

Excerpt from Penny Florence (ed.) *Thinking the Sculpture Garden: Art, Plant, Landscape* (London: Routledge, 2020).

Small scale and evanescent where *The Minotaur* is massive [by Tim Shaw, in the woods nearby] Caroline Winn's fragmented piece somehow manages to capture something of the interrogative wit of the Manet painting, *Le déjeuner sur l'herbe* of 1862/3, that is its genesis<sup>1</sup>.

Its metal rods run through porcelain squares that for me seem to mock the plinth, since the rods continue to hold up the forms alluding to the painting (a seated naked woman, the baffling pointing finger). One of the most famous works at the birth of Modernism, the Manet's bravura play on its sources, on gender and on the sensuality of picnicking among the trees has baffled and charmed in equal measure for over 150 years, yet still retained its radical aura. Winn's ceramics are not easy to see in the dappled light; just like any work on the edges of abstraction, it becomes mobile in response to the eye's indecision, in the manner of trying to catch a dream. Here, too, there is a Japanese connection, since Manet was as influenced as the rest of his generation by the Japanese print. His illustrations for *L'après-midi d'un faune* are taken directly from Hokusai's *Mangwa*. It's an intuitive connection, not explicit, for Neil [Armstrong, maker of Tremenhoe Sculpture Garden], but the choice and siting of this work exemplifies his consistency. But this is how, on reflection, the evanescence of Winn's piece appears necessary; like Mallarmé's nymphs 'So fair, they're light, light incarnate, floating in air' (*Si clair,/ Leur incarnat léger, qu'il voltige dans l'air*).<sup>2</sup>

When asked what made Armstrong site it where it is, he said, 'That was a collaborative work, completely, just a walk round the garden with Caroline Winn, she saw the site and then saw the vision, if you like [...] she liked the area - the idea - very conceptually [...] to try to capture some of the ambiguity [of the painting] in the setting. Slightly staged painting, I think, and the final work has the same feeling of being placed in a way which is ... unusual and slightly intriguing.' [...] 'I think it works very well. I'm probably in the minority [said with wry irony]. I like the idea of 5 figures in a green backdrop, then the detail becomes another level and it makes use of what could have seemed a rather featureless walk around a circular walkway ... not necessarily dull, as I don't dislike the idea of nothing much happening, having a quiet area. But it does provide a moment of focus in that journey around and it kind of sits well, since you go almost through the work, very restrained and of a completely different cultural way of thinking.'

Ceramics have a strong relation to place at Tremenhoe, since it is only about 45 miles from St Austell, once the heart of the china clay industry in Cornwall - and now, of course, home to the Eden Project. Like pottery in general, it is one of Cornwall's traditional arts that connect to the Far East, to China as the origin of the technology that bears its name and to Japan through Bernard Leach and his close association with Hamada Shōji in St Ives (about 7 miles away). We might forget that clay is earth, but we should remember that it has retained its closeness to its origins (largely unlike paint)<sup>3</sup> with many contemporary artists digging their own materials including glazes out of the ground.

(See the two images from p. 172)

---

<sup>1</sup> So much has been written about this painting, including by me, that to suggest any single reference seems invidious. However, unsurprisingly, I think my earlier work is relevant here in that it explores this landmark painting as part of early Modernism's articulation of a 'new problematic of the imaginary', relating the perpetual metamorphosis of Impressionism structurally to that of French Symbolism, as for example in Redon (Florence 1986/2009). The poet knew both painters well and there is a fundamental correlation between their works indicative of larger historical and critical issues.

<sup>2</sup> *L'après-midi d'un faune* (1865/1876). My translation. See Florence op cit.

<sup>3</sup> This is so especially in the digital age, and if you don't make art yourself. The actual media count; from egg tempera to grinding lapis lazuli to how artificial pigments contributed to Impressionism, and back to charcoal and earth pigments in the earliest art preserved in caves.