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LONDON GALLERIES by Norbert Lynton

SANDRA BLOW'S new paintings, at the New Art Centre, are surprisingly different from those she did before and from the big one hanging in the Royal Academy show. The forms haven't changed particularly, those slow sweeps of the painter's broom bringing rivers of greys and browns and texture across her white fields. It's the colour that is new. Her watercolours of the last two years gave us some warning of the pinks and oranges that now appear in the paintings but could not tell us of their strange luminosity. Without expending any great quantity or intensity of colour, she has turned her pictures into vehicles of light and, because of the light, of more emotion than before. (New Art Centre, 41 Sloane Street, S.W.1; until June 8.)

A more assertive use of colour and of form characterises John Plumb's new paintings at the Axiom Gallery. He used to paint large colour fields and to activate them by disturbing their edges with more or less wavering bands of contrasting colour. Now everything is firm and clear; clear geometrical blocks occupy certain positions in the colour field. But the programme hasn't changed: it is still the disruptive action of the small units across the field that matters, the way they tense and mobilise what at first seems an inert surface. And the surreptitious conflict is all the more effective now for being between more unambiguous elements.

The exhibition includes a large and handsome print by Plumb, the first of the gallery's series of multiples. It sells at a very reasonable £3. (Axiom Gallery, 79 Duke Street, W.1; until June 8.)

Light without colour is the medium of Camargo's white reliefs at Gimpel Fils. He is a Brazilian, one of those South Americans usually associated, for reasons known only to its promoters, with the world of kinetic art. I tend to get impatient with artists who keep on playing the same game with the same counters and on the same spot. Camargo's counters are cylinders of wood of various dimensions and his game is to cut them at one end at 45 degrees, to arrange them in a variety of ways on a

background and to paint the whole thing white.

But there is no mistaking the fact that they are quite magical to look at. Camargo has many ways of dramatising his material, mixing large blocks in with small ones, setting a tight cluster against an empty expanse of whiteness, packing them tightly or sprinkling them sparsely. And there is a free-standing sculpture in the show, one zig-zagging cylinder carved in marble and painted white (!) that is quite one of the most mysterious visual phenomena I have encountered for a long time. (Gimpel Fils, 50 South Molton Street, W.1; until June 8.)

This evades the problem of the artist who goes on pushing a line that has been found artistically and commercially good. It is often difficult to distinguish between a man passionately developing a limited programme (like Mondrian did) and the man who, out of interest and without cynicism, plays variations on his favourite theme. The art trade has long relied on the latter, at least since the seventeenth century: collectors want to have an X that looks enough like other Xs for everybody to recognise it.

Take Mark Tobey showing at the Hanover Gallery. His calligraphic all-over paintings stand beside Pollock's apparently more expressionist writings as a subtle, sophisticated alternative. I was already disenchanted with them at the time of his big Whitechapel show of 1952 and I have come to find them since, for all the variations offered, fidgety and curiously mindless.

Tobey's public image (he is nearly 80) is that of the mystic, with one spiritual foot in the East and one in the West and a flat in Basle. His art seems meditative; he is convinced that "multiple space bounded by involved white lines symbolises higher states of consciousness." He fails to convince me: to me his pictures and prints look like smooth performances of a well-known routine. That doesn't make them totally bad but it makes them not good enough, and quite incommensurate with his fame. (Hanover Gallery, 32a St George Street, W.1; until June 9.)