Aspects of Modern British Art

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EDWARD BAWDEN
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PATRICK CAILLEFIELD
PRUNELLA CLOUGH
HAROLD COHEN
RTA DONAGH
RICHARD ERICH
BARRY FLANAGAN
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MARY MARTIN
ROBERT MEDLEY
JOHN WELLS
In January 1936, Hilton held his first one-man exhibition, at the Bloomsbury Gallery in London, which was building a reputation for showing moderately advanced work. His paintings, in an exhibition staged in late January, included a portrait of his mother, the subject of several paintings, and a study of a woman in traditional dress, all done in a predictably Ecole de Paris manner with slight Bloomsbury overtones. (In the titles listed in the catalogue, the word ‘girl’ occurs ten times. Something of an idée fixe?) Hilton showed 18 paintings as well as drawings, the subjects included human heads and figures and a portrait of his father, with the odd still-life and landscape. All were done in a predictably Ecole de Paris manner with slight Bloomsbury overtones. In the titles listed in the catalogue, the word ‘girl’ occurs ten times. Something of an idée fixe? Anthony Blunt, the art historian and long-standing friend of John Hilton, reviewed the exhibition half-encouragingly in The Spectator: ‘He writes: “It seems that Mr. Hilton needs a large canvas and a close attention to nature in order to get over a certain tendency to a dry method of composition and to give full play to an unusual feeling for restrained and delicate colour-harmonies and to a considerable ability in a rather swaggering use of paint.” At this point, Hilton’s work might be described as indulging in Bloomsbury aesthetics, but aspiring towards the more radical aesthetic of the Seven and Five Society (fl.1919-35). This was set up as an alternative to the London Group as an exhibiting body of greater individuality and avant-garde stance. Hilton’s work was hung among the works of the Seven and Five Society and the London Group. The exhibition was reviewed by Anthony Blunt, the art historian and long-standing friend of John Hilton. In his review, Blunt commented on Hilton’s work, writing: “It seems that Mr. Hilton needs a large canvas and a close attention to nature in order to get over a certain tendency to a dry method of composition and to give full play to an unusual feeling for restrained and delicate colour-harmonies and to a considerable ability in a rather swaggering use of paint.”
SAM HAILE
1909-1948

Reclining Figures, 1936
Oil on canvas
Signed and dated lower left
64 x 76 cm

Prov: Marianne Haile
Exh: Birch & Coom, Sam Haile, London, 1987, No. 1

He suffered considerably, during his all too short life, from the way that circumstances had shaped and directed his reputation. He always thought of himself as primarily a painter, and only secondarily a potter, and felt cheated and misrepresented as a result of his success as a potter and his complete neglect as a painter. It is true that his genius in pottery was so obvious and exceptional as to make it inevitable that his work in that medium should achieve much more impact upon public and critics than his painting, in which he never attained the same sort of outstanding quality, his form and content, and on the whole, the paintings and watercolours of his quite distinct and separate kinds – on the one hand more or less pure landscapes, of which a series of watercolours of Swiss mountain scenery were the most accomplished and attractive; and on the other hand, Surrealist works, relying for their effect upon a highly personal, mysterious and poetic imagery. The landscapes were occasionally exhibited, and a number of them sold, while very few of the Surrealist works were ever shown to the public.

Abstractions dogged them. A lot of the earlier ones were lost or destroyed when he went to the United States in 1939, a number were destroyed in the same car accident in which Haile himself was killed in 1948; almost half of the survivors were burnt in a fire at his widow’s pottery at Dartington in 1957. Only twelve small canvases and some fifty watercolours, gouaches and drawings remain of the whole Surrealist output.

A. C. Sewter, The Surrealist Paintings and Drawings of Sam Haile, Manchester Institute of Contemporary Art, Touring exhibition, 1967.
While staying at Barnett’s Farm, near Lavington Common, in 1939 they heard that there were six acres of woodland for sale half a mile away. Such an opportunity was not to be missed and at the same time they were offered a large gipsy caravan by a Miss Williams of Heyshott for the sum of £20. Two cart-horses towed it to the newly acquired woodland where birch trees had to be felled and bracken cleared to make space for it…

Luckily the contents of the Hampstead studio survived the bombing. Such loss and damage as did occur was due to pilferers not to enemy action. Nevertheless it was not practicable to go on living at Archibald Road and the Hitchens were forced to evacuate to Sussex and somehow fit themselves and their belongings (which included a grand piano) into the newly built studio and the green and scarlet caravan, now their permanent home.

The escape from London and the raids to the seclusion and tranquillity of Sussex woodland was a turning point in Hitchens’ art as well as his life: it was as though he had broken free from former constraints and could now follow his own path with certainty. In his pictures of the early forties, painted with unprecedented assurance and vitality, there is an uprush of energy – a renewal through contact with nature. Reviewing them in the New Statesman (4 April 1942), Clive Bell wrote: ‘To have made progress during the last years an artist must be capable of living, an as an artist should do for and by his art. Ivon Hitchens has made more than progress, he has made a leap forward.’

Peter Khoroche, Ivon Hitchens, Andre Deutsch, London, 1990

IVON HITCHENS

Landscape with Pond, c.1940
Oil on canvas
Signed lower left
41 x 75 cm
When Bomberg heard on the radio about the formation of the War Artists' Advisory Committee, he sent in an application straightaway. The committee's brief seemed to coincide with his own views about the need for state patronage of artists, and he would have pressed Bomberg's efforts to produce powerful work for the public domain. However, when he submitted a canvas of his work, and beside it, an article in The Studio that the War Artists' collection could not be completely representative of modern English art because it could not include those pure painters who are interested only in picking down their feelings about shapes and colours, and in facts, drama, and human emotions generally. (Clark thought of Bomberg as ‘pure’ in this sense; he was greatly mistaken.) But Bomberg's application was twice refused, and only in February 1942 did the committee grant him a token invitation to paint the Burton-on-Trent bomb store.

Bomberg was so fascinated by the sight of the bombs stacked in the disused mines that he made painting after painting of the eerie scene. His meagre supply of canvas was soon exhausted, and so he turned to greaseproof paper in his determination to explore the full implications of his allotted subject. The images he produced there showed how conscious he was of the bombs' destructive nature, and the work contrasts very favourably with the blandness of the bomb-store painting which Cuthbert Orde had executed for the committee a couple of years before his. In his, the bombs were a real and immediate threat to the lives of the people, whereas Bomberg found himself treated with disdain. The committee did not even accept the painting he submitted, preferring to take three of his drawings instead.

Richard Cork, David Bomberg, Tate Gallery, 1968
JOHN WELLS
1907-2000

Form in Rotation, 1946
Pencil, oil and gesso on board
Signed, titled and dated verso; signed, titled, dated and inscribed No.1 with the artist’s address on a label verso
25.5 x 35.5 cm
Prov: Philip Hofer, Director of the Department of Graphic Arts, Houghton Library, Harvard

While he was stationed on the Isles of Scilly during the war Wells became increasingly frustrated by the medical work he had come to see as a series of distractions. In a letter to Hepworth he stated, ‘The trouble is that so many distractions spoil the logical development and one can only compose in fits and starts. However, following his decision to give up medical work and to pursue art as a full-time career his work developed slowly. It is as though time afforded the time and space to concentrate totally on painting and sculpture. He felt that it was important to work through the body of ideas that he had encountered and formulated in his discussions with Gabo, Hepworth and Nicholson over the previous five years.

He began a renewed study of geometry and mathematical systems of proportion. Many of the paintings of this period are characterised by the use of systems through which he divided the blank rectangle of the canvas or backboard into a series of lines and divisions, which then formed the basic structure of his composition. Wells describes his method for such paintings in the following terms: ‘I would draw some Golden Sections and diagonals and more lines…and start seeing shapes in that…’ The paintings Music in a Garden (1947) and Le Sacre du Printemps (1947-8), among others, use what is known as the Golden Section as the basis for the pencil grid from which Wells generated the final forms. The Golden Section is a traditional system of proportion and division. It is essentially the division of a side so that the ratio of the smaller to the larger part is equal to that of the larger to the whole. It is also called the ratio of growth, not only because it is found so constantly in nature, but also for its continuous creative quality, whereby a perfect square is cut off from a Golden Section rectangle, the shape left over is another, smaller Golden Section rectangle and so on. The fact that it can be observed in so many forms of nature – the spiral of horns and shells – affirmed its appeal and validity to an artist like Wells, who sought to reconcile his interest in the geometric forms of Constructivism with knowledge of nature.

Matthew Rowe, John Wells: The Fragile Cell, Tate Gallery Publishing, 1998
In describing what would seem to be the most significant intellectual and emotional springs of Eurich’s creative impulse, there lies no guarantee of successful paintings, only hints and clues to that consistency of feeling that runs throughout his career. Indeed, looking at them objectively, these thoughts and feelings contain obvious potential dangers, pictorially, of a kind which would have swamped a lesser artist. Indeed, looking at them objectively, these thoughts and feelings contain obvious potential dangers, pictorially, of a kind which would have swamped a lesser artist. Indeed, looking at them objectively, these thoughts and feelings contain obvious potential dangers, pictorially, of a kind which would have swamped a lesser artist. Indeed, looking at them objectively, these thoughts and feelings contain obvious potential dangers, pictorially, of a kind which would have swamped a lesser artist. Indeed, looking at them objectively, these thoughts and feelings contain obvious potential dangers, pictorially, of a kind which would have swamped a lesser artist. Indeed, looking at them objectively, these thoughts and feelings contain obvious potential dangers, pictorially, of a kind which would have swamped a lesser artist. Indeed, looking at them objectively, these thoughts and feelings contain obvious potential dangers, pictorially, of a kind which would have swamped a lesser artist. Indeed, looking at them objectively, these thoughts and feelings contain obvious potential dangers, pictorially, of a kind which would have swamped a lesser artist.

Edward Wadsworth put his finger on one of them in a letter written to Eurich in 1940 when they were both contemplating the idea of exchanging paintings for each other to complete. In criticism of both of us, he wrote, “I think that you love kind of realism and you were too fond of flesh, and elegantly, clothed flesh. But I see you adding all sorts of things to mine and leaving out lots of yours.” Eurich’s passion for remembering the visual detail of his childhood was acting in its scope and archness and could, as Wadsworth comments suggest, easily have buried the paintings in a formless welter of information. There is always an extraordinary amount of information in a Wadsworth painting; sometimes more than is often, as in this imaginative painting of the 80s and 90s, but rarely. If ever does it threaten to get out of hand and overwhelm the overall visual impact of the work itself. For Eurich, the paintings (as well as in a painter existing a bunch of painting) which possess a disciplined looseness of compositional structure in which all the myriad details of observation are except into visual rhythms of a quite remarkable variety and originality. And it is these pictorial values which hold the emotional expression of the subject in check, creating the delicate tension which characterises the best of his work.

Nicholas Bishoff’s, The Edge of All the Land: Richard Eurich 1903-1992, Southampton City Art Gallery, 1994
Ideas, like food, are transportable. Like food they don’t always travel well and are often best consumed on the spot where grown.

That a certain kind of contemporary painting should be called ‘international’ is a contagious and flattering notion, but let us distinguish between success and history. International styles have existed in the past. They express requirements held in common and begin with architecture, they are largely anonymous.

Discoveries are individual. Turner and Constable starting from an accepted 19th-century style ended by exploiting their own, which arises from their own desires and conflicts. Discoveries also:

I am not a scientific phenomenon, but I have my own problems of subject and the illusion of appearance (that great Cheshire cat!). Conflicts never generated must be cherished, even though I am condemned to resolve them all along. I cannot afford to throw them overboard in favour of a current style, though to ignore what is going on around me would be as short-sighted as for a scientist to ignore the discoveries of other scientists.

To feel good is reassuring, but it is not the same thing as being good. In the same way it is a temptation to feel ‘modern’ or ‘international’ or anything else that is in the air. It would seem to be not the expression of whether or not British painting is international in the same sense that British art is international, but rather (like some British sculptors) some British painters may receive it.

The term ‘international’ may be over-rated for that ideal British painting was never international. It was by nature introspective, literary and lyrical, which seemed to be current in the immediate post-war years, at least it had the barest hint of that particular strain of the risk of becoming internationally packaged goods.

Artists are accustomed to taking risks, but in the end they must be personal risks. I would rather be labelled after I am dead. Also at that time, concealed about my person, will no doubt be discovered a trademark stating country of origin, but where exactly it will be found I cannot tell, because I don’t spend my time looking for it.

Robert Medley, Predicament, London Magazine, July 1961
IVON HITCHENS
1893-1979

Sunlight Woman, 1954
Oil on canvas
Signed lower left; artist's hand-written studio label verso
60 x 71 cm
Prov: Waddington Galleries, London

In November 1950 the Leicester Galleries put on a show of twenty-seven paintings by Hitchens, all painted in the past three years, and all nudes. In the tower and figure studies, Hitchens himself had been included in exhibitions of the same sort. But, it is true, these had not made any significant appearance in public – too soon after the flower pieces – serving mainly as foils to the solid array of landscapes. As late as the 1944 exhibition, the nudes were included only as a kind of afterthought...

Inevitably the nudes have been overshadowed by the landscapes, and not simply because of the relative rarity without question is in the landscapes that Hitchens' particular gifts and manner of execution were always evident; in the figure paintings, if not always effective to the same degree as in the landscapes, there was a distinction and atmospheric expression part of his oeuvre and have not received the acclaim they deserved.

In the Hampstead days, there had only occasionally been a chance to afford the expense of a professional model, but Hitchens was always driven to seize his chance whenever it offered itself. For the 1948 show, he had managed to engage a professional model for a prolonged stay, and this had triggered off the unprecedented spate of paintings now on view at the Leicester Galleries.

As with the landscapes, each part of the picture structure is carefully planned, and in both cases the successful painting is the one in which each colour form is a vital movement in itself. In the landscapes, however, the composition of each colour form, whether in echo, opposition, transition or escape, indeed it would be false to assume any fundamental difference in Hitchens' approach towards painting a landscape or a nude (or flowers or a still-life). The nature of each dictates the pictorial treatment most appropriate to itself, but granted this, the basic considerations were essentially the same. The only concession to the subject is in the shape, size and texture of the canvas.
Anthony Hill was the only artist in the constructionist group who did not go through a lengthy transition from representation to abstraction. Aged 21 when he joined the group after meeting Pasmore and Adams at the Central School of Art, he then began a lifetime involvement in constructional abstraction. He moved quickly from geometrically influenced paintings to the construction of three-dimensional reliefs based on an ever-widening range of underlying mathematical systems. His considerable mathematical knowledge was recognized in 1979 by his election to the London Mathematical Society and his appointment as a visiting research associate to the Department of Mathematics at University College, London. Hill was a powerful advocate for the concept of the abstract artwork being its own subject and having no reference to the visual external world. Writing in the second of the three Broadsheets produced by the Constructionists during the 1950s, he claimed that abstraction from nature ‘will be undermined by latent associations and when the onlooker adds his own interpretation an abyss of subjectivity is encountered such that art is reduced to the level of a Rorschach test’. It would be wrong, however, to consider Hill’s work as dominated by factors such as arithmetical ratios of topological formulae to the detriment of its visual impact. Removed from this is the fact that his work was essentially visual, and as Alistair Grieve has pointed out: ‘Judgment by eye was always of paramount importance to him and mathematical systems were only starting points or tools used in the creation of a harmonious object’. Hill is particularly important in the history of British constructive art as he provides a link between the largely geometric abstraction of the Constructionists and the mathematically-influenced work of the later Systems group, with whom, though not a member, he had an informal working relationship.

Alan Fowler, *Constructive and Systems Art in Britain after the Second World War: From Elements of Abstraction (Space, Line & Interval in Modern British Art)*, Southampton City Art Gallery, 2005.
ALexander Mackenzie
1923-2002

GwiliAn, 1957-58
Oil on board
Signed, titled and dated verso
99.7 x 150.9 cm

Mackenzie thought of painting as a parallel process; though all painters are revealed in the detail of their mark-making, his artistic personality is notably (and characteristically) concentrated in his. Lines, scratches, abrasions, collage, cuts and cloudy flourishes of rubbed-down pigment re-enact on gesso panels, canvas, parchment or paper the landscape’s ‘wild structural’ qualities. In the abstract idiom he practised consistently from the early 1950s until his death in 2002 Mackenzie seems often to be referencing patterns of field walls or hill contours as though they were calligraphy in a lost language, interpretable only through meditation on the marks themselves.

Mackenzie said that he thought of his work as ‘paintings first, with landscape elements’. So he did. Reviews placed him firmly in the English landscape tradition. This was a mixed blessing for a young artist around 1960, especially one who was by then associated with Nicholson, Hepworth and the Middle Generation painters of St Ives…

Mackenzie’s analytical approach to ‘wild structure’ insulated him from the atavistic mythologizing of the Celtic landscape he could easily have picked up from the charismatic Lanyon or heard expressed with stately fervour by Barbara Hepworth. He saw the cliffs and moorlands of West Cornwall neither as turbulent Romantic heritage nor as an unconstructed ecosystem but as layered, resonant surfaces inscribed with meaning.

Michael Bird, Alexander Mackenzie, Austin/Desmond Fine Art, 2007
Martín Bradley
b. 1931

Paysage Dans Le Vent, 1960
Oil on canvas
Signed and dated app. left; signed, titled and dated verso
100 x 80 cm
Prov: Toninelli, Milan

I was born in England in 1931, descended on my mother’s side, from a family of Flemish painters whose most prominent ancestor was Jan Herman Koekkoek.

At the age of fourteen I fled on board a cargo ship and for three years voyaged back and forth from the Americas as a cabin boy.

At sea I dreamed of becoming a painter: I had always had a certain natural aptitude for drawing.

Returning to London at eighteen I began to paint, encouraged by certain older artists. I exhibited in several London galleries. My first influence was the American comic strip, which was, to my beginner’s eyes, far more expressive than the pre-Raphaelite reproductions I had been exposed to on the walls of my schoolroom. Later, I discovered the magic of Chinese calligraphy.

The masters and cultures which have helped me to form my present language were the Fauves, then Paul Klee, Max Ernst, Mark Tobey, as well as the diverse manifestations of Sino-Japanese calligraphy, the ancient so-called primitive civilizations and the graffiti that I find on the walls of our cities.

My paintings tend to evoke the essence of an object, an emotion real or imaginary. For me the world is composed of a long series of natural visions inextricably mixed with those of the imagination, and each picture that I make is a crystallization of these experiences suspended in the long corridor of time.

I have learned Chinese, Tibetan, Spanish, Portuguese and Catalan because I believe that language enriches the imagination, the word evoking the image.

I want to share with you, the spectators, the marvelous moments that allow us to reflect on the Eternity of the Cosmos.

I consider myself rather a ‘visual poet’ than a painter and it is thus that I express myself.

Martín Bradley, from Martín Bradley, Gallery One, London, March 1962
His paintings can originate in the vaporous expanses of thought, the limitless realms of the imagination, elemental, like seas stirred by the winds into tempests or becalmed in a fairweather separation of sky and water, unpredictable, pregnant with unforeseen changes, or they can begin with a sense of the hard reality of daily events, exacting and precise like the routine of a sailor at sea. Continuous vacillation between such opposite influences and contrasted facets of existence creates different attitudes in the mind of the artist towards his work, and in the work of Martin Bradley it promotes a surprising versatility and freshness. The hard statements making bold, uncomprising images are accompanied by the fluid ambiguity of others. Brought together they give us a poetic consciousness of the complex nature of reality.

Apart from these metaphysical considerations, Martin Bradley understands us as a painter the power that colour can exert over form, and shapes by lines and shapes in ways that give them new significances. His knowledge of Chinese calligraphy has taught him that certain gestures of the brush can speak a language which is at the same time direct, simple like the eternal and ubiquitous language of the child, and yet one of truth that we find woven into canvasses like an endless rainbow. His signs and figures are abstract images, symbols of the movement and the contradictions of this life on many levels, in which we find beauty, but with profound delight, a unity of opposites such as that presented to us by Bradley in his work.

For me, painting must come about in response to an outside, not an inside, situation. It is what the painting is about that counts, and the middle-aged idea of ‘relationships’ is a very dull idea, unless a relationship within the painting stands for something outside the painting.

Yet it is not that simple. Of course painting refers to the outside world; but in seeing, it sees itself seeing: it records, and records its own act of recording. It makes communication possible, and much of what is communicated is concerned with the mechanics and processes of communication. And whereas in most meaningful, it questions most profoundly what may be meant by meaning. It is self-analytical, self-critical, and possessed of this finely balanced feed-back system, self-controlling.

If this were no more than an image, a speculation as to what painting could be, it would be enough for me. In fact painting has never been uniquely concerned with ‘life’. (How could it have been? Objectivity in art is not the ability to seek out and to present the truth but the power to convince you that what is presented is the truth.) The perennial subject matter for art is not life, but the transposition of life into art, and whereas other painting has been engaged with it, it is engaged always upon an endless speculative enigma into the nature of painting itself (for the original exposition of the ideas in this sentence I am indebted to Dr. Leo Steinberg.)

It is what the painting is about that counts. But what painting is about is even more important. The painting is symbolic, necessarily, in the sense that a symbol is something that stands for something else. But I feel more and more strongly that the act of painting is itself symbolic; an act that stands for something else. What is symbolically enacted is bound up obscurely with the nature of the society within which it is accomplished. And finally it is what the act symbolizes which will determine the nature of the painting.
Like Kenneth Martin, Mary Martin would probably have discounted her early environment as a factor in her development as an artist. Yet however dialectic a work of art may be, however ‘abstract’ the artist’s intention, every form or surface, however simple or geometrical, inevitably calls up some kind of association, as Mondrian realised: ‘The definitions “figurative” and “non-figurative” are only approximate and relative. For every form, even every line, represents a figure, so form is absolutely neutral.’

The white backgrounds of so many of Mary Martin’s earlier reliefs and the use of angled, reflective squares of polished aluminium or actual mirrors in her later reliefs must owe something to early memories of the cliffs along the South Coast near Folkestone and the choppy surface of the English Channel. Standing in front of the huge monumental wall that Mary Martin originally made for the Signals Gallery, Inversions 1966, its large aluminium plates angled at forty-five degrees from the wall shattering and re-forming the light that strikes them or the image of any object near it, one is aware of an experience which has the exhilarating drama of watching light scintillating off the surface of the sea on a windy day. The experience has been reformulated through the experience, imagination and mental discipline of the artist’s mind, but the same vigour is there.

This is to give what might seem rather specific English associations and connotations to what is after all the use of an international language of geometrical, abstract forms. For Kenneth and Mary Martin use a language which is current (is a currency, like money) – a language which developed through Franco-Iberian cubism and their subsequent, through Russian suprematism and constructivism, Dutch De Stijl and the German Bauhaus. Yet like all artists who have said something particular in this language (and there are plenty who have not), they have given it a personal nuance, a local accent.

ROGER HILTON 1911-1975

Birds, 1967
Oil on canvas
Signed, titled and dated verso
30 x 25 cm
Prov: Waddington Galleries, London

ROGER HILTON 1911-1975

Untitled, 1967
Oil on canvas
Signed and dated verso
60.9 x 50.8 cm
Prov: Waddington Galleries, London
The alternative definition of creation as the specific act of making provides another way into Jones's work. Jones was trained not only as an artist but as a teacher, a role in which he has long found pleasure and stimulation. In view of his long-standing interest in colour theory, in Kandinsky's writings and in Klee's Pedagogical Sketchbook, Jones finds it natural to construct his pictures in terms of problem-solving: exploring the interaction of colour, the relationship of solid to two-dimensional form, the transformation of source from popular illustration or photography to painting, and the means by which such matter can be made into psychological structures from the spectral. The presentation of sensations of movement within the static format of a painting has been explored in a number of ways over the years, through shape and linear direction as well as through colour. The identity of the canvas as a real object, as the ‘thing in itself’ and not only as the receiver of information about perceived phenomena, has been asserted with a thoroughness comparable to that of Frank Stella. Jones's means are often similar to those of an 'abstract' painter, yet every mark is endowed also with a more literal figurative reading as a means of justifying its presence in the picture...

The ‘Marriage of Styles’ with which one finds so frequently in Jones's work is the main characteristic shared with the work of other British painters associated with the Royal College of Art and the Pop movement. For Jones this is not a device for its own sake but rather a means of liberating himself from the restrictions of a particular style or tendency, making redundant the barriers generally considered to exist between one style and another. A single painting may shift from one mode to another in a matter of minutes, and the process may be repeated and developed in a variety of different ways. The identity of the canvas as a real object, as the ‘thing in itself’ and not only as the receiver of information about perceived phenomena, has been asserted with a thoroughness comparable to that of Frank Stella. Jones’s means are often similar to those of an ‘abstract’ painter, yet every mark is endowed also with a more literal figurative reading as a means of justifying its presence in the picture...

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Kenneth Martin commented that, ‘To be interested in the kinetic is to be consciously interested in sensation.’ Movement was inherent to Kenneth’s conception of his kinetic mobiles, as a way of linking three-dimensional space with time. The minimalist sculptor Carl Andre commended Kenneth on the ‘sexiness’ of his mobiles – perhaps alluding to the combination of mass-produced industrial materials and elegant sinuous lines. Linearity was the starting point for his mobiles; they are essentially expanded, three-dimensional forms based on drawn lines.

Kenneth’s earliest mobiles came out of a search for clarity. He talked about how he ‘got lost’ trying to do many things and wanted to make something simpler. He took inspiration from Alexander Calder, whose mobiles were shown in London in 1953. Unlike Calder, Kenneth’s mobiles do not directly reference nature, rather they are resolutely abstract, composed of what he called ‘primitive forms’: lines, circles and ellipses. He described the form of his Screw Mobiles, in which brass rods radiate from a central axis, as being like a ‘spiral staircase’. However, scientific forms such as the moebius and the double helix, discovered in 1953 to be the structure of DNA molecules, may also have had an impact on the design of his mobiles.

The movement of the Screw Mobiles and Rotary Rings of the mid-60s is slow and inexorable – they are not moved by draughts, like many of Calder’s suspended sculptures, but rather rotate mechanically, powered by motors. Contemporary photographs of the mobiles show the importance of light and shadow. It is in the unpredictable play of light on the surfaces of the wall behind that chance enters the equation, making for an inconstant field.

Celia Davies & Sarah Martin, Kenneth Martin & Mary Martin: Constructed Works, Camden Arts Centre, 2007

KENNETH MARTIN
1905-1984
Screw Mobile (Multiple), 1970
Chromium plated steel
66 x 28.5 x 28.5 cm
Exh.: Camden Arts Centre, Kenneth Martin & Mary Martin: Constructed Works, London, 2007, No.29 (another example)
RICHARD LIN
b. 1933

Black and Vermillion, September 1969
Oil, aluminium and canvas
Signed, titled and dated verso
101.5 x 101.5 cm
Provenance: Mr and Mrs Jacques Lebrun
Galerie Withofs, Brussels
Marlborough Fine Art, London

RICHARD LIN
b. 1933

Sea, 1974
Oil on canvas
Signed, titled and dated verso
81.3 x 81.3 cm
Provenance: Marlborough Fine Art, London
If post-war French abstraction (in all its manifestations) largely shaped her sense of the relation of one item to another... there were other important affinities and recognitions at work. The unexpected angles of view in the early work, and the integration of working man into his industrial setting, she explicitly related to the early Italian townscapes. In her use of diverse materials and surface textures she drew upon contemporary developments of collage, assemblage, on the urban matter of the French l’artautre, on Tachism, and on the ‘poor materials’ and ‘antithesis and allies’ as remanded (by her) in comparable evocation of Surrealist imaginative procedures.

When I referred to her ‘marvellous’ photographs - of tangled wires, ropes and factory gates, ropes and discarded gloves - I had in mind André Breton's dictum: ‘The marvellous is always beautiful, everything marvellous is beautiful. Nothing but the marvellous is beautiful’. As Breton (and his Surrealist colleagues) knew, the marvellous may be found in the inconsequential, a lost glove, a stain on a wall. I remember also, as relevant, her affection and admiration for her close friend, the surrealist sculptor F.E. McWilliam, who shared with her a creative predilection for the discarded and disregarded, seeing in unconsidered objects and banal things opportunities for mysterious poetic transformations. Clough's images, in whatever media, are, like those of Surrealism, of a kind that affects and inflects the way we look at ordinary things, and induces us to discover strangeness and beauty in the familiar.

Deep, the marks may be, but the continuous reworking that builds up the surface of a painting destroys that of a drawing. No matter how long Auerbach takes to finish a drawing – weeks, usually – what one sees on the paper at the end is always the work of one day’s session and one only. But each day’s work is left overnight, taken up the next day, and the sitter arrives, and then scrubbed back to a grey blur – usually to the sitter’s disappointment, since there seems no end to all this. The word begins again. There may be fifteen, twenty, thirty, vanished states in the end, each corresponding to a separate day’s work. Then one final record in the deepest, burnished toner, on which the paper has been scorched in many coats of ingrained charcoal left by the successive erasures. After a while the paper sometimes wears away under the scratchy attack of the charcoal and the rubbing of the rag, and must be repaired. Hence the patches that infest Auerbach’s graphic work. The glued-on paper has no formal intention, and no claim to aesthetic interest, as collage. Its edges do not relate to the action of the lines and tones in the drawing – though the action is implied, often very tautly, in the edges of the original sheet itself.

Drawing seems lighter to him than painting – as it ought to, given his arduous and messy way of working with pigments. ‘It seems to me more intelligent to have a piece of black chalk in one’s hand, to have a piece of paper, to be able to make one’s points economically. I am delighted occasionally to be able to do that. But after a time it seems an impoverished activity, a sort of escape, and you go back to painting.’ For Auerbach, the capacity for repeated attack that drawing demands is an index of maturity.

Robert Hughes, Frank Auerbach, Thames and Hudson, 1989
EDWARD BAWDEN
1903-1989

Caerhays Castle, Cornwall - Portico Front, 1983
Watercolour
Signed lower right, signed titled and dated verso
50 x 65 cm
Prov: Miss E Stevens
The David Paul Gallery, Chichester
The Fine Art Society, London
Exh: Royal Academy Summer Exhibition, 1944, No.649.
The most recent bronzes that Flanagan has been making again bear the imprint of the pressing hands and fingers, but the shapes are elaborated and the surfaces coloured by patinas. Patina is the name given to the patina formed on metals by the action of the atmosphere or other external influences. The title of a piece is itself suggesting or suggested by the form, as part of the process of creation. Flanagan's meticulous working is reflected in the detail of the finished product, which is often of a highly ornate and refined nature.

Flanagan's work has passed through many phases and is characterised by an inexhaustible inventiveness, and good humour. At the core of it is a persistence and seriousness of purpose in his profession. The practical and imaginative ingenuity that he has displayed, in a work that bears so many contemporary conventions is, in the effect of his work is to touch the most basic and ancient, physiological and psychological resonances in his viewers. His works slump, balance and dance in ways that we recognise profoundly within ourselves.

Tim Hilton, "Lost a Slave of Other People's Thinking..." from Barry Flanagan: Sculpture, British Pavilion, Venice Biennale (and touring), British Council, 1982
The contours of the border between Ulster and Eire, the Republic of Ireland, signify what the fighting was all about. It is a line drawn between reality and the dream of a unified Ireland. For her subsequent paintings based on the Maze Prison, Donagh used the potent symbol of the H-block, the building type used to incarcerate paramilitary republicans convicted or suspected of crimes against the British Government. The Maze, on Long Kesh (or Long Meadow), near Lough Neagh, is notorious for the “blanket” and “dirty” protests prior to the hunger strikes that led to the deaths of Bobby Sands and nine other prisoners in the early 1980s. Newspaper and television coverage of these grim events was regularly illustrated by aerial views of the prison compound, a patchy grid of H-blocks stretching into the distance.

It is precisely this kind of view that Donagh took for her “H-block” paintings. A grid, drawn in acute perspective, also parallel to coinciding with the picture plane, made up of squares occasionally inscribed by an alphabetical letter – H’s instead of X’s – is a pictorial formula the artist again found suited her purpose. In Long Kesh (1982), the H’s are drawn and painted in such a way as to imply that they are referring to both the buildings and symbols. Concerning the latter, during her time teaching in Belfast, the artist noticed how the letter H was being used increasingly in murals to signify the republican protest. “In contrast with the figurative style of mural design this looked more abstract and more open to interpretation. It could have meaning for both sides, be a complaint, or an emblem, but above all it referred to actual prison cells.” The view looking down onto the oblique H’s in Long Kesh, partially obscured through cloud-like areas of paint, suggests not only the origin of the images, but also the privilege of being free, flying over these earthbound buildings full of prisoners.

Jonathan Watkins, back to the Black Country from Rita Donagh, Ikon Gallery, Birmingham, 2005
Patrick Caulfield has sometimes been associated with these Pop-oriented painters (Lichtenstein and Oldenburg); certainly he does share common characteristics with some of them, but his art differs from theirs in a rather fundamental way. Like many of his contemporaries he makes use of pre-existing imagery, often of a banal kind. What Caulfield differs from them, however, is the nature of this imagery and how he uses it.

Like many he has used pre-existing imagery, often of a very banal kind. The sources and range of his imagery, however, differ very considerably from those of his contemporaries. You do not find in his work details from customized cars, pin-ups, New York skylines, Scientific American diagrams, etc.; his banalities are taken from sources nearer to home. The imagery of English Pop Art is not so remote for the Englishman especially because it is cliche, whereas English Pop Art is not in fact for the Englishman especially exotic. When Caulfield includes the exotic in his work, it is always a traditional and obvious kind—palm trees and oriental pottery often appear in his paintings. His is a deliberately banal and apparently ironic statement of exoticism. While Caulfield actually does deal with usual cliches and he totally effective they must be banal, as to be almost totally dull; so far however he has never actually been exoticism as presenting a cliché about exoticism. The exotic cliché is a salient feature of Caulfield's work, and as other critics have pointed out, his paintings exploit the shock of recognition, the elevation of the familiar. His use of the banal however cannot be simply summed up in this way: To Caulfield clichés are not interesting; there must be some good reason why they have become clichés. Clichés are not because they are statements of obvious truths—but does that rule them as less interesting? Certainly some are uninteresting truths but, in order to become clichés, they must be found to have been useful at some time.

Christopher Finch, Patrick Caulfield (Reagan/New Art 2. Reggia, 1977)