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Thursday, 6th October 2011

Charles Matton - Enclosures

All Visual Arts

2 Omega Place, King's Cross,
 London N1 9DR

Until 7 October. Entrance free

Some exhibitions wash over one's brain and evaporate into a fond memory. Others weld themselves into one's psyche and

lodge there for ages. One such show was *Vanitas*, organised by All Visual Arts, held down the road from, and at the same time, as Frieze Art Fair last year. It was such a stylish and audacious exhibition, held in a spacious Regency town house in Portland Place; it made the big, blousy fair up in Regent's Park, look like a car boot sale. Amongst the gems were enormous hyper-realism paintings by Jonathan Wateridge, an exquisite sculpture by Jodey Carey, fiendishly clever arrangements of stuffed animals by Sue Webster and Tim Noble, more taxidermy by Polly Morgan, all mixed in with 17th century Dutch still life *Vanitas* paintings. There were also two very, very, small exhibits by Charles Matton, a Frenchman who died in 2008, one entitled 'Sigmund Freud Study II' and the other 'Library Homage to Georges Perec II' both of which are on show again a year later.

These were basically models, at 1/7 scale, but they were more than that - they were works of art on a grand, but miniature, scale, if that is not a paradox. C Matton uses trickery, mirrors, both conventional and two-way and wit, to construct these truly astonishing sets, a triumph of obsessional attention to detail over anorakism. Every period light-fitting, bathroom-tap, paint-tube, table, chair, bed, bottle, playing card, curtains, painting, book, newspaper, or anything else in the entire show, were fashioned by this extraordinary man. Lighting is all too important, and the effect he achieved with his 'Homage to Edward Hopper I' with a single chair in an otherwise empty room, is painterly. Matton first of all constructed the room set, a mere 106cm wide by 70 cm high and 62cm deep; he then lit it, photographed it, and painted in oils directly onto the Cibachrome print. This is not the world of Hornby OO or architectural models made for planning, development or selling buildings to potential clients - this is a way of looking and absorbing the atmosphere of each box, whether it be an artist's studio, such as Francis Bacon's or Alberto Giacometti's, a study, a wine cellar, a New York loft or the fanciful 'Bedroom of a Romantic Art Collector'.

The thirty-eight boxes, or boîtes, were only recently discovered, and the show's curators, Joe la Placa and Mark Saunders, of All Visual Arts, should be applauded for assembling this exhibition in London. Matton's widow, Sylvie, is currently supervising the construction of a small limited edition of the boîtes, each of which will take up to three months to finish, and will cost between £60,000 and £120,000 each. The show deserves to be seen by a wider audience, and it is extended, during Frieze Art Fair the All Visual Arts annex at 22 Warren Street, W1T 5LU - from 12 - 16 October 11am - 6pm, or by appointment..

A lavish book with same title has just been published in English by Flammarian, which is a delight. 256pp.

Fully Illustrated. ISBN: 978-2-08-020087-7 £50.00

Don Grant