

Oak

Vertigo, Great Eastern Street, Shoreditch, London

Foreword to the catalogue

For the last few years, in a field in south eastern England, a man has been sitting with an easel, looking up at an oak tree. He has sacrificed himself in the name of an extraordinary act of homage to a part of the natural world we see regularly but almost never notice. Stephen Taylor has been teaching us how to look.

Taylor's attention is a symptom of our inattention. In his essay 'On Naïve and Sentimental Poetry' (1796), Friedrich Schiller observed that the Ancient Greeks, who had spent most of their time outdoors, whose cities were small and ringed by forests and seas, had only rarely felt the need to celebrate the natural world in their art. 'Since the Greeks had not lost nature in themselves', he explained, 'they had no great desire to create objects external to them in which they could recover it.' And then, turning to his own day, Schiller drove home his message: 'However, as nature begins gradually to vanish from human life as a direct experience, so we see it emerge in the world of the artist as an idea'. In the age of concrete and steel, Taylor's work brings us back into contact with what we needed, but had forgotten we even loved.

Taylor has admirably fulfilled that most ancient task of the painter: to re-enchant the world.

Alain de Botton, August 2006