

Alistair Crawford

Pictures for a small room

The title of my first solo exhibition in Aberystwyth in 1975 was *Pictures for a small room*. I have always liked small pictures. I am not sure why. I like the strength of fragility, as in Gwen John. I like the *fragment*, the bit of something else, the promise of more to come. I like to find things, rummage, wipe the dust off. I like *little* surprises. I would like you to notice them out of the corner of your eye. One critic kindly wrote of my pictures: “They invite your attention not with rhetoric but with the gentlest of gestures – ‘gentlest’ until, having submitted yourself to them, they hold you very firmly”. I will settle for that, for you can say everything in a postage stamp, as Blake has taught us.

Around 2003 I found myself buying little frames, then more eccentric ones. It gave me something to do on endless shopping trips; to stand and stare in department stores, and try to feel a feeling for a picture just from a frame, a designer’s exercise. And so that I could stop smuggling them into the house, I declared that I was going to fill them with pictures made *specifically* for the frames. (I had no idea of the outcome, of course). Immediately I started to put them together I noticed the similarity to that first exhibition in Aberystwyth, years ago. The largest then was 18 x 24”, several were as small as 6 x 8,” and framed in cheap (but trendy, eccentric) white plastic. It was also the time of aluminium frames and perspex boxes, 1960s glitter, they tell me now.

In 2004 I went back to that 1975 idea and staged *Pictures for an even smaller room* which turned itself, along with new works made to fit these odd frames, into a little retrospective of the various ‘themes’ I have used along my journey. While I was very encouraged by the outcome I still thought of it as a *diversion* but I was listening to the expression of much delight across the town, it would seem that I had just succeeded in making the frame into a work of art, like Samuel Palmer’s and his sheep under the tree, at least that is how I interpret folks stopping me in the street to tell me they have just seen a good one! Some people even bring me them. So, in 2006 I held another: *Pictures for a small room* and now I have to go and find yet another set of frames and set to once more because my collection has all gone.