

ANNA CONWAY | PURPOSE

In a painting from 2013, the note written on a Post-it in trompe-l'oeil, which also coincides with the work's title, warns "It's not / going to / happen like / that." The Post-it, as if glued to the rest of the image, evokes or replaces¹ the human figure that has just exited the scene of the painting. The negative tone of the admonition seems to refer to nothing in particular, but we may easily deduce it's a statement of pictorial method. The little square yellow sheet, with a sibylline warning that perfectly simulates words written in haste in ballpoint pen—one can even see, at the top, the strip of adhesive that affixes it to the oval mirror onto which is attached—is the visual glue that binds together the assemblage of dissonant elements juxtaposed on the canvas. [...] The interweaving of narrative incongruities, figural shifts, and visual paradoxes in *It's not going to happen like that*, exemplary of Conway's pictorial *modus operandi*, evokes the mixing of biblical tale and imaginary digressions in medieval mystery plays; in its often indecipherable hermeticism, it also recalls the rituality of the *mysteria* of ancient classical religion.

[...] Apart from the recurring diagonal construction of images, which gives them a photographic sensibility that allows for further complexities and complications of perspective, Conway's representation enacts a chameleon-like use of space, with interiors becoming exteriors and vice versa, and preserves an integrity of objects and settings that can be called realistic, but within a *mise-en-scène* that is definitely unrealistic. This irrealism connotes all the artist's figural situations, adhering on the one hand to an iconic accuracy of the represented figures and objects and, on the other hand, to the controlled solicitations of the imagination; in this sense, it recalls the incisive but soft lines with which Bosch's magical realism symbolically describes a material transcendence.

[...] In her conversation with Bob Nickas, Conway makes a statement that is an implicit introduction to the four canvases she painted after *It's not going to happen like that*—*Determination*, *Perseverance*, *Devotion*, *Potential*, all executed between early 2014 and late 2015, and exhibited under the general title *Purpose*: "The most dominant features in all of my paintings... is the atmosphere of the light and air." The events presented in these four paintings (the representation is an event) appear indeed inscribed as images that occur, respectively, at night, in full daylight, at dawn and at sunset. The first two images occur in interiors, the other two outdoors. It is not legitimate, however, to consider these canonical phases of the pictorial day (which proceed like a *liturgia horarum*) as inscriptions of naturalistic realities. They are, rather, stages of the imagination which turn the light (in *Determination* and *Perseverance*) and the air (in *Devotion* and *Potential*) into the initial condition of existence for the work's atmosphere. [...] While *Determination* and *Perseverance* are paintings whose iconic intensity is informed by the language of light, *Devotion* and *Potential* are instead paintings whose images take place in an open space, in the intermediary phases of the pictorial liturgy, the dawn and dusk of an astronomy of the imagination. [...] The four astronomical-visual liturgies of *Purpose*, with their narrative minimalism, density of images, specificity of time/light, intensity of linear definition of objects, while exceeding the resolution of those earlier paintings emit however the same, consistent and constant pictorial ideology. The relationship of (dis)proportions between human figures, objects and the setting within which they exist, while logical in terms of representative likeness, is still focused on provoking in the viewer an effect of displacement, dislocation, of psycho-optical vertigo. Such relationships, in term of scale and spatial dis-position appear still based on the rules of Renaissance perspective, yet those rules while apparently respected are substantially subverted. Frontality is often rejected in favor of the photographic angle, the painting is constructed fundamentally according to a double viewpoint: whereas the image is panoramic, and can be immediately grasped in the entirety of its vastness, the details, which the artist clearly intends as the image's focal point, are always represented with an accuracy of gestures and a precision of lines that imply a differentiating proximity/position of the eye. To paraphrase Salvador Dalí, one might call this a melancholic-critical method (see also Dürer, *Melencolia I*). In the visual economy of this method, color comes into play as strictly a function of the theme of the individual painting: it avoids expressivistic contrasts, practices tonal consonances and temperances that aim to create the painting's own atmospheric mood.

[...] Anna Conway paints the imaginary with the clarity, accuracy, and evidence of a photographic eye, "with every inch being accounted for," as the artist has stated. With the melancholic detachment of someone who depicts from memory a world that is lost because it has never occurred, she avoids both the graphic distortion of expressionism, the baroque exuberance of the surrealist oneirism, and the photographic mimesis of hyperrealism. Her painting adopts instead a transrealism, a realism that transcends social and historical connotations and references and if it cites them transforms them into improbable events whose identity remains deliberately suspended. This suspension intimately involves viewers, throwing them into a state of alarmed interrogation. "I am trying to articulate a story, although I never usually find or locate its climax," the artist has said. In fact, it's the painting itself that constitutes its climax: with the un-ending of its representation.