

Falling in Love. Every time. Chantal Joffe's paintings of 'Moll'

Abstract of the catalogue text

[...] In this respect, Chantal Joffe's work is traditional: for her, 'likeness' is also defined by other artistic qualities than optical verisimilitude. Her portraits of Moll vary considerably in terms of their perspective distortions, their composition, or treatment of volumes, lights and shadows. But all of them succeed in forging a deep relationship between the viewer and the sitter. Even with all the artistic tools of painting on display – brushstrokes, paint drips, treatment of the canvas – we think of Moll in terms of the person, not the portrait. And in bringing this about, Joffe's work is anything but traditional. [...]

[...] In her portraits of Moll, the gaze of the painter – and, by extension, that of the viewer – is not intruding. We are allowed to look, and the view is returned. Joffe's painting puts an exchange of looks at its centre. This precludes any claim to genial superiority. It is a non-hierarchical moment of reciprocal spectatorship, continued over time, agreed in repetition, and building in trust and mutual appreciation. It does, however, propose the possibility of transcendence: Portraiture is becoming a process of familiarisation. And instead of seeing a painting, we begin seeing a person.

Every time I paint, I fall in love with the sitters. They are so beautiful to me.

Chantal Joffe, 2014

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