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THREE CATS, NICOLAS PARTY @ THE MODERN INSTITUTE

by Figgy Guyver



Nicolas Party, Installation view 'Three Cats', The Modern Institute, Aird's Lane, Glasgow, 2016

Nicolas Party returns to The Modern Institute with wry humour that outdoes his countless art historical references

At Three Cats a jug is an elephant, and an elephant is a jug. You'd be forgiven for thinking this is a poorly-translated proverb, but it illustrates the sense that Nicolas Party's newest exhibition (entitled Three Cats) is full of indeterminate things. There's a still life of fruit, or perhaps candles. The figures in Profiles are androgynous. The cats in Three Cats look placid, yet the painted gallery wall features a green malachite scratch: maybe the culprits are hidden in plain sight?

Party returns to The Modern Institute for the first time since Still Life Oil Paintings and Landscape Watercolours (2013), in a flourish of purples, greens and blues. There's a similarity to the subject matter in this new show, as Party returns to classical genres such as still life and portraiture with the same droll humour.

Each way you turn, the compositions have a knowing look about them, as if the classical themes have been inserted for added symbolism. There are art historical references, as the supporting statement notes the cats are a nod to Balthus. However, there's a sense that 'still lives' or 'portraits' are composed with the very purpose of making us ponder their symbolism. This is most the case in Purple Fruits, where a single needle leans against a bowl of particularly peachy-looking plums. There may be a hundred and one art references to support the work, or perhaps there's just a wry smile.

Party is at his most dazzling in his large pastels. Four Green Birds and Still Life are bounds ahead of smaller works such as Tree, which lacks the impressive lustre of the larger pieces. However, there's an integrity to the exhibition that carries the less notable works. Three Cats chimes like a dissonant yet pleasing chord.

Until 28 Oct