



Kinda kinaesthetic

Fri, 8 Apr 2011 | By [Emily Gosling](#)

Last Thursday saw the opening of the first UK solo show from painter Philip Taaffe, showcasing his intense, mesmerising abstract works.

Taaffe's influences are wide ranging and exotic, wrenching a contemporary twist on themes including Islamic art, Japanese 'fold-and-dye' paper techniques, Balinese masks, archaic totemic imagery, optical experiments and Medieval stained glass windows.

We popped down to the Gagosian Gallery in London's Kings Cross for a sneak preview of the exhibition, and had a chat with Taaffe about his work.

What strikes you on seeing the paintings is how visually arresting they are - there's a vast energy, with elements leaping out and almost following you around the room.

The influence of Mark Rothko is apparent in the intensity of the pieces, which Taaffe refers to as 'kinaesthetic'. He says his frequent visits to ancient Islamic temples inform the energy of his paintings. 'They're a mediation on these forces,' he muses.

He adds, 'A painting should come out of a grand synthesis of visual forces and ideas.'

The stunning Medallion Window uses designs from stained glass windows in Canterbury Cathedral, and this painting is one example of Taaffe's action painting-like technique. For Medallion Window, Taaffe created blocks of felt which were then thrown at a canvas on the floor.

Taaffe says, 'The designs from the stained glass windows are liberated from their immediate circumstance. The erotic proximity [of the harsh lines of the stained glass and the softer background shapes] releases the energy - it's a way of controlling the entropy of the work so that the energy is contained and released at the same time.'

In paintings such as Onibaba I and Onibaba II, huge lattice prints are created by lowering frames on to a canvas on the floor and walking over them.

In these large scale, almost Pop Art-like works, brightly coloured faces from Buddhist and Japanese history emerge from a system of bold, black calligraphic lines, inspired by the 'corrosive story' of Japanese film Onibaba.

These, as in much of Taaffe's work, take inspiration from ancient history. He explains, 'All art is based on other art.'

He adds, 'All paintings are experiments, but there's an overarching sense of responsibility to cultural needs and absences. You have to find a way to make a unique contribution.'

Philip Taaffe is showing from 7 April – 21 May, at the Gagosian Gallery, 6-24 Britannia Street, London WC1X

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