

Wallpaper

DANNYBOY. Being the youngest painter to get into New York's Met could have gone to Danny Rolph's head. But as Karen Chung finds, he prefers to dwell on affairs of the art.

Karen Chung, October 1999



Even the most consummate cultural carnivore would surely agree that installing a Damien Hirst medicine cabinet in one's space is taking clinic chic just a little bit too far. While the razor-sharp, formaldehyde-scented, mutation-tinged edginess that constitutes a sizeable slice of what's been so popular in art of late may be just dandy in the context of an art gallery, it could prove a lot more resistible if you're on the hunt for something that won't send you running from your space with your sensibilities in shreds.

Thirty-one year-old painter Danny Rolph understands, and favours a quieter, 'softer' approach to making his mark. Having studied at Winchester then London's Royal College of Art, Rolph is currently the youngest painter to make it into New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art's permanent collection, with a piece that was snapped up by the museum when he was just 26 years old and barely out of college. 'Of course it's amazing to have a piece in the Met,' he states with beguiling candour, 'but I can't really say it's changed my life.'

Danny Rolph works variously on canvas and, more recently, plastic, biding his time while he builds the tint/tone, layer by layer, to just the right pitch. His recent work has a hologram-like intensity, and he's always had a kick-ass sense of colour. The dizzy reds of a Campbell's soup tin butt up against gossamer silvery white or translucent baby blue, and what at first seems to be a drip of pigment in freefall turns out to be a meticulously rendered circle. Rolph's work veers between linear precision and out-and-out abstraction, to be read like a Rorschach blot.

Up close though, texture is the lure of Rolph's paintings. As the final washes are laid on, he punctuates the surface with hundreds of tiny pinpricks and marks, working the texture into the colour until the two resonate as one. 'The representation exists in what I do, not what I exhibit,' he explains. 'It's not about clear ideas or concepts; what's vital is the dialogue I have with the paint and canvas.'

Rolph's move to painting on plastic seemed the



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inevitable answer to dealing with the eternal problem of representing a tangible sense of space in two dimensions; the same colour, on different sides, appears to be intense, yet dim and bookish. 'It was a way of almost physically slicing through the space,' he says. Acknowledging a global raft of influences, from the architecture of Herzog and de Meuron (the Bankside view from his studio is to die for) to the laden simplicity of haiku poetry, Rolph has recently returned from a stint at the British School in Rome, and his new work hits the Turin Art Fair this month, (3-7 October). 'The representation is embedded in the painting's finished state,' he says. 'But it never overpowers the painting's potential.'