

Stand Cool and Composed in front of a Million Universes - Walt Whitman.

Walt Whitman's words are also the title of Norman O'Flynn's current solo exhibition at WORLDART in Cape Town. It is also a key to unlocking this intensely layered and visually dense exhibition of paintings. He presents us with snippets, proof if you will, of many different universes / realities, in space and in time.

He uses what is traditionally referred to as 'reverse glass painting'; a technique first used in the Byzantine Empire to create icons, and later used throughout Europe in the arts of gilding and portraiture from the Renaissance onwards. It was a technique also used in the folk arts of sailors. This technique was used in various instances in the past, often honouring or praising someone or something that was greatly revered, precious or important. It was specialised and it raised its subject's importance to an even higher level. O'Flynn uses modern materials, acrylic paint on Plexiglass (a form of acrylic or plastic glass). This makes the works durable. Were it on glass, the artwork would be destroyed if broken.

It is considered work. And Norman O'Flynn is a master of considered, well observed and carefully documented objects and people. The attention to detail, and this within a pop aesthetic, is astounding. Keep in mind that this technique differs from normal painting in that everything the painter places on the surface will eventually be seen in reverse, meaning left to right, hence 'reverse' glass painting. Compositions are usually planned beforehand, then executed and in this case with great dexterity and skill. A lot went into the making of these.

The pop aesthetic tends to lend itself to commercial art, or advertising as well as having a certain cachet within so called street art. Often the worlds of street art and fine art find common ground within this aesthetic. It is as it were a lingua franca. O'Flynn is aware of this and well versed in both, employing the same care to detail and perfect application to portraits and still life and interiors, which is the very personal universe he firstly lets us enter. We find ourselves time and again in the artist's studio, living room or some domestic setting. A collection of bric-a-brac and some kids' toys that happen to be on a coffee table or side table becomes the classic still life under this artist's gaze. They are so well observed and documented as to be transformed to a state with a degree of gravitas - the glare and reflections of a screen becomes another universe that beckons us.

Text used within some works act as another entry to the ideas of alternate and alternating, malleable states of existence. In the form of tattoos adorning some of the subjects we find recurring phrases like Everything observed is affected by the observer. Everyone sees a different truth. Everyone is creating what they see. This references a theory in quantum physics that have been keeping physicians and philosophers entranced. It has been found, through experiments using electrons that the act of observing creates an interference in an electron's behaviour or 'flow' and in a sense changes reality. With art, and for this artist, it is so often about observing, looking and then documenting. The artist suggests that there is no such state as passive observation but that in fact it is a wholly active state that shapes our reality. No matter how banal the subject may seem, by having been observed it becomes a reality.

In addition to the more current field of quantum theory, O'Flynn reaffirms the idea of active participation in the creation of realities when in another 'tattoo' he quotes John Milton – the mind is its own place, and can make a heaven of hell, a hell of heaven.

What appears to be new ideas around our existence, our experience of reality, is in fact all old ideas.

These are questions and observations humankind have always posed.

Everything is relative.