

AND ENTERTAINMENT

Summer Shows at London Galleries

by PAUL GRINKE

The sprightly summer show at the Robert Fraser Gallery includes an important new work by Bridget Riley, an exciting token of forthcoming excursions into the field of colour. This canvas manipulates undulating vertical waves of black and white gradually becoming pale grey and blue with an insistent rhythm and a feeling for the spatial possibilities of simple shapes. This is a welcome loosening of the rigid black-and-white framework which has hitherto constrained her painting within the strictest illusionistic boundaries.

Paolozzi shows a number of bright metal constructions, smooth shiny hillocks with a mechanical flavour, and Colin Self a jagged militaristic piece which might, after the example of Giacometti, be more aptly titled disagreeable object. A large stain painting by Harold Cohen called *Free Fall* was recently shown at the Whitechapel Retrospective. Some ephemeral pieces of Pop by Peter Blake range from a souped-up Christmas crib embodying a little fable about primitive worship of consumer goods, a tattooed Torso Belvedere and a cryptic message entitled *Come Stanley* which I found irresistible for its brevity.

Jann Haworth (Mrs. Blake) has struck out boldly with two extraordinary figures made of kapoc which would not be out of place in Madame Tussaud's or the lumber room of a department store. Patrick Caulfield's deadpan paintings exert a basilisk fascination but still fail to satisfy. Of the younger British painters Derek Boshier seems to go from strength to strength. He has now shaken off any lingering shades of Frank Stella with some segmented canvases which allow his varied spectrums of colour to dominate the picture space like rainbows on the loose.

At the Kasmin Gallery the work of John Howlin shows the controlled impact of North American painting, especially Larry Poon, on the younger generation of British abstract painters. Howlin marshals small circles of colour in snowflake clusters, drilling them like tiny soldiers in various corners of the canvas. Occasionally a lone circle defects to another camp, but the ranks close up and conceal his absence. All these fragmented activities, though excusable in a drawing, do not always add up to a successful picture.

The inherent weakness of much modern painting is its formal stayer quality, the inescapable repetitive element of design which creeps into any organisation of basic geometric shapes. Howlin is a pattern maker, an architect of simple inorganic shapes, a manipulator of a kaleidoscope of colour and form within an academic framework. But these paintings are more than just efficient meticulously constructed patterns—they have the germ of some good if not entirely fulfilled ideas in them. There is nothing wrong with the idea of several pictures within one canvas, but the connecting links, the stray bubbles and inner framing edges are the weak point of his organisation. With all this is an impressive first one-man show for a young painter



Bridget Riley's new work

who has clearly shown that he can handle the colours and forms of the Sixties with consummate skill.

Following hard on the heels of the Marlborough Gallery's recent rejeu of the 1930s a further tribute to Circle, that elusive publication which sought to bring together the sculpture, architecture and painting of a decade, is presented by the Signals, London, Gallery. Signals pursues a consistently single-minded course as patrons of kinetic art and the largely untapped wealth of South American art, though all too often weaving a web of bombastic mystery around their enterprises.

Their current show is as novel as their first show some two years ago at the Ashmolean Museum, presenting a number of artists, linked by the nexus of Paris, who deserve to be seen more of in this country. J. R. Soto, true pioneer of Optical art and surprisingly omitted from the recent Responsive Eye show at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, dominates one whole side of the gallery with his amazing Wall. This is a shimmering, tantalising construction of lightly suspended glass rods, curtaining vertical slats of black and white. This one piece alone, lent by the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, from its Soto room, makes a visit a must.

Of the others who make up this unusual consortium, Carlos Cruz-Diez and Alejandro Otero, both from Venezuela, are the major

contributors, with Takis and Camargo, who have both shown before, maintaining their unassailable position as masters of new forms of construction.

Cruz-Diez has been working for some years on what he calls psychromies, an adaptation of the principle behind Victorian glass paintings, with two separate images appearing when viewed from different angles. The result is superficially similar to Soto but with a more lyrical range of colour. Otero deploys bold colours against black panels in Mondrianesque symphonies; these "Colour Rhythms" are remarkably successful as attempts to define pure colour by linear references.

Among the other numerous artists on show Antonio Asis has some fascinating reliefs of vibrating springs which throw shadows on a matt surface, and Chillida, probably the finest Spanish sculptor, continues to enclose the force of the four winds in simple straining metal ribbons.

Anxious to stress the continuity of abstract art since the great innovations of the Thirties, the organisers have included a number of relatively minor works by Gabo, Schwitters, Lissitzky and others, some being little more than sketches or maquettes. To look back to the Thirties and forward to the Seventies at the same time is a Janus-like manoeuvre which would tax the resources of any gallery.

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