

DENMARK

REVIEWS



DEXTER DALWOOD
David Risley Gallery
Copenhagen

Dexter Dalwood's work has never been about knowing something intimately, but rather envisaging and relying upon the viewer's prior knowledge to create an image of a place. The British artist imagines interiors and scenes of infamous events described in the press but not revealed in photographs, such as the scene of the *Death of David Kelly* (2008), part of his contribution to the Turner Prize in 2010. Instead, Dalwood typically starts with a collage as a working model, so his source materials are actually the fragmented ideas of what these locales might look like in our collective imagination.

In the artist's second solo exhibition at David Risley Gallery – suggestively titled 'Orientalism' – his take was slightly different. Though the works here also depict imagined spaces, gone are the cinematic interiors and eerie connotations of the particular events or secluded places of his earlier paintings. Time and place seem to be obliterated, and despite the broken compositions, the works almost border on still lives.

Dalwood created the seven paintings with the small gallery space in mind. Their backgrounds are made up of what look like etching marks, doubling as white noise out of which images emerge – bits of architecture, interiors and mirrors in which reflections appear. The paintings also shared some recognizable motifs: namely, palm trees and coloured flags that allude to current events in the Middle East. Dalwood's characteristic flatness of colour and smoothness of image surface are there, but in relation to his previous works, which dealt with discrete subjects, this collection is a sequential variation on a theme: first, the largest canvas, *Next Day* (all works 2012), established the motif. Against the speckled, stucco-like background, Dalwood collages swaths of painted

terracotta floor tiles, an unravelled tapestry with a camel print, and a gilded frame bearing a reflection of palm trees, minarets and a half-familiar green, black and red flag with a crescent and a star. A triptych of identical compositions followed: mirrors reflecting images of minarets and palm trees, shifting in colour according to time (*Morning, Midday, Night*). The fifth work, *Snake Charmer*, is ostensibly a reference to Jean Léone Gérôme's arch late-19th-century example of Orientalist painting. Here, an image emerges more fully – a sandy surface, blue sky and a minaret. *Night Mirror* is effectively the series' end: the work shows a window opening into the blackened surface; the mirror on the floor presents an indistinct reflection. The series goes out on a note of obscurity.

Individual titles are usually crucial to understanding Dalwood's subject matter, yet this time the title of the exhibition itself set the tone. The term 'Orientalism' today might conjure bleak media images of army khakis against sand and remnants of car bombs in dusty cities. Here, Dalwood hinted at less violent tropes that never fully materialized. The group of paintings are more tentative than resolute, but that also lends them a certain fluidity. As in all his work, the narrative lies outside the picture frame, but in this case the narrative is a much broader, looser one, encompassing pictorial traditions, contemporary geopolitics and questions of representation and looking. It's difficult to imagine these paintings apart from each other – and I'm not sure that would do them a service – but there is also something thoroughly satisfying about watching Dalwood play out a theme. For all the lack of impasto brushstrokes or emphasis on medium, it is ultimately the process of seeing and perceiving that is on display in Dalwood's compositions – alluding to snippets of media images but not quite painting the full picture.

CHRISTINE ANTAYA

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Dexter Dalwood
'Orientalism', 2012,
installation view

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Dexter Dalwood
Night Mirror, 2012,
oil on canvas,
92 x 100 cm

