

GLASGOW

Victoria Morton

THE MODERN INSTITUTE

“On one hand I believe in the idea of expression but on the other I am skeptical of this,” Victoria Morton remarked in an interview. Such contradictory beliefs can be felt within a painting such as *Photosynthesis* (all works 2014), one of the five large recent works presented in this exhibition. It shows a dense field of expressive color marks mixed with the contours of several human figures. Some high-pressure situation seems to be depicted, even if the action is not clearly defined. The composition appears controlled and directed despite the flow of expressive gestures.

Photosynthesis continues a way of painting that Morton practiced in previous years; it connects, for instance, to some bigger canvases with complex figuration from 2008–10, while three other works in the show, *Soliton*, *Feed Me*, and *Delay Dispersion*, introduce a new attitude. These paintings appear at first as more harmonious compositions of abstract color patches and tonalities. There is still some figuration, but it is less evident and defined. *Delay Dispersion* is the brightest and most resolved, with strong yellows, greens, and reds. In the center, a darker spot seems to indicate a house or entrance. *Feed Me* has a softer, less defined atmosphere with a lot of purples and pinks, while *Soliton*, with some larger green areas, seems the most raw and “unfinished” of the works.

The three reminded me at first glance of Impressionist interests such as the breakdown of light into colors and the importance of optical sensation. Yet they also contain imperfection and accident as conscious content, and they refuse to fully accommodate a viewer looking for an escape into beauty. The artist herself believes the work to be connected to fresco painting. She has an interest in pre-Renaissance art, in which central perspective was not yet a ruling principle. Indeed, the absorbing texture of fresco technique here seems somehow transmitted to canvas. In general, the mood of the works is contemplative; one can immerse oneself in color transitions without getting caught in one story or being directed toward a focal point. Attention is divided all over the canvas. Compared to *Photosynthesis*, these works suggest that there was less

pressure to reach a “correct” and tight composition; rather, they look like natural developments in paint.

The only work in the show that lacked a distinctive atmosphere was *Living Made Easy*, which shows a standing female figure pouring some product from a flask in her hand against a red background on which graphic lettering reads OPTIMUM LIVING MADE EASY, as in an advertisement. As a hinge between Morton’s new, more atmospheric paintings and her earlier work, it is of some interest, but stylistically it might belong in any number of other artists’ oeuvres.

Earlier in her career, Morton moved into environmental approaches to painting, creating spaces rather than individual works and including, for instance, domestic furniture with painted objects on it. She had to internalize the recurrently proclaimed “death” of painting in her own practice, and she went through a process of deconstructing the medium. Only then did she find her own painterly voice: determined, but without claims to having the “right” formula. To paint, this exhibition seemed to say, is to continue to strive for the ultimate painting while knowing it doesn’t exist. Significantly, there were no props or photos included, unlike some of Morton’s previous exhibitions—just five big paintings doing all the work.

—Jurriaan Benschop



Victoria Morton,
Feed Me, 2014, oil on
canvas, 118 × 98½".