

Anna Keen A Complete Artist - John Kirby

Usually I live a rather quiet life. I get up stroll to the studio drink lots of tea and read the paper. Occasionally I even do a little work. After a number of hours of this frantic activity its time to get a few things for my dinner watch a little TV and then amble off to bed. Occasionally I do some travelling. On my initial trip to Rome when I had my first show with il Polittico I knew no one in the city. I was introduced to a charming funny young British artist who seemed to be enjoying all the pleasures of the Eternal City. She took me on a whistle stop cycling tour of her favourite places and we stopped for tea in the rooms where she lived and worked in the shadow of the Vatican. I thought then as I do now that Anna Keen lived the sort of life every artist should. A spirit free of ties and ready to embark on the latest big adventure. In her company I have rowed across the Lagoon in Venice to the Island of Infections Diseases wandered round Naples on a completely unplanned trip that included sliding down the deserted corridors of the Capo di Monte Museum to stand in awe in front of Caravaggio's magnificent flagellation of Christ. At her insistence I have been photographed being crucified on the beach at Salerno one Palm Sunday in my underpants to the amusement of the baffled onlookers. Once we got hopelessly lost on a trip to the dismal midlands town of Wolverhampton but the trip was enlivened by laughter and an infectious sense of adventure. It never surprises me when after not hearing from her for a while I get a phone call to say she is living on a boat in an industrial wilderness or that she has moved on a whim to Amsterdam. Everywhere she goes is for her an inspiration for new and exciting work. It would be easy to imagine that such a restless spirit would get little work done but Anna is a prolific painter who is totally involved in her art. You might suppose that she belongs in another more romantic age except that the golden light that suffuses her work is just as likely to fall on the concrete bleakness of an inner city wasteland as a decorative and beautiful Roman ruin. I notice that in her latest work this light has a tendency to dissolve the details and that there is an urgent feverishness in her technique which belies her mastery of the art of painting forms and the ambiguous spaces that surround them. Underlying is her ability to draw and the cool eye that can register and reinterpret her surroundings. As an artist myself i have as great a respect for these masterly skills as I do for her ability to embark on her next big move - always ready to leave her comfort zone and experience something new. She is for me a great friend and inspiration. The consummate artist.

Consolations and Desolations of Rome
10 nov - 8 dec. 2007 Gallery Il Polittico Rome
(Text published in catalogue)