detailed (and therefore of course challengeable). This is by Angus Stewart in the current issue.

*The Jackdaw* is worth a home in school and college common rooms and the local library. Perhaps if more people subscribed it could have some colour printing.

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