

Conley, Sue 'Abstract of faith', Herald, (April 2009)

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Abstract of faith

Does abstraction drive you to distraction? Fear not -- all you have to do is look at it Sherman Sam: Let's stay together

Sue Conley - 10 April 2009 12:01 AM

The gallery-goer can find abstract art something of a challenge. It's probably not terribly sophisticated to be left somewhat cold by work that doesn't 'look like' anything.

We've all been trained to see and hear narrative, whether it be bedtime stories, lectures from parents or bosses, television shows and novels. We've been oriented to see and hear the world through the mediation of recognisable images and words that add up to some kind of story.

When faced with a series of surfaces that have been inscribed with what appear to be random patterns and odd applications of colour, well, it can be flummoxing. What are we supposed to make of it? How are we supposed to react? What does the artist want us to do?

In Let's Stay Together, Sherman Sam actually wants us to feel a little bit uncomfortable.

Okay, I cheated -- I got a press release that contained an excerpt from an interview with the artist, and he said as much. I didn't read it until after I saw the show (hand on heart!) and I can say that, yes, I did feel uncomfortable.

I felt uncomfortable because there I was, trying to make this stuff mean something. A series of small paintings and drawings hangs in a line on one gallery wall. They vary in their general smallness, but they are, as one, small. It's kind of amazing to be so intimidated by such small paintings and drawings, but there you go.

Circles have been painted on swatches of colour; lines have been drawn and then mostly erased. I spent quite a long time looking at them, willing myself to have some sort of breakthrough ...

And I did. The image on the right, What Makes the World Go Around (2007), got to me. I can try to explain using all kinds of art critic words, but I won't. Something about it, after having struggled with everything that came before, touched something in my heart and/or mind, and, had I the dosh, I would have snapped it up.

I see a lot of work, and that rarely happens. So, abstract art: it's a challenge, but the ability to cope with that challenge will only arise if you give it a chance. - SC

Let's Stay Together runs until May 2nd