

ARTS' News

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Spring 2001

MY VIEW:

fenscapes, cloudscapes, cityscapes

by RICHARD BAKER, ANTHONY DAY,
JANE EVANS,
MARIAN HARTLAND-ROWE,
ROBIN IVY, ROBIN MAUNSELL

You are very warmly invited to the Private View on Wednesday 28th March 7 - 9 p.m. or to visit the exhibition on Thursdays, Fridays, Saturdays, Sunday 1st April or Sunday 6th May, 11 - 5 p.m. or by appointment

HERE AND NOW ...

CAMBRIDGE DRAWING SOCIETY at the Conservatory Gallery 30th November to 22nd December

The Drawing Society's first exhibition here as a whole group was an unqualified success with a wide variety of two-dimensional work in watercolour, oil, pastel, collage, lithograph, linocut, in themes ranging from flowers, boats, landscapes, wildlife, nudes, still lifes and even musical instruments. Paintings were very reasonably priced and many were bought as Christmas presents, including some as purchases which I suspect were not eventually given away! I think we all like an excuse to buy presents for ourselves!

OUT AND ABOUT ...

ART WITH A SMILE by Anthony Day

I've long fancied contributing to an exhibition entitled *Art with a Smile* while doubting my ability to play any significant part in it. I wouldn't want to jostle with leg-pullers and cartoonists but



artists with a warm sense of fun and the ridiculous, or



with a strong satirical sense. I know of only one

High Summer Water III, gouache by Anthony Day

hereabouts for whom humour is essential to her full expression and I will come to that later.

I've held frivolous themes in my head for so long that they've become absurdly out of date, the chance missed. My inspiration for *Monarch of the Fen*, a scraggy goat surveying the far reaches of his domain from the top of a river bank, when such were commonplace outside fen hovels as a ready source of milk sustained only by grass and weeds, was too late, even at the time of inception. Goats have long since become truly noble creatures competing for dignity at Royal Shows, none better than in my village where lives one of the country's top breeders. Yes, it never got done.

Then I had a neighbour obscenely dedicated to manicuring her garden into an extension of her sitting room, shaven Leylandii and all, an affront to the soul of a landscape lover, fumigated against all that might nibble a leaf or sustain a bird. My gloriously encouraged wilderness, practical to a degree with its apple and plum trees, its soft fruit bushes, its English



hazel, its welcomed dandelions, buttercups, sowthistles for the goldfinches, teasles for the tits, its red campions

Norfolk Field, oil pastel by Robin Maunsell

and its rich resource for vegetables was anathema to the lady with her shed-full of pesticides and shears and mania for hygienic order. She was deaf to my quiet words of disapproval (her husband was allowed little part in it). My pictorial satire on that also never got done.

It was all in my head until they'd long gone to find their uninhabited island, for which and its wildlife I felt distinctly sorry. My painting would have been ordered even beyond her wildest dreams, not a weed in sight, her ladyship at war with spray-can with my dear old tomcat of that time (which she loathed and longed to feed with slug pellets) screaming at it when it peeped through from my hawthorn hedge, bopping out of sight in a perfected corner, bent double to relieve himself. The title? *The Intruder*. Alas, never got done.

Much earlier I wanted to raise a smile at the scruffiest fen dwelling imaginable, a 'learner' under corrugated iron, its bedraggled owner leaning on a post sucking - why not? - a straw, the yard over-run by cast-offs and nettles. The title? *Nettle Fen*. Not much, maybe, but just another modest idea gone to waste.

I mean, it can all fit in with serious painting. Take a look at **Hogarth's** before-and-after lovers in the Fitzwilliam, completed with his usual technical dedication, never allowing the guffaws to throw him off his stroke. Of course, if you want a belly laugh try one of the museum's **Rowlandson** extravaganzas. Our caricaturists today tend to turn sour and ugly like **Scarfe** or, I'm afraid, **Searle**. But surely there are good painters about who like to raise a smile, apart from **Lowry** and **Beryl Cook**.

Perhaps I should try a portrait of Dennis of Grunty Fen, letting the subject establish the humour. I know the chap but in his private guise he might prefer **Richard Sell** or **James Horton**. I haven't done a portrait for years.

Locally **Joan Bevan's** portraits contained unforced satire, but to a few humour must attend every work or art they create and one such is **Amanda MacPhail** showing at the Old Fire engine House, Ely, last November; an instance of humour informing felicity of design and colour. These small works were composed of durable collage, lyrically designed, always more enchanting than facetious, imbued with affection and delight. *A Little Fishy* was her title applying not to the talent but to her central motif. Visitors inevitably found them irresistible and bought the lot but few could conjure up such gentle magic to

raise a smile. She would have to be part of my enriched fun show.

Ah, well, back to the serious stuff.

HEIDE by Robin Stemp

I am writing this on the plane coming home from Australia. As I write, the sounds and scents and silence of this extraordinary country are still with me. We are sailing over the Gibson Desert and the terracotta earth is marked by a circle of rock, the colour of crushed raspberry. The afternoon shadows are a deep azure and fall in the shapes of kangaroos and lizards. The rivers squiggle like snakes along the dessert floor, flashing white in the sun. The Aboriginals painted this landscape for centuries, but what have the new wave of inhabitants made of it?

Australian art. What is it? Apart from Aboriginal art, which is rooted in the land, is there a distinct Australian school? Can a country composed of so many different nationalities create an essentially Australian art, despite having cultural roots elsewhere? We went to Australia to see friends and to try to find a source of that art, essentially 'Australian' but non Aboriginal and, at Heide, in the Melbourne suburb of Heidelberg, we found what we were looking for. Heide - an ironic gesture to the Australian habit of shortening names - was the home of **John and Sunday Reed** - the patrons, founders, financiers, friends and supporters of the new wave, known loosely and collectively as the 'Angry Penguins'.

It wasn't until after World War Two that Australian art came of age. The work, in violent spasms of colour, appears as a bolt out of the blue. Suddenly, local artists knew what it was to be Australian. Out of a terrible war, the peace stretched ahead with looming uncertainty and art, as always, mirrored exactly, the society which created it. **Sidney Nolan, John Perceval, Joy Hester, Albert Tucker, Arthur Boyd, Yosel Bergner** and a dozen other artists, filled the void left by the war, with their often angry, vibrant and above all, Australian paintings. Some of the artists went to Paris, paid for by the Reeds and came home with half digested influences. Others saw 'abroad' as an escape from the stodginess of post war Australian life and returned to see their home land through fresh eyes. Either way, the Reeds had opened a door in the thick wall of colonial provincialism.

The Reed's house, now a gallery, is a centre for contemporary art. Like Kettle's Yard, it is a memorial to the past, but has its vision - I hope - in the future. The Reeds, who both died in December 1981, had a genius for atmosphere. The house they built is now a small, exquisite gallery. Another recently opened gallery is larger, but has the intimate feel of a private space. Each window frames a view of gum trees and giant ferns, making the building into a work of art. Outside, in the park, the giant gums rise sheer into the rainy Melbourne skies. In the sculpture park, the falling-water call of the magpie is shot through by the bell bird and the vulgar disputation of the kookaburra. It takes time to discover the visual language of a



country, so take time over a visit to Heide. Time is not important. Time is outside, worrying itself silly in the traffic which crashes past the gate.

The Reeds, with their extraordinary insight; her tricky personality, his charm, their money and taste and courage, put their finger on something infinitely precious. Whether Australian art still has that spark of sheer bloody-mindedness which made it great in those post war years, is debatable. As in Europe, the dull and damp green landscape sits facing internationalised conceptualism which is much the same the world over. The landscapes often show Australia as it isn't - more like the Home Counties on a dreary afternoon - and the conceptual camp make a lot of noise about relatively little. So, where is the art essentially Australian to be found? Perhaps, as in this country, painting is having a rest and the visual arts are more evident in photography or sculpture. There is not room, here, to discuss the future of an essentially Australian art, only to suggest a visit to a glorious past.

Ed: Addresses and opening times available on request.

MUSINGS ...



**SPOKEN LANDSCAPES -
AN ALPHABETICAL
ANTHOLOGY OF
LANDSCAPE POETRY**
selected, introduced and
illustrated by Mark
Handley, interwoven with
our own art anthology

'I' is for ...



IIDA DAKOTSU (1885-19620)

The Japanese *haiku* in translation must have been as refreshing to European and American poets on its first appearance as Japanese woodblock prints were to painters looking for a new way forward. Narrative, argument and perspective gave way to impressions and expressions, to symbols and con-structions of varying

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luminosity. In its strictest Japanese form the *haiku* has three lines of 5 - 7 - 5 syllables and its aim is to evoke as much as possible by the few words permitted, to be a suggestion, not a catalogue. The seasons of the year form the chief subject matter.

Iron autumn
And all the cold
Windbells tinkling.

... for **HENRI GABRIEL IBELS**
(1867-1936)

Painter, lithographer, writer, working in Paris around the turn of the 20th century, although mostly famous for his poster art which at the time rivalled **Toulouse-Lautrec**; he certainly had a similar style and subject matter. A famous poster is *L'Escarmouche* (1896) in red, yellow, blue-green and black, depicting men drinking at a bar (the bar-counter symbolised a barricade at which the common-man could voice dissatisfaction with the political situation). Self-taught, Ibels exhibited in the Salon des Indépendants at an early age and controversially reported the **Dreyfus** Affair in his periodical *Sifflet*. When French poster art went in to a decline about 1910, he concentrated on dramatic literature, without as much success, and eventually became Director of Costumes at the Théâtre de l'Odéon.

... and for **INTERMEDIA GROUP**

Founded several years ago by the weaver **Doreen Sanders**, the nine members of this group met originally as tutors at the old Country Centre in Huntingdon Road, Cambridge, and now hold an exhibition every two years, the last three of which have been held here at the Conservatory Gallery.



Elm Burr bowl by Chris Nunn (member of Intermedia Group)

FRAMINGFRAMINGFRAMING

'J' is for ...

BEN JONSON
(1572-1637)

from **TO PENSHURST**

Thou hast thy ponds, that pay thee tribute fish,
Fat, aged carps, that runne into thy net.
And pikes, now weary their owne kinde to eat,
As loth, the second draught, or cast to stay,
Officiously, at first, themselves betray.
Bright eeles, that emulate them, and leape on land,
Before the fisher, or into his hand.
Then hath they orchard fruit, thy garden flowers,
Fresh as the ayre, and new as are the houres.
The earely cherry, with the later plum,
Fig, grape, and quince, each in his time doth come:
The blushing apricot, and woolly peach
Hang on thy walls, that every child may reach.
And though thy walls be of the countrey stone,
They'are rear'd with no mans ruine, no mans grone,
There's none, that dwell about them, wish them downe;
But all come in, the farmer, and the clowne:
And no one empty-handed, to salute
Thy lord, and lady, though they have no sute.
Some bring a capon, some a rurall cake,
Some nuts, some apples; some that thinke they make
The better cheeses, bring 'hem; or else send
By their ripe daughters, whom they would commend
This way to husbands; and whose baskets beare
An embleme of themselves, in plum, or peare.
But what can this (more than expresse their love)
Adde to thy free provisions, farre above
The neede of such? whose liberall boord doth flow,
With all, that hospitalitie doth knowe!



... for **GWEN JOHN**
(1876-1935)

The art of Gwen John depicts a quiet world of solitude, revealing her sensitivity to nuances of colour and the personality of her subject, whether a room, woman, or cat. She was able to produce a haunting image out of an ordinary scene, such as a corner of her own dilapidated room. She was born in Wales and was 18 months older than her flamboyant and more famous brother **Augustus**. Their mother died when Gwen was seven, and the children were raised by two aunts and their father. Even as youngsters they both painted, mostly portraits of other children. In 1895 Gwen began a course of study at the Slade School of Art, and continued further in Paris at the school run by **James**

McNeil Whistler. In 1903 she settled in Paris and remained for the rest of her life.

She seldom exhibited her works and hated to sell them. However, the American collector **John Quinn** became her patron and provided her with a modest stipend in exchange for pictures. In 1906 she met **Rodin** and became his model and lover. She also came to know his secretary, the German poet **Rainer Maria Rilke**, with whom she corresponded for many years. She converted to Catholicism in 1913 and painted portraits of many of the residents of a nearby convent. She remained single and spent her last decades living alone in near isolation in a dilapidated building, surrounded by beloved cats.

... and for **FRANCIS JEANS**

Francis Jeans is a figurative painter of a wide range of subjects from landscape, still life, figure and portrait. He works in oil on canvas. His recent work over the last few years has concerned more the integration of figures and interior with reflections of exterior views on the windows of shops and cafes.

He has produced a series based on a Cambridge Hat Shop which show his involvement with real and reflected space. As with the cafe scenes these paintings are observed directly from life. Many involve reflections of Cambridge Colleges.

A new departure has been more theatrical with paintings in progress made at the Wimbledon Theatre and at the circus. In these the interest is more in the auditorium and in figures off-stage in reflected light from the stage.

Francis does not like to use photographs but prefers always painting directly from his subject which means often working at early hours in the street. He is fascinated by figures and reflected images and their interplay in space.

Ed: If you would like to know about his work, please contact us on 01223 211311.



The Hat Shop, oil by Francis Jeans

FRAMINGFRAMINGFRAMING

KNOW WHAT YOU SEE - SEE WHAT YOU KNOW - by Michael Gillespie

Measurement of the speed of light and of our nervous systems shows that everything we experience is a constructed memory - even the briefest observation. Art students soon discover, though it takes longer for them to believe, that they cannot draw from life by looking up and down so quickly that they do not have to remember.

Life drawing and clay modelling from life, treated as objective study, are a form of the primary impulse from which both art and science spring - that of exploring and internalising external realities and including them in the physical interface by which human minds know each other; taking quasi magical possession of them in fact. Re-creation in palpable form powerfully extends the mental constructing and naming we call knowledge. 'Objective study' implies that what should be expressed can be agreed as true or false. Curious things are revealed when we try.

The student has the object, nude or still life, before him or her and must set down its appearance. In drawing or painting where an optical projection must be imitated it at once becomes clear that the object as conceived dominates the sensory perception of it. Limbs seen foreshortened are turned sideways to show their most defining proportion, and the curved back of a seated figure is straightened to approximate to a standing back, the archetypal image of the recognised object - a back. It also becomes clear that our concern with optical projections is normally very limited, and that if the mind habitually cluttered itself with optical projections it would be unable to function at all. Movement is necessary for the eye to establish objects. Nevertheless with clay modelling people have the greatest difficulty in reconciling the sensory evidence of different points of view so as to arrive at the object in its full shape.

Even more fundamental is the revelation that it is not possible to see what a thing is and where it is at the same time. The eye is directed, but within that direction the mind chooses what is perceived, so that if we concentrate attention on the area of high acuity in the centre of vision we are precise in our apprehension of a part, but unaware of the location in space of that part relative to the other parts we are required to draw. If, on the other hand, the mind concerns itself with peripheral vision in which all the parts can be seen at once, none of them will be seen with the clarity we require to feel certain.

Exclusive divisions continue. Concentrate on the colour and you will not apprehend the shape. Concentrate on the shape and you will be little aware of the colour.

The attempt to be objective at its simplest - a common object studied through a single sense - disintegrates as a stabilising experience. This may be precisely why there is such a stabilising experience. This may be precisely why there is such an endless demand for fixed and inevitably simplified images - drawings, paintings, sculptures and in the last century

ART CLASSES IN THE GALLERY
with **Judith Din** - watercolour and drawing
Thursday mornings 11 - 1 p.m.

Summer term 19th April to 5th July
(half term 31st May and 7th June)
to be held in the garden - weather permitting (!)
with the themes of landscapes and skies.

This term Judith will also take us on an instructional trip to the Fitzwilliam Museum. If you would like to join us telephone 01223 211311.

photographs. They reduce bewildering Object to contained object.

The truth which can be told with clay is confined to shape. Objective modelling is simply apprehending a shape and filling a bit of space of the same shape with clay. Obviously sequentially sticking bits of clay together will take time. Less obviously, since we can recognise a model posing before us instantly and without difficulty, so will apprehension of the shape. That requires time consuming shifts from central to peripheral vision, quite apart from the fact that at any one time the other side of the model is invisible. Our perception of depth is inadequate. We can see that the foreshortened limb is longer than the optical projection shows, but not exactly how long it is relative to the other parts, which will usually be seen as foreshortened themselves when we move to see the limb more clearly. Our apprehension of the total shape, or indeed any part of it, is a function of memory served by constant movement. We are potential victims of a great jumble of memories, even though these memories of shape have been already partially separated from memories of colour and all the other aspects of reality our purpose led us to exclude in the act of looking.

A strategy must be adopted which will deal with time. Education supplies an apparent answer. We will measure. The time-conquering facsimiles of experience which are the bedrock of mathematics are far more stable than the apprehensions of the senses, easy to record and recall. We will replace the shifting perception of apparent relative dimension with intellectual certainty. By three straight lines in space any point may be defined relative to any other. We therefore need not bother to look at the model much; attention to the engineering which will allow the mathematics to do its work will be enough. We will have told the truth. Sadly, we will be as ignorant when we have finished as when we began. The exercise of perception and imagination which fills the world with apprehended wonders will never have taken place. We can be almost entirely unaware of what the mathematics was about. (Cf. perils of accountancy).

We will abandon the fixed grid and trust to our innate capacity to learn, hoping that strategies of mind can circumvent the pitfalls of its own shortcomings.

We have to fill a shape in space with clay to make it visible. Pieces must be placed or removed sequentially, each given focal attention. The hand does not follow the mind and eye with preordained

certainty. We place a piece and ask if it is right. It cannot answer. In the absence of a fixed grid its rightness can only be judged as a function of the other parts, which are not there. It is most difficult to combine the receptive mind which questions with the assertive mind which imposes forms by imaginative projection. Once more the time separation of our own function makes the job difficult. Objective study in art schools in fact epitomises the problem of problem solving - how do we deal with a whole while occupied in sequential attention to the parts? and how do we apprehend a whole if only sequential perception of the parts is accessible? If method and custom and law are grids how do we devise new ones? By the invocation of common ground through 'objectivity'?

Ed: Nick Gillespie's own sculptures can always be viewed through the Gallery.

ART ON A PLATE ...

by Katharine Macpherson DA

What could be a better antidote to cold winter days than a warm flavour-packed casserole? Especially when it's kleftiko, that rich and delicious Greek dish of lamb shanks braised in wine and tomatoes - redolent of sunny Mediterranean holidays yet substantial enough to keep the chilliest British weather at bay.

This recipe is easy to produce for a family meal, but also makes a good choice for entertaining as it will wait happily in the oven if there are any delays, simply growing more tender and intensely flavoured all the time.

I first made it some years ago after enjoying a particularly impressive version at *The Plough Inn* at Rede in Suffolk. Lamb shanks weren't so easy to get hold of then, but they're regularly available in the major supermarkets now, so there's no excuse not to try it!

KLEFTIKO

Serves 4

4 lamb shanks
3 medium onions, thinly sliced
1 carrot, finely chopped
4 garlic cloves, crushed
2 tablespoons olive oil

1 pint wine, red or white
1 tin chopped plum tomatoes
2 tablespoons tomato puree
1 teaspoon dried (or 2 sprigs fresh) oregano
1 bay leaf
1 teaspoon dried (or 2 sprigs fresh) rosemary
1 tablespoon fresh parsley, chopped
salt and pepper

* Season the lamb shanks and quickly brown them all over in a tablespoon of oil in a frying pan before transferring to a large casserole dish.



THE FRY PUBLIC ART GALLERY

Castle Street, Saffron Walden, Essex
01799 513779

Our 2001 season starts Easter Sunday and continues until October 28,
opening on weekend and
Bank Holiday afternoons, 2.30 - 5.30

The Gallery exhibits in its PERMANENT COLLECTION work by nationally famous 20th century artists such as **Edward Bawden, Eric Ravilious, Michael Rothenstein, Kenneth Rowntree**, who lived in Great Bardfield or Saffron Walden.

From Easter until the end of July there will also be a retrospective exhibition of work by

JOHN NORRIS WOOD

Professor of Natural History Illustration
at the Royal College of Art.

John Wood, whose childhood was spent at Gt Bardfield, expresses his love and fascination for the natural world in his watercolours and prints - which will be for sale.

Also available: Works on Paper by
JOHN ALDRIDGE, RA (1905 - 1983)

Since his death interest and knowledge of Aldridge has predictably waned, but the gallery now has available for sale 150 drawings taken from his studio when he died, most of which reflect his interest in the topography of East Anglia, but also cover plants, animals and agricultural machinery. They are available for inspection, or can be purchased by post on approval. Please send SAE for the catalogue.

MEMBERSHIP of the Society and participation in its activities: £5 per year.

- * Lightly fry the onion, carrot, celery and garlic in the remaining oil for 5 minutes before adding to the casserole with the tomatoes, tomato puree and herbs.
- * Pour the wine into the frying pan and bring it to the boil, stirring. Add to the casserole and season well.
- * Cover tightly and cook in the oven at 160°C for a minimum of 2 hours (3 would be better). Check occasionally to ensure it is not drying out and add a little extra boiling water if necessary. The dish is ready when the meat is tender enough to pull easily away from the bone.
- * Discard the bay leaf and other herbs if using fresh ones, then serve the kleftiko with boiled rice or creamy mashed potatoes, sprinkled with chopped fresh parsley.

Ed: Katharine writes the 'Eating Out' column for Business Weekly.

Pamela Marshall Barrell

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