

Exhibition Guide

Lisa Milroy *Making Sense*

First Floor Galleries

30 May – 15 July 2007

Born in Vancouver, Lisa Milroy moved to London where she studied at St Martins School of Art and Goldsmiths College of Art. She came to prominence as an artist during the 1980s with paintings of isolated objects on plain backgrounds. Painted quickly and from memory, these works were precursors of 'slower' paintings, outdoor scenes of objects located within familiar pictorial space. By the latter 1990s, Milroy's work became more cartoon-like, significantly due to the influence of Japanese *ukiyo-e*, also evident in the work exhibited here.

More specifically, this exhibition was inspired by a group of 15th century tapestries which Milroy recently encountered at the Musée de Cluny, Paris. Entitled *The Lady and the Unicorn*, it features an enclosed garden where the five senses are represented. In response she has invented a garden of her own and we are introduced to it in the first gallery by a small 'painting map' and chalk pastel drawings that indicate the location of sites dedicated to sight, sound, smell, taste and touch. Milroy's garden is one of rolling lawns, an ornamental lake, an island and bridge, with varied foliage including cherry trees in full pink blossom. Resembling a theatre set, primed for an as-yet-unknown drama, it is a metaphor for the human body, where the senses have distinct perceptual fields but are locked together in their responses, influencing and referencing one another.

Moving through the installation of five large canvases in the second gallery, the viewer experiences a sensory onslaught brought on by the smell of fresh oil paint, the textural surface of the canvas and Milroy's use of vivid colour. Each painting here, through ingenious still-life arrangements, symbolises a human sense. In *Sight*, we see a blank canvas resting on an easel, as if waiting for a painted image. Off-shore, optical paraphernalia such as sunglasses, binoculars and a camera, are depicted as actual objects floating on small canvas pontoons. *Sound* involves a large expanse of sky, suggesting that the noises made by the painted objects are able

to escape and reverberate in the air. In *Smell*, the windswept backdrop sets off a mass of fragrant flowers and a lurid, overripe melon. Milroy's light-hearted humour pervades her representation of *Taste*, where hunger, the most basic human need, is translated into the most extravagant selection of foodstuffs. Lastly, in *Touch*, she conveys the feeling of sumptuous furs very effectively whilst reminding us of the dangers of sharp edges and hot surfaces.

In the last gallery, Milroy plays with an illusory transition as visitors move from the fiction of the paintings to an actual lounge room. They are invited to sit on sofas and peruse books on gardens around the world, inspect a wall of the artist's working drawings or simply daydream. The orange juice here is real and freely available for the taking.