

# RECEPTION

Showroom 3\_11

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**Guy Allott** Always the Sun, a book launch

Sept. 24 – Nov. 5, 2011

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**Opening** Friday, Sept. 23, 2011, 6–9 pm



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## Guy Allott Always the Sun, a book launch

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The 20 or so drawings by Guy Allott in the book you are holding fall into two over-lapping clusters, firstly the 'sad trees' with their dappled hints of Samuel Palmer and the later English neoromantics, and secondly a larger group of off-world landscapes, populated by occasional jolly dancing tree-people, with towering mountains at 360 degrees, obedient to no mere earthly laws of physics or geological time.

Throughout the history of European art one recognises the pleasure particular artists have derived from depicting wood-grain, from Giotto and Piero della Francesca, to Braque, Magritte, and Guston. Here paint remains deliciously and timelessly itself in the very act of signifying wood-ness, and the age of trees that grow to an entirely different time-scale to our own, and on which our entire civilization has depended, from hearth and home to boats and funeral pyres, to say nothing of charcoal, paper or stretchers. The trees in which we hid as children, which we climbed and fell out of, were here long before our earliest ancestors. Acknowledged and revered in almost every known society, their branches stretch out from the ancient Norse legend of *Yggdrasil*, the tree of the world, to the sadly speaking tree of Anglo-Saxon poetry, and so on to *Avatar*.

The conventions of landscape were of course largely redundant for most of the last century, but generous and inclusive they now feel alert and meaningful again, and instinct with our sense of the present, as Allott's work so powerfully demonstrates. Here real trees invade imaginary planets, to paraphrase Marianne Moore. They remind us, if we need to be reminded, that the landscapes of the old masters are always real places, from the craggy cloud-capped azure peaks which surround the little town of Pieve di Cadore high up in the Dolomites where Titian grew up as a child, to Constable's Suffolk, or Joseph Anton Koch's majestic Wetterhorn, or Allott's native Yorkshire.

Always the moon presides indifferently over our sleep and dreams, but who could have guessed that when we finally got there it would prove to be so anti climatic, so very unlike the sci-fi film and comic landscapes of which twentieth-century adults and children alike dreamed? It was not however the real surface of the moon that so affected our perceptions, for after all we know that for most of its history our own world was just as vastly lifeless. It was on the contrary the shockingly vulnerable beauty of planet earth as visible from space in that first astonishing 'blue marble' photograph that so jolted the imagination. We are hardly the first to envisage Gaia, the animate mothering earth, but has any previous image ever shown her more isolated and defenceless? One could argue that modern mapping techniques are changing the way we envisage landscape.

Meanwhile the galaxies and constellations continue to swing above our heads sublimely indifferent to our mortal ideas of progress. Besides, the pastoral vision has never been restricted to depictions of our planet, and many of its most poetic expressions have always lead us up into the skies, and it has moreover always been the nature of Romanticism to

think big as well as tiny. One wouldn't really be that suprised to find Keats sitting on one of Allott's lonely planets listening intently for the plaintive beep of an orbiting satellite.

The beautiful imaginary paradoxical worlds to which he takes us obey their own physical and pictorial rules, defiantly flouting the familiar conventions of binocular earth-bound human vision. Who is to say if his melancholy wrecked art historical space ships are what they seem at all? They might after all be monuments, or alien art-works?

With their constant confusions of upand-down, and in-front-or-behind, Allott's radiant other worlds remind us of happier past visions of outer space, imagined as a universe of far-off utopian destinations safely ready and waiting for us in the face of possible global catastrophe. But in the meantime as he has suggested: 'It seems we will be earth-bound for some time'<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Guy Allott, '2010

Text excerpts by Simon Watney from Guy Allott's book *Always the Sun*, London: Site 23 2011 (ISBN: 0956941001)

### Exhibitions at RECEPTION

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Öffnungszeiten: Do–Sa 11–18 Uhr and by appointment

illustration:

Guy Allott: For The Love of Beauty, 2011, watercolour 23 x 30,5cm

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