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Wings of a Butterfly, Ingleby Gallery, Edinburgh ★★★★★



Installation view of Wings of a Butterfly at the Ingleby Gallery | John McKenzie

Let's hear it, if you please, for group exhibitions, the best of which invite works from different places and times into conversation with one another, and shed new light on those who made them.

There's a conversation across time in **Wings of a Butterfly**, the ambitious, triumphant show which starts the year at Ingleby Gallery. The artist Pierre Bonnard (1867-1947) wrote in one of his final diary entries: "I should like to present myself to the young painters of the year 2000 with the wings of a butterfly". This show puts his work (two paintings, three drawings) alongside 11 painters and a sculptor from the 21st-century.

They are artists who already had a relationship with his work. It turns out that the things that made Bonnard different from his peers, and perhaps more difficult - his casual compositions, the way he could make a subject start to disappear into the backdrop, his tendency to resolve a work while leaving areas eerily unresolved - are right up the street of contemporary painters.

This impressive gathering of artists find kinship with Bonnard in different ways. For Chantal Joffe, it's something about the directness of his figures, captured in mundane settings. Andrew Cranston says he thinks of Bonnard every time he's in a bathroom, and his large painting, Fairly Liquid, is tremendous: the figure in the bath almost disappearing into a dazzle of patterns and light, any pretence at grandeur undermined by the bottle of Fairy Liquid floating in the tub. Phoebe Unwin is in the bathroom, too, with A Bath Six Times Over, which seems to merge and overlay different moments in a single complex picture.

A haziness or uncertainty in Bonnard, what Picasso disparagingly called "a potpourri of indecision", chimes with artists today. Lorna Robertson's Half-remembered names and faces hovers on the edge of abstraction, as does Michael Clarence's Two High Hearts, though both artists have roots in painting the figure.

Hayley Barker's wonderful painting Tessa's Garden is clearly enjoying a chat with Bonnard's Garden at Le Cannet and Nick Goss's Hotel Paradiso is an interior with strange lapses and uncanny shifts in perspective. Sculptor Joel Tomlin can't make free with gravity and shapes the way a painter can, but his wooden platters and the objects on them have a similarly disconcerting effect.

Some of the most intriguing work in the show comes from Philadelphia-based Aubrey Levinthal, who will have a solo show at Ingleby later this year. Nights in C's Room and Hotel Buffet in Colorado start with ordinary scenes, made uncanny by shifts in scale and point of view, and vast stretched tabletops which we seem to view from above, while people and objects are viewed laterally.

With only a small selection of works by each artist (in some cases just one), it's possible they have presented their work at its most Bonnardian for this show. However, this clever grouping does what the best group shows do: it sheds fresh light on them, and on Bonnard, while drawing attention to some key concerns in contemporary painting.