'Silent Works that Speak', Forword to the 2007 Catalogue

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'Painting, which for Horace was visual poetry, has a curiously silent but deeply expressive sub-genre: the still life. Everyone knows that paintings do not make much noise - mostly none at all - but still lifes have a special inclination to speak in long pauses, punctuated by acute silences and occasional moments of hush. They tend by means of a thoughtful lack of urgency towards a meditative stillness. As a general rule, a melon, a cardoon, a spray of carnations or an earthenware pot do not move while being painted; they do not have to be entertained like a human sitter who might otherwise end up looking melancholy in the finished portrait (that was Leonardo's concern), nor can they complain that the likeness is not quite right, the skin of the onion too papery, the shadows of the plate lopsided, or the glass insufficiently transparent. Instead, they just sit there, confronted only by the intense scrutiny of the painter's eye that looks and thinks, looks and thinks, and then decides.

Annibale Carracci chided his loquacious brother, Agostino, for talking too much with his poet and writer friends: "We painters have to speak with our brushes", was his solemn rebuke. The Neapolitan, Salvator Rosa, portrayed himself as a weeping philosopher holding a tablet with a Latin epigram: "Either be silent, or speak only if your speech is better than silence", and Velázquez, whose bodegones are above all about silent contemplation, inscribed one of his portraits with a verse from the Book of Lamentations: "It is good that a man should both hope and wait in silence for the salvation of the Lord". Velázquez was described by contemporaries as phlegmatic, and he was probably taciturn. But his artistic eloquence is evident in the way he paints the white of an egg about to coagulate in a clay dish, or the bent shadow of a knife on the inside of a white ceramic plate, or the swollen, pregnant, belly of a large water jar.

With the great still-life painters, from Caravaggio to Chardin, from Stoskopff to Juan Gris, objects, which are silent, begin to speak. Zurbarán's vessels, whether the artist intended it or not, bespeak devotion, "like flowers on an altar, strung together like litanies to the Madonna", said the Italian critic, Roberto Longhi. When Cardinal Federico Borromeo, cousin of the saintly Charles, looked upon the flower paintings he commissioned from Jan Breughel his mind turned to reflecting joyfully on the wonders of the created world. Cézanne saw in the simple forms of apples, pears and wooden boxes the means by which to negotiate a new relationship with the world around him, while in the hands of Picasso, the newspaper and the tobacco pipe became volatile explosive charges primed to detonate the very language of art. Some years ago Professor Gombrich

spoke out to remind us of something that we all secretly knew: every still life is, by its very nature, a vanitas, replete with transience, manifesting silent intimations of mortality.

James Gillick's painting belongs to a venerable tradition. An art historian cannot help but sense in his works the distinguished genealogy of William Nicholson, Morandi and Fantin-Latour, and hear echoes that reach back to Luis Meléndez and beyond. He labours with the infinite care of a devout craftsman, preparing his own linen-covered panels and lovingly making his own paints and varnishes. Then he settles down to confront the silence of the simple motifs he paints, a silver coffee pot, a leather case, a glass vase, the everyday objects that accompany us in our allotted time, rich in personal associations but meaningful beyond the immediate domestic context. There are flashes of genuine painterly virtuosity: the jagged reflection on the surface of a metal container, the stain left by a wet mussel, the downy softness of the breast of a dead bird. These too, form an integral part of the tradition of still life and mimesis. James Gillick's paintings are silent works that speak.'