Newcastle-on-Tyne

Picking a winner from among one's contemporaries is a chancy business, and awful examples of the temerity of distinguished critics haunt the memory. Yet it must sometimes be attempted—unless one accepts the popular but historically improbable assumption that the elderly generation now alas! on the way out (this means for us Bonnard and Matisse, Leger and Picasso, Klee and Kokoschka) were the last of the great masters, and that we shall never see their like again.

In fact the surprising rightness of many contemporary judgements encourages boldness. The lover of the art of his own time alone knows that exciting feeling of immediate and complete understanding of a picture which no doubt arises because he has so much in common with the painter. The barrier of history is down. It is worth bearing this in mind; though perspective and a wider public may come later, nobody but ourselves will ever understand the art of today so well again.

This said, let me nominate Keith Vaughan (born 1912) for greatness. The enterprising Hatton Gallery of King's College, Newcastle upon Tyne, has just presented an exhibition of his work that is soon to be seen in Leicester, Nottingham, Birmingham and Liverpool. And although one may have suspected it before, not until this his first comprehensive exhibition has Vaughan's stature as the outstanding English painter of his generation (in my opinion) been made apparent. For as Stephen Spender says in his introduction to the catalogue it is not in particular pictures that Vaughan's achievement lies, but rather in "qualities, colours, a manner" that all his work possesses. These paintings suffer more than most from the punishment of isolation; seen together, they complement one another in a most impressive fashion.

As befits a European painter (and he is an artist of European importance) Vaughan is a traditionalist, not given to the trail-blazing experimentation of the Americans or Russians. Beginning as a Sutherland follower he has learnt from Matisse and the Cubists, but more than all this he is, it seems to me, the true heir of Cézanne, and of Cézanne at his most profound, most ambitious, most difficult—the painter not of landscapes or still lifes or portraits, but of the *Baigneuses*. Like Cézanne's figure compositions, Vaughan's come near to failure more often than do his landscapes, but in them his originality and remarkable powers are more clearly revealed.

Cézanne knew, as did Poussin and the Venetians before him, that whereas the figures and fields he looked at had three dimensions, his canvas was quite flat. And the best work of painters like Cézanne (or Gauguin or Matisse or the young Cubists) who steer the passage between the Scylla of decoration and the Charybdis of mere representation has the strength and control that such a feat demands —and the tense excitement that accompanies it. This Vaughan attempts too, not always succeeding, for no artist of modern times has that unfailing excellence which the workshop-trained Renaissance masters possessed. Sometimes he works on a scale too large for him, and either disorganisation results, or one uneasily feels the painting to be blown up beyond its natural size.

At their best however Keith Vaughan's pictures are both profound statements about form and colour, and also things of great beauty. Nor is the human quality ever absent. Its gentle lyricism contributes to the undeniable and indiscribable poetry of the pictures as much as does the sensitive handling of narrow ranges of colour—harmonies of ochres and olives, of slate greys and blues.

Picture lovers in the provinces are offered during the next few months an opportunity denied to Londoners. How sad if this beauty and poetry is as yet something that only a few can share!

Alan Bowness

ark Image

Gallery One

In this exhibition of his recent work, Souza makes visable to us his comprehension of the horrific effects of this violent and competitive age on the individual, by an extension of his gifts of strength and formal incidity. Deep gloom and seriousness of mission characterize nearly all his work, relieved by an unexpected lyricism, normally surpressed, in *Landscape with Blue Sky*.

The main burden of Souza's message lies in his depicting of the mentally or physically tormented individual such as the martyred, *Mr. Sebastian*, and *The ruined Business Man*, where social comment is strong. But his uncompromising and powerful formality always gives universality to his image. This image of mid-twentieth century victimized man is both convincing and appropriate, solid black lines slash into the figure and re-create it in terms of a rigid hieratic silhouette, which is original and eerily moving.

The ruined Business Man contrives to be utterly dejected and yet have a stoical acceptance, the mood being induced by thick leaden paint with no hint of the entrancing and delightful qualities of the medium. Horror is added by sinister strings of colour dribbled over the face forming a coloured mesh. Yet like all Souza's devises, by sheer force of his integrity, are intergrated and essential to the total impact of his idea.

Moonstruck Man I and II are the most disturbing of Souza's creations, man gazes up into the unknown and infinite skys of an Atomic Age, baffled and isolated, stressing man's relationship with elemental forces. Although haunted by such themes, Souza is far from repetitive, his nudes for instance have a grave monumentality, helped by faint echoes from Bernard Buffet. His gouache drawings of insects reveal astringent linear designs that avoid the dominant silhouette to be found in his paintings, creating an exciting network of taught lines.

The exhibition indicates an impressive advancement for Souza towards a developed visual concept of man, and should not be missed.

James Burr

The Tycoon and the Tramp. *(Gallery One)* *F. N. Souza*

English artists rarely succeed in Paris, but Mr. Donald Hamilton Fraser has opened most successfully at the Galerie Craven. A number of pictures have been sold to French collectors.

* * *

Looking Forward, a new realist exhibition is now being hung at the South London Art Gallery, Camberwell. Sir Vincent Tewson, Secretary of the T.U.C. will open it at 5 p.m. on Tuesday, April 17th. The show, which includes about 100 works, is a sequal to the *Looking Forward* exhibition at Whitechapel in 1952. John Berger, who has organised it, tells me that many of the 30 artists included are comparatively unknown and that the quality of their work proves his contention that recognition is as chancy as ever today. There are also works, as in the first show, by Greaves and Middleditch and several large canvasses by Peter de Francia.

* * *

Crystalline Trickle

R.W.S. Galleries

When we think calmly of the long record of water-colour painting, we ought to pay tribute to a venerable medium. The paintings in the caves of Altamira (10 to 20 thousand years B.C.), the pictures on the walls of the tombs of Egyptian Kings (1,700-1400 B.C.) and many of the illuminated MSS. of the Middle Ages, are all the ancesters of the works of the Royal Water Colour Society's exhibition.

It is only after reflection, that our claims that aquarelles are an essentially English medium seem a slight exaggeration. Certainly, however, we have had things pretty well our own way for the past couple of centuries, and the R.W.S. has been representative of many of the worth-while water-colours made in this country during that time. To-day the exponents of this medium mostly favour delicacy of execution. Melodrama, either as a subject, or in treatment, is almost absolutely *out*. The muddied and at times turgid torrents of the remote past have become a trickle, though a crystalline trickle.

Out of 194 drawings in the present show, I had marked nineteen in the catalogue as worthy of note: that is ten per cent. One of these, *Prince Charlie in the Highlands* by Alan Sorrell is a piece of surviving melodrama. Another, in near monochrome, *The Falls of Lodore* by the late John Wheatley has a Chinese pattern. There are two by A. Carr Linford, in which the element of bigness in the shape of a hill or a railway arch makes them noticeable. Otherwise charm is the prevailing quality. Robert Austin's *Young Seamstress* and his flower studies are delicate and sensitive.

S. R. Badmin's emphasis is on stone walls and rounded trees, both of friendly thoroughness, and Vincent Lines pictures, with the gracious use of white paper to interpret pleasing snow, are feminine in their delicacy. The freshest pictures are *Nude* by Douglas Hamilton-Holden, the varied group by Len Annois, and the glittering, *Model Changing*, by Mrs. Fisher Prout. Sir William Russell Flint has the technique of the period absolutely at his finger tips. At his best in such works as *The Forgotten Fountain* he almost belongs to the great company of the 19th century.

G. S. Sandilands

ART NEWS AND REVIEW

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A PAINTER'S CREDO

John Bratby

Artists communicate with us principally by their work but this does not detract from the significance of their own personal explanations. Mr. Bratby has asked us to publish this lecture which was to have been presented to the Durham Art Society but was not delivered on account of illness, and is printed verbatim.

"Art, I believe, expresses the feelings of its time. I am not alone in believing that to be true, but I may be alone in believing the following application of that truth to the work of Middleditch, Greaves, Smith and myself who constitute together, in the minds of critics, a group, the so-called New Realists, or in the minds of a few silly critics the Social Realists, or the Cornflakes School —that last being the most idiotic bit of critics junk that I have read. Incidentally, art critics in provincial papers write very nonsensical stuff, so you must read their effort with a critical attitude. While I am on this diversion I may as well mention that this group has been called the Kitchen Sink School, which is more of an eye-catching phrase for the critics column than a sensible group name for Smith, Middleditch, Greaves and myself. I have never painted a kitchen sink in my life, neither has Greaves or Middleditch. I once started painting wash-basins but all but one of these were rejected for exhibition by the Beaux Arts Gallery on the grounds of non-originality and Jack Smith derivation. In passing I might add that if I ever feel like painting fireworks, a weir, chickens, or flowers on a window sill, I stop myself because Smith and Middleditch have done that before me and I want to exhibit all I paint. This is a bad state of affairs but I cannot complain, as the facilities for exhibition of work at the Beaux Arts Gallery which deals with the work of all this group, are excellent. To run off the subject still more, I will say that the Beaux Arts Gallery's policy, which is original, has to my mind been just as responsible for the creation of Smith, Middleditch, Greaves and myself as artists, as Smith, Middleditch, Greaves and myself have been responsible for that. Whatever the other three might fondly wish to think about their independence, I am sure I owe my reputation as an artist to that gallery. No other gallery would exhibit my large pieces of hardboard in 1954. Now they might, perhaps, especially as they are sometimes saleable, but it was the Beaux Arts that ran the risk in the first place—and it is the Beaux Arts which is willing to run the risk again, even if I fail to sell in future shows at their gallery.

It is relevant to this diversion from the starting theme, to mention that the Group has been related to the Ash-Can school of painting in America. Superficially that is a reasonable comparison as I painted dustbins a lot once, but the Group does not really choose Ash Can kind of subjects. The point is rather that they just do not paint flower pieces in the accepted manner, nice conventional landscapes, conventional still lifes or saleable sexy nudes. They certainly do not paint the seamy side of life, but they will probably paint it if that is what they find around them one day. They paint their environment, with no social criticism, and with no particular joy in its unseaminess. Critics terms must be warily taken, for they are 50% catch-phrases and 50% sincere perceptive writing. The Ash-Can School, the Cornflakes School, the Kitchen Sink School,—all catchy phrases, half insincere, and as relevant as many film titles are to the films they name. So many film titles are practically isolated from the film, and conceived primarily as catchy titles, regardless of the suitability of title to film content. Similarly critics groupings are often just conceived to liven up the uninteresting stuff in the critics column. New Realism is the most thoughtful grouping for this group I am talking about. New Realism includes Reyberolle and many contemporary French artists.

Now to return to the expression of his decade by the artist. Do I think I express the mood of the decade 1950-1960? Yes. So do Jack Smith, Middleditch, and Derek Greaves. Bernard Buffet's success in France is dependant upon the fact that he is painting an existentialist mood of sophisticated depression that is fashionable. Abstract-Expressionism as practised by the Americans—Sam Francis and De Kooning, is also to my mind an expression of the age, an expression of the Mood of America, whose comparitively traditionless people are unsettled and disturbed by a war threatened age of Atom bombs and general basic instability. We, over here, and the French, have a traditional life, that is less easily upset by world war threats, and so the art of the painters here expresses less general mental tension, but it does express some, and that is reflected in our New Realists, just as the mood of Bonnard's age was reflected in his very dateable painting. How can

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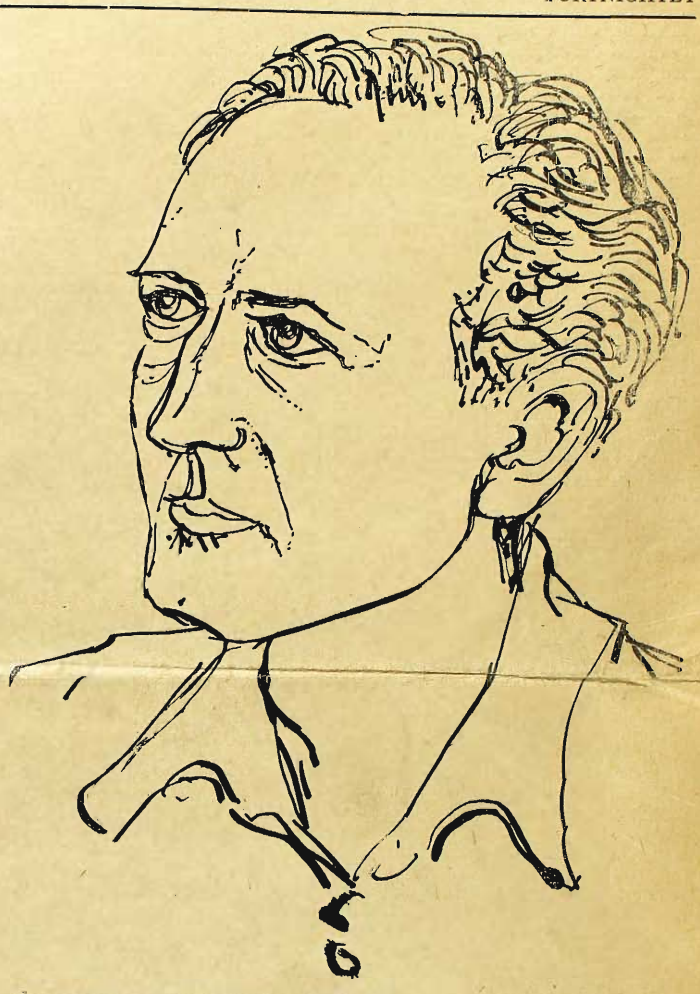

PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST

DOLF RIESER

An artist's origins and predilections are often apparent from the objects and hangings which adorn his studio. Rieser's certainly do so and point directly to Africa. He was, in fact, born (1898) *at King William's Town, South Africa. This location is important for it is on the edge of the richest area of Bushman rock paintings. These Rieser saw as a youth, and so deep was their impression on him that even now much of his best work shows their lasting influence.*

Rieser's formal education was primarily scientific; he gained a doctorate in science from the University of Lausanne. It should be noted in this respect that biology was his special study, and it is significant that although his personality pattern is not such as to tie him to a life of repetitive — if sometimes rewarding — research he has not ignored the worlds of organic forms that biology opens up and which can be used as subjects for creative development.

Although Rieser's early artistic activities started in Germany at the time time of the strident Expressionist movement, it was not until he settled in Paris (1930) *that his true and purposeful development began. This can, in large measure, be attributed to Joseph Hecht, the founder and master of modern engraving. Hecht demonstrated to Rieser — as he did to other of his pupils, Buckland Wright, Gross and Hayter included — that engraving was something more than a technical discipline. It could be, in fact, was a truly creative art form. By* 1939 *Rieser had not only become a master of the art, but was exhibiting with the Surindependants, Atelier* 17 *and the Anglo-American Group, also selling prints to leading galleries and institutions in Europe and the U.S.A.*

Since about 1952 *Rieser has made some significant and original experiments which can have only beneficial results for the engraver's art. Initially, there are his large plaster prints (line and colour) which when mounted on fabric-covered facia boards have all the appeal of the extremely low bas-reliefs of the Quattrocento. During the past year he has made a startling excursion into a new field, engraving on spun-glass — a technique which opens up wonderful opportunities for the creative interior designer.*

G. E. Speck