

Jury report ABN AMRO Art Award, 2007

Melissa Gordon's paintings are sometimes said to resemble storyboards. By this is meant the way in which she builds up her images by bringing together apparently disparate images in a single composition. Binding all these elements together is the fact that they are all painted: irrespective as to whether they are reproduced photographs from newspaper articles, landscapes, figures or covers of books and magazines, they are all painted images that come together in a painting.

The working method that Gordon has adopted problematises the idea of the *pars pro toto*: in a formal sense the various visual elements are indeed representative of the whole, for they are all painted. But does the relationship between each part and the whole also apply to the substantive meaning of the work? At first glance the opposite would appear to apply, since the original context of the source is also evident in the painted version. The method of combining the most divergent visual elements rapidly puts one in mind of a collage. Precisely because she has reproduced her original sources on the flat surface of the canvas, however, Gordon produces an arrangement in her work that is free of any explicit hierarchy. Instead of a classic picture with a clearly defined centre or a painting with an overall structure, Gordon presents the various visual elements as a side-by-side arrangement within the framework of the painting. This she does in a way that arouses a chain reaction by invoking storylines and associations. Each element in itself is indeed the whole - can act as the starting point for engagement with the story and the meaning of the work.

Research plays an important role in Melissa Gordon's work. She collects information and images, not just on a fascination with the history of art but also on a well-developed interest in and involvement with political and social issues. Objects, texts, photographs, books and newspapers serve as a prelude to complex visual constructions built up in accordance with an intrinsic logic of their own. The painted surface of the work, the skin and structure of the paint and the relationship of the painted object to the original source all help determine the ultimate meaning of the work. Gordon tries specifically to use the visual arts in order to create new meanings for the sources with which she works. The viewer plays an active role in this process by injecting his or her own storyline into Gordon's work and world of imagination.

A recent group of works by Gordon, who often works in batches, is the series *The Only Man in There* (2006). This is a series of paintings based on the lives of female political leaders of the period 1960-1980, such as Indira Gandhi, Margaret Thatcher, Golda Meir and Sirimavo Bandaranaike, who have all

gone down in history as strong power players. They would often be viewed by the public as 'The only man in there', in the sense of being the only real 'man' in the parliament/government. In the work inspired by Iron Lady Margaret Thatcher we see a man and a woman in a landscape, albeit recognisable only from such details as the woman's pumps and the man's suit and shoes. Both figures are concealed by 'paintings within the painting'. In the case of the woman this is a vertical image of a flash of light or explosion that could refer to the Falklands crisis when Mrs Thatcher was Prime Minister, while the man is partly obscured by a painted reproduction of a press photograph of Mrs Thatcher receiving a dignity. Gordon subtly combines elements of the classic historical picture with references to everyday life - in this case a man and a woman walking in the winter landscape - as though the power of the world stage and the big story has an equally necessary and powerful counterpart in the everyday life of individual people. In this way Gordon often places the spotlight in her work on opposites held together in a mutually symbiotic relationship. She does so not just in a single work but also in a series of works and even in exhibitions in which various series are combined in such a way as to create new storylines.

Melissa Gordon (1981, Boston, USA) made her debut in 2005, since when her work has developed rapidly. The jury of the ABN AMRO Art Award unanimously voted Melissa Gordon as the 2007 winner, drawing attention to Marlene Dumas's elegant description of Melissa Gordon's work as paintings of pictures that show that a painting is not a picture.' The jury considers that in Melissa Gordon it has identified an artist with exceptional visual and conceptual qualities. The ABN AMRO Art Award is aimed at encouraging youthful talent and the exchange of contacts between artists from divergent cultural backgrounds. The adjudication of the award to Melissa Gordon recognises an exceptional talent and a young artist who is making a name for herself internationally and who is on the way towards building up an entirely individual and convincing visual world of her own.

Members of the jury for the fourth ABN AMRO Art Award

Steven Aalders, visual artist

Marja Bloem, freelance curator

Hedwig Fijen, director of Manifesta

Tom de Swaan, member of the board of directors

ABN AMRO, chairman of the board of the ABN AMRO Art Foundation and chairman of the jury

Pietje Tegenbosch, advisor ABN AMRO Art Foundation

On behalf of the jury,
Pietje Tegenbosch