

## A preface

I began my acquaintance with Jason Martin while preparing the "Sensation" exhibition at the Royal Academy in 1997. He'd only left the famous BA course at Goldsmiths College a few years earlier, but even then his work stood out for its inventive and creative strategies. These have made him easily one of the most exciting painters working today.

So what is it that makes his work so special? What are the qualities that make each of his paintings a real event?

Every one of his works has an individual sense of oneness that arises from his very particular and constantly evolving technique. Like the work of some Zen calligrapher, his paintings invariably consist of one highly considered stroke made with a huge brush especially created for the occasion.

Brush size is of course important to every painter. Pots full of differently sized examples, some even consisting of a single hair, sit beside most easels.

Martin's brushes, however, are several feet wide, the same width in fact as the painting he's working on. The meeting of brush and canvas – or perhaps another ground, such as wood or metal – produces a very specific tension and sense of autonomy, almost, as with a photograph, as though the artist were not directly involved, somewhat removed. Yet of course Martin's eye and mind are the agents of individual choice, giving each work the recognisable and unavoidable style that helps us to situate its creator and his output in the broader scheme of things.

And although Martin's work is at one level abstract, I hesitate, as I find I do with all imaginative abstract painting, to use this term. For each individual work of his seems to have a very particular subject matter. Abstraction and illusion are not usually associated, but, as in that most sophisticated type of ancient ornament that uses plants, animals or human faces to make

simplified, abstract patterns, the two really do meet in his work. This is the illusion that I find most thrilling: an illusion that might in turn evoke inner or outer space, the density of a forest, the enormity of an ocean, the mystery of the night or the intensity of the sun, not to mention the music of the spheres.

One constituent of each particular metaphor is colour. Martin is nothing if not an imaginatively refined colourist. Indeed, his combination of the root of the brush and a carefully chosen colour (more recently several colours) gives each of his paintings its very precise, particular mood and sense of place. Within his personal language, Martin has made room for an infinite number of nuanced words, the products of invention, imagination and applied thought. Metaphors as much for the technological age as for the complexity of our perceptions of the world around us, his works seem highly relevant to our time.

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