

ROSA PARK OPENHOUSE, ISSUE 19



Rosa Park, the Director of Francis Gallery, has an intimate understanding of objects - an intuition for materials and meaning that presents itself in subtle and affecting ways. A skilled and sensitive curator, her galleries in Bath and Los Angeles are a template for how to *live* with art.

Exploring ideas of intimacy and domesticity, Francis Gallery is an experiment in setting and scene. Following in the footsteps of artists and collectors, the gallerist cites institutions such as Kettle's Yard in Cambridge - and the homes of Donald Judd and Georgia O'Keeffe - as the inspiration for introducing antiques, furniture and design pieces as companions for the paintings, ceramics and sculpture. A true *mise-en-scène*, each exhibition is a conversation between the objects, the artist and the space.

In Bath, the classical Georgian interior has been beautifully restored - replete with moulded wall panels and ornate cornicing, dark stained floorboards and generous wood-framed windows - it is the antithesis of the 'blank slate' or the ubiquitous 'white cube'. Park notes that she quickly realised that she didn't "have to work so hard to make [the Bath space] feel like a house," and so, she developed a looser curatorial approach - using furniture and other objects more sparingly, and to great effect.

An exhibition of paintings and ceramics by Rosemarie Auberson is on display when I visit in early 2023. Fields of colour and tone - each canvas boasts areas of dense, impenetrable pigment alongside thin, layered washes. Hung like musical notes, the paintings punctuate the space, drawing you through it... A small painting in soft, pink tones is nestled beside the fireplace - which is itself a piece of contemporary sculpture with its gently curved hollow and rough papery finish. Hung off-centre and below eye-level, the painting's position accentuates its tenderness and the vulnerability of Auberson's surfaces.

Like many of the artists represented by Francis Gallery, Auberson's work rewards the contemplative viewer - those who sit with the pieces, or who return to them over and over. Speaking with Rosa after my visit, she notes that the

artist will take each painting from the studio into her home, living with it for months - observing how it changes as the sun rises and falls each day - before she decides if it is complete. "When I found out about her process it made so much sense. I am very interested in the domesticity of things, and so the way she works really resonated with me."

Park is fascinated by how objects, and our relationships to them, develop over time: "Things are meant to break over time, nothing lasts forever. You can always fix it. It's why I love kintsugi - if ceramic breaks, it's okay - you can put it back together and seal it with gold or bronze. I'm not afraid of things breaking or ageing - I think it's weird that we're so careful with things, we're obsessed with the idea of preservation." Park's approach is shared by many of her artists, each of whom embodies and interprets the philosophy in profound and personal ways, producing work that explores ideas of time, age and wear...

In 2022, Rosa Park opened a second space in Los Angeles, adapting the original model to account for the architecture, history, scale and palette of her new locale. A reflection of Park's evolving interests, the US site offers a new context to continue developing on many of the same themes: "I have worked very hard to create intimacy [in the LA space] - I built a partition wall that's curved so that the single giant room is broken up into four quadrants, and within this curve we wanted to create an almost temple- or altar-like experience... I am still exploring the themes of intimacy and domesticity, but not in such a literal way - more in the sense of how it makes you feel."

Drawn to impermanence and imperfection - as a curator and collector, Park is attracted to patina rather than gloss, intricate layers over exuberant forms. Seeking objects whose aesthetic merits are equalled by their meaning, she places great emphasis on the stories that we attach to objects - the grand, or personal, narratives that transform a simple object into a memento, token or heirloom.

Rosanna Robertson, March 2022, London
Wordcount: 696