

By Gregory Salzman

Cuny Janssen's pictures of the Amami-Oshima island, Kagoshima Prefecture, Japan, show its coasts, its mountainous terrain, its temperate climate, its flora and its people. While there are no pictures of farmed land, there are many indications of the prosperity of the place. What is also evident is that life on this island is largely in touch with and dependent on the local natural environment and its derivative materials. The pictures attest to the artist's equal enjoyment of nature and of people and her appreciation of places where people live in close rapport with the natural environment. Her pictures show these connections without stressing them. There is clearly no programmatic rationale or agenda in this work. Rather, the pictures betray curiosity and appreciation of all manner of ordinary phenomena. Individually, the pictures describe moments that merely are what they are without any further significance. Beauty attends each of these moments. Considered together as an entire set, the pictures elicit connections between salient attributes of the physical environment and distinctive cultural traits of the people, taking note, for example, of the similarity of the chromatic palette of the geography and that of people's apparel.

The viewpoint of Janssen's art is both intimate and objective. Intimacy, as a pictorial quality regards the sense of physical proximity and contact that we, as viewers, have to and with the subject. The establishment of this viewpoint has a scalar implication. It is a matter of the way the picture co-relates the foreground, middle ground and background and where the emphasis is situated. In the case of Janssen's pictures there is, generally, considerable compression of these three spatial registers, thus yielding a high degree of density and of tactile involvement. Her pictures are tonally rich and chromatically saturated. Their mise-en-scene is frontal, direct and natural. Most are organized around a formal center. This subtle centering is important to the work's gravity, which regards its sense of fixity, its contemplative bearing and its physical presence.

Children and views of untrammelled nature are her preferred subjects. The typical unselfconsciousness of the former and exquisite beauty of the latter are commensurate with the natural directness, candor and empathic qualities of her art. The children in her pictures peer at the camera without any trace of reserve or circumspection. Such absolute trust or openness towards the world and the possibility of the experience of immediacy it affords, is what Janssen's art aspires to. It seeks to meld thought and feeling. The same rapt attention and transfixing of time applies both to her pictures of people and of nature. Through their acute definition, composure and luminous clarity, her pictures' corporeal beauty is spiritually distilled. Her art belongs to and exemplifies a long tradition in Dutch art and culture, that celebrates quotidian subjects and identifies sight and insight.



In the picture reproduced here a girl looks up from her dinner plate and her gaze meets the camera. A caesura in the texture of reality, with its dual suspension and implication of time, is the basis of the picture. The plate constitutes the center of the composition and anchors it. The picture is poised between transience and permanence. It contains various imperfectly rotund and, thus, sensuously inflected motifs, that mimic and amplify one another and whose placement is vital to the composition. The dual contrasts of orange against cerulean blue and of the green accent vis-à-vis the reddish-purplish depths of the table are profoundly engaging. The wonderfully lustrous consistency of the image, accentuated by the highlight on the girl's lower lip, is further augmented by the painterly reflections of the objects in the table's surface. The presence of the orange in the picture augments the girl's presence and enhances her beauty. The monumentality and timelessness of this domestic scene depend, too, on the placement of its central motif within a comprehensive relationship of solid and void that renders space palpable.

In every encounter with something perceived as beautiful feeling temporarily suspends thought. The experience of beauty, always exceeds any possible explanation of its existence, yet the urge to trace the lively feeling that grips us back to its source is also insistent. We feel the need to know why something moves us.



The beauty of the other photograph reproduced here, a close-up study of vegetation, derives equally from its contrastive relationship of lustrous effulgence and dark concavity, and its ambiguous affirmation of mass/ corporeality and its suspension of gravity. Through the picture's clear yet elusive structure, elaborated by the fugal interplay of multiple sub-motifs, space becomes palpable and delightfully sensuous. The spatial coherence or compositional legibility of the picture depends on the single large leaf that directly faces an external light source and reflects it. This principal, effulgent element establishes the picture plane and serves as a spatial reference point by which to gauge the manifold inclinations and relative locations of all the other leaves. Through its arresting presence *vis-a-vis* the fugal consistency of the composition, circulatory movement and stasis are correlated. The picture's spatial fluency and crucial un-grounding depend equally on its contrastive correlation of mass and luminous levity and on its counterintuitive and anti-gravitational reversal of top and bottom. The capital elements of the composition (the triad of larger leaves) are at the 'foot' of the frame while the roots and darker zones (normally earthbound) are gathered at the top of the field.

Various elements that undermine uniformity, such as the tangle of bare branchlets (upper left), also generate interest. Also notable is the lone vertical, twig (bottom foreground) whose forked tip catches the light and, thus offsets it from the dark concavity behind it. It animates an otherwise blank area in the composition. As one discovers, there is no area in the picture that is either undefined or uneventful and that causes attention to flag.

As with the other picture that brings spatial scope to its subject, the sensuous beauty of this picture also encompasses a certain grandeur.