



FUNNY LOOKING

ART

LAURA OWENS, EDWINA ASHTON

UNTIL NOVEMBER 26
Camden Arts Centre

Humour in art can be hard to pull off, but both the American painter Laura Owens and the British filmmaker Edwina Ashton do so with aplomb. With Owens it stems from the fact that she wears her intelligence lightly. In many of these large-scale canvases she quotes a huge range of influences – folk art and crafts as well as from the canon of art history. She also plays clever games with scale and illusion, poking fun at major art movements such as Minimalism and Abstract Expressionism along the way.

Lots of artists do the same, of course, but Owens succeeds by creating a sense of harmony – a deceptive innocence. With its happy co-existence of day and night, flat and deep space, paint used to “describe the world” and paint applied for its own sake, as well as the kooky

creatures that populate the image, an untitled painting from 2001 is typical. One gallery at Camden is filled with small paintings revealing the countless rehearsals that take place before she begins a large composition. These studies are enlightening but you don’t really want to know about the hard work behind the magic.

Some of Edwina Ashton’s films were shown last year at Peer but they more than repay a second viewing. In fact, the more you watch them the more the nuances and mannerisms take hold. Making deliberately cack-handed costumes, often out of rolls of foam and sleeping bags, Ashton transforms herself and her collaborators into animals and insects that go about bewildering tasks or have odd encounters.

With absurd monotony, what might be a maggot in a pork-pie hat rolls pastry or perhaps sausage meat around a pot. A caterpillar declines the offer of lettuce from a smooth-talking Victorian suitor. Deliberately low production values give the work its charm but, as with the best comedy, there’s darkness



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**Untitled 2004 by
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