

made workable sometimes, particularly in his early pictures. Simply cannot coordinate these disparate elements together. In 1970, an extraordinarily long narrow shaped field narrows until it terminates at a point, the width of a finger, way, way down the wall where it starts. One does not serve this work, one travels in its direction. As a grand design it is useless, for mass and length cannot make an arbitrary shape coherent. It has been mistaken for monumentality.

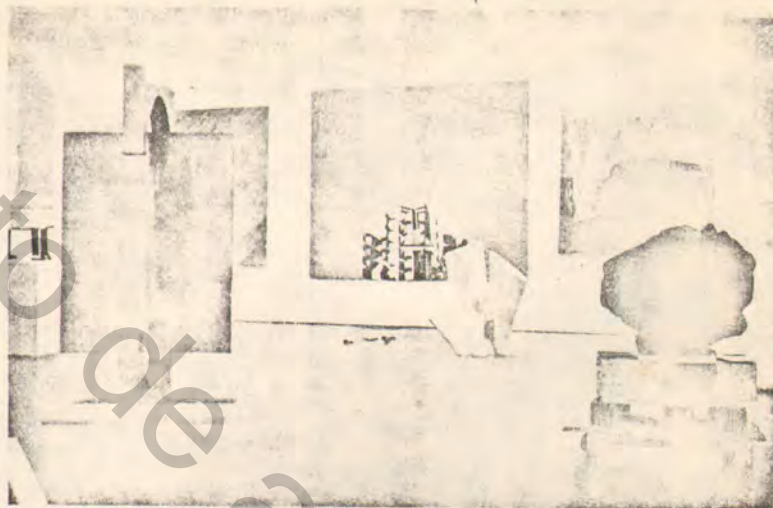
When there is Bell's use of colour, he relies on those shades favoured by architects in the fifties, orange and blue, accented with green, pink and yellow. The colouration is dense, without relief, and there is no apparent relationship between it and the structure of the canvas. There is a lack of unity among the pictorial elements. In some of Stella's works, these are so well controlled that a picture might seem to move and yet be still. Like all really good painting, the best works have an almost organic character, shape and surface sized together. This is a sophistication which Bell seems to be missing out by using exaggerated techniques. He does not achieve it. It is surprising, then, to find that he, like Basil Beattie, has well developed themes in his works on paper, which are small, original and presumptuous. Most of them investigate how a specific colour and shape can interact (he calls them 'studies'). In one example, two 'tulle' like swirls are cut into white paper and punctuated at the centre with a large circular black dot. A superb drawing is *Tallahasse Fan*, an image of a brightly coloured fan, one of a square poised in space at a slight tilt. This piece demonstrates particularly well Bell's expressiveness and applied colour, the kind of design which has an almost unconscious design. I have been told it is the one thing an artist can't be taught. While it does permeate the drawings, this quality has been neglected from the paintings; with Stella's natural gift, one wishes he were using it consistently.

The London Group at

Whitechapel Gallery, London, 13 December 1973.
Whitechapel's loan of the gallery space allowed the London Group to open their ranks to outsiders in this year. An exhibition such as this is particularly valuable because it manages to open up the magic of the commercial galleries, seemingly difficult to penetrate both new artists and established ones whose work is currently fashionable. Furthermore it provides all the artists concerned with a rare opportunity to revalue their own work through seeing it in a broader context.

The high proportion of work by non-members included both established artists who were specially invited to participate and a number of new names whose work was chosen by the Selection Committee. As a result the show contained a varied and stimulating survey of the major routes followed by contemporary painting and sculpture in this country without ever straying into suspect conceptual territory.

The members, of course, include a number of long-respected names, of whom the most venerable is Duncan Grant. His *Still Life*, showing fruit illuminated by the diffused light of an old table lamp with shade askew, stood up well to some of its brasher neighbours.



Installation shot. *The London Group*. Photo: George Lewinski

Sunlight picks out the tactile clumps of foliage in Julian Cooper's paintings, in which interlocked pieces of static honey-combed structure contrast with the dynamic streamlined furrows below. Members working in a totally non-figurative idiom included Brian Fielding; his *Painting II* was notable for its strong configuration framing a diagrammatic motif, set off by dark splatters of paint like breaking chalk. Barry Martin investigated the use of colour to create effects of recession through space, in paintings that offer a positive tranquillity that is particularly rewarding. In comparison Arthur Wilson's convoluted and interpenetrating metal reliefs have a surging energy which is barely contained within their highly disciplined structures. Neville Boden also uses thin sheets of metal to fashion witty *Angels*, in the shape of wings with scalloped edges, curling with scarlet bravura.

The artists selected by the Committee included Robert Darkes, a skilful Realist with an unexpected talent for infusing lifeless stucco with colouristic warmth, while retaining the bleak anonymity of his chosen locations. The atmospheric qualities of his damp plaster contrast with the gleaming surfaces of John Kilday's *High Rise Block*, which uses rainbow iridescences to activate myriad bands of

vibrations throughout its nightmare expanse. Marianne Kreeger's *Babel* is also a towering construction, but it is made of a delicate fretwork of fantasy and is grounded in a luminous sphere.

From the London Group one expects, and appreciates, the stability of tradition. People who expect student shows to be firework displays of new and original talent are invariably disappointed. The extent to which art-school work should reflect contemporary trends is clearly problematic, but it is surely relevant that showmanship is particularly suspect at a time like today, when one cannot observe a firm general direction. There is little allowance for frivolity these days: any tendency towards jokiness is

resolutely pounced on by those who believe that there are serious problems about painting to be grappled with.

The second year show at the Royal College splits neatly into two camps. There are those who are concerned with formal problems of art on a universal level, and those content to work out personal solutions expressed chiefly in the figurative content of their work. The first group consciously see themselves as rejecting the traditional image of the Painting School, and regard their work as a bid to leave behind the comforts of figuration in order to enter the vital mainstream of abstract art. However biased this view may be, their work at least shows that they are aware of post-1940 American art, in contrast to the cosy cocoon apparently swathing some of the other students. However, although their ideology commands respect, they are only beginning to work out the large problems they have set themselves. Very often the less ambitious works of the other camp are more successful within their own terms.

David Wiseman's four canvases show how he has tackled the problem of setting up and denying illusionistic space. His tentative manner becomes progressively more coherent. In comparison Michael Major's work appears more confident, perhaps because he is working in a narrower

area, with less complex configurations. His concern with different ways of laying on paint is shared by Richard Miller in almost all his admirably varied paintings. Graham Cowley is by far the most assured of the group in terms of stylish handling. Although less intellectually stringent, his work is distinguished by his facility for freely executed forms which he places with considerable panache.

The figurative contingent included John Dewhurst whose pencil drawing of a Victorian parlour was notable for its elegant technique, transcribing the polished surface of the dresser with sensitive fidelity. In terms of subject matter, the most impassioned painting was Christopher Griffin's interpretation of a Welsh mining village, which showed a bird trapped in a miner's lamp under the heavy glitter of an opaque black layer of coal dust. Other noteworthy paintings included Tina Floyd's *Evolution of Women*, an apocalyptic monochrome tangle, and Alexander Young's landscape-derived abstraction, expressed in rosy drifts.

Fenella Crichton

Scargio

Paul Camargo at Gimpel Fils, London, from 8 January to 2 February 1974.

Camargo's fourth London exhibition at Gimpel Fils consists of a series of recent sculptures.

Camargo has always guarded his independence with care and integrity. He had no formal art school education. He was initiated into the arts through his contacts with certain artists. In Brazil he studied under Lucio Fontana and Emilio Pettoruti, and when he came to Paris in 1948 to study philosophy at the Sorbonne he met and became deeply attached to Brancusi. The works of Arp and Vantongerloo also made a profound impression on him.

Ten years ago it was clear that Camargo was entering an important stage of his development. At the time there was a growing interest in South American artists, many of whom lived in Paris. These artists were (and are) involved in abstract art. However, their outlook was subtly different from that of European artists. The ease and facility with which they expressed abstract ideas, the total elimination of the figurative and yet the warmth and emotional content of their work, characterized a particular approach which could be identified as South American.

Several months ago I passed through Paris on my way back from a trip to the Middle East and North Africa. I had visited a number of places including Isfahan, Damascus, Cairo and Fez, and was full with the beauty of what I had seen; some of the finest examples of the art of a civilization whose expression was entirely based on abstract principles. It was against this background that I saw Camargo's recent works. I was amazed by what

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I saw. Here was an artist who had quietly and modestly continued his own way, avoiding the distractions and attractions of fashions and movements, and had through his own intuition come to a fundamental understanding of abstract principles which allowed him to make works of art that could express the subtlest ideas and feelings.

Camargo's first works in this direction were entirely informal and organic. They were made by placing the fingers in sand and capturing the effect in plaster. The significant move from this was when we took a white background and with anonymous elements made from cylinders of wood, attached them in different relationships to the surface. Recently, the works have come away from the wall, and are now realized in the round as sculptures. The organic and the geometric appears beautifully balanced. The material, marble, has a clarity and softness which allows the light to enter in the work.

The following is a short extract from a conversation that we had in his studio.

IC: Many times I have been classified as a kinetic artist... Well, I think you have to know what is kinetic. I never put mechanical movement in my work. In fact, I think the introduction of very domestic technology into Art is infantile. I don't believe in that.

Many artists have worked with movement without having thought of the problem of TIME, and for me TIME is more interesting than movement. Mechanical movement tends to have a short temporal cycle, and becomes incredibly monotonous.

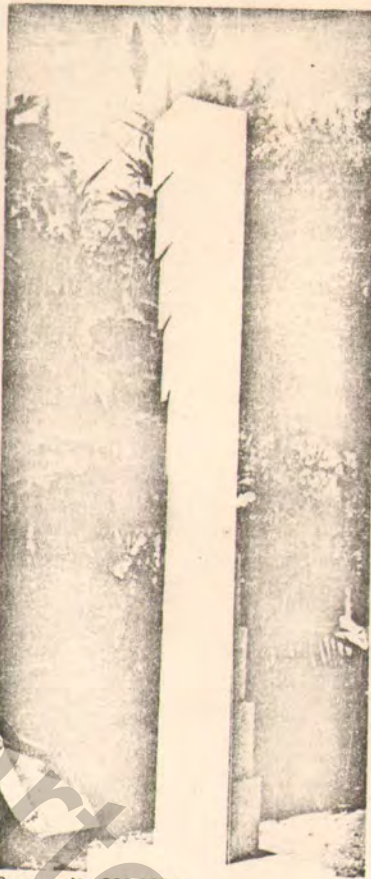
PK: Your art is conceived in a very interior manner.

IC: You have an intuition of something, you have to concretize to know this intuition. You can concretize it with your language. The problem of the creative activity, whichever one it is, is a problem of having a 'support' — a formal support which will be adequate for what you want to say. For the purpose of analysis, or for the purpose of speech, one separates these aspects, but in fact, in the act of creation, in the work, they are found perfectly united. It's a kind of symbiosis. It would be very Aristotelian to start again with the business of form and meaning, wouldn't it? They do not exist. It is the same thing with space and time. One cannot say there is space and time. There is Space-Time.

PK: So, having established a language, which has definite and clear restrictions, you then have the possibility of creation.

IC: The artist organizes his language to say what he wants to say or can say. I can speak very easily with the elements of my language, and I can say everything I want. There is a sort of symbiosis between me and these elements and the work and me.

PK: There is a tendency amongst artists today to take an idea, exhaust its possibilities, and then move on to another idea.



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IC: That is a problem of style, not language.

PK: But you cannot exhaust a style.

IC: No, I do not think so, because it's like a language. You cannot extinguish a language. If you have something to say, you speak and the language is alive. If you have nothing to say, the language is dead.

PK: It seems to me, though, that it also depends on how subjective the language is. If you take the elements of your language, they are in fact very classical. They can all be reduced to either the circle and the cylinder or the square and the cube.

IC: But the combinations are infinite.

PK: Exactly, and it is there, surely, that your language is much more than simply a subjective style. It is actually taking into account something that is universal in its possibilities. Every time you look at these works there is something new to see in them, and what becomes of interest is some very subtle change.

IC: Yes, but sometimes very subtle changes change absolutely everything... My direct problem is to investigate and to work with plastic elements. It's a very specific area of work — the plastic field — because it creates plastic realities which, because they are made by man, are human realities. It is I who make them, others who see them. This realization is on a plastic level. There is, I find, in the creative process another level, let us say a psychoanalytic level. I think that every artist makes an emotional transference into the object and the object is capable of passing this transference on to the spectator. Art has a huge capacity for emotional communication. Even with the most

abstract elements you can say just about everything.

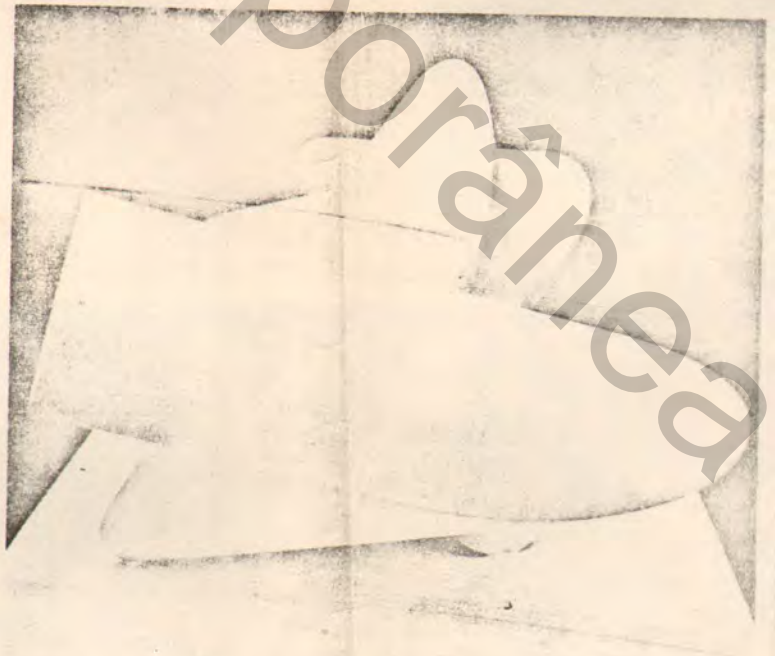
PK: Is it possible to separate the language from the personality?

IC: Perhaps. There was an exhibition of 'New Directions' in Paris which was to be a collective exploration. I was invited to participate and refused. I told them: 'You are working on researching vocabulary, you are making a plastic speculation looking for a vocabulary, you are making a dictionary; this is fine, it is useful. But I have the pretension of writing a text, of making a poem. You are working with words, you are looking for words to codify, a kind of plastic codification; it doesn't interest me: I want, with plastic elements, to create a poem. I have the pretension to create a poem'. . . . If I take a completely ignorant employee and keep him in my studio eight hours a day, five days a week, and tell him to speculate on the cube, he will divide it in two, in three, in four, in five, etc. and make a fantastic thing, but it is not going to have any meaning. When I started working with these elements, I studied their possible combinations. But I had to discard what an element could do objectively and assimilate completely all of its expressive possibilities before I could create with it. . . . I have always been very contemplative by nature. As a child I was always fascinated by trees. I used to remain for hours looking at a tree. What fascinated me was how a branch would come out of the trunk. I wouldn't understand and would remain, asking myself how it was coming out, so spontaneous, so organic. At the same time so terribly strong, so terribly clear. A tree is very strong as a plastic existence, as an object. It was difficult for me to organize my daily life and of feeling. . . . I take an enormous amount of time between the idea and its realization. I can spend months rearranging the elements until I arrive at the moment of decision, of

permanently fixing them.
PK: Do you think the artist is dependent on the epoch?

IC: It is not that he is dependent, he is in his own epoch. This is why artists as first creators, in general, are people who have a perception of the period, and in fact when there is a break it is when the artists perceive certain things about their period and become aware that the language which they have inherited from the past is no longer of use, and cannot be a witness to this period; then they are obliged to invent a new language to express this new perception. This is what is meant by epoch. . . . The artist has an immediate role and a transcendent one. In the immediate role, for example, you have a man who buys the thing to decorate his house. There are people who think that the artist's role is just that — a very decadent and superficial vision of the artist's role; when, for example, Giotto was painting his frescoes in the churches, it was not only meant for the decoration of the church, it was a vision of the world. . . . The artist's perception is vital because it can change the world. For example, the perception of the third dimension by Brunelleschi. Until the Renaissance, men had a bi-dimensional concept of the world. They did not know that the earth was round, the earth was moving. From the moment that the third dimension was formulated, the earth was no longer flat. Brunelleschi felt the need to formulate this intuition, this perception of the third dimension. Thus, perspective was discovered because we obtained the perception of the third dimension, a dimension which has translated itself in the plastic arts through perspective and which has translated itself in the practical world through the discovery of America. Thus, if Brunelleschi had not formulated the third dimension, Columbus would never have gone to America.

Paul Keeler



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