

# ArtReview



UK £6.50



vol. 71 no. 2



Shaping art history since 1949

# 1970–79

After the art market boom of the 1960s *Arts Review* entered the 1970s musing anxiously about the ever-growing production of art – ‘where is all this work to be exhibited and sold?’, it wondered in its opening editorial of 1970. That would end up being the least of art’s problems in a decade that turned out to be challenging for the British artworld, critically, commercially and institutionally.

While the stars of British postwar Modernism such as Barbara Hepworth and Henry Moore were now safely part of the canon, the radical currents coursing through British society found their shape in the conceptualist and other ‘avant-garde’ forms being staged by new commercial galleries like the Lisson, Nigel Greenwood and Angela Flowers. Official recognition of conceptualist and alternative trends came with the Hayward Gallery’s *The New Art* in 1972. *Arts Review*’s contributors were not always convinced of this new way of making art, which celebrated ‘the intellect’ over ‘the visual’.

But the argument over the ‘visual’ in ‘visual art’ was also against the abstract art that had found favour during the 1960s. During a decade in which the relationship between the official artworld and the public became an issue of contention, with contemporary art increasingly seen as ‘elitist’ and incomprehensible, the revival of ‘figurative’ art – in particular painting – was held up as a radical alternative, epitomised by *Arts Review*’s enthusiasm for the London-based American painter R. B. Kitaj.

Image-making, however, was something everyone could take up. In the wake of Pop art and the counterculture of the 60s, images of fantasy and desire coursed through both fine art and popular culture (J. R. R. Tolkien’s watercolours of Middle Earth, Ralph Steadman’s interpretation of *Alice Through the Looking Glass* and prog-rock album art legend Roger Dean all make appearances in the magazine). And while this could turn up as the sexist and sometimes misogynistic imagery of male Pop painters (Allen Jones’s fetish-sourced paintings being the most contentious), it was also the weapon of the artists of the early feminist movement, which *Arts Review* tracked sympathetically through the decade.

Women were anyway making their presence felt across the artworld. A notable feature of *Arts Review* in the 70s is the growing number of female contributors, and coverage of women taking up roles in institutions; profiles of a young RoseLee Goldberg, Sue Grayson, the Serpentine Gallery’s first exhibitions organiser (they weren’t called ‘curators’ in those days), and young gallerist Lucy Milton all feature.

But by the time *Arts Review* interviewed Milton, she was shutting her doors – a casualty of the oil crisis. By the mid-70s, *Arts Review* was regularly reporting on gallery closures, as economic recession hit hard. As the decade wore on, and politics in Britain became more polarised, side-taking became more overt; artists and critics engaged in heated debates over the future direction of art, and the ‘social function’ of art became a hot issue. If the early 70s were marked by Britain’s joining the European Economic Community (*Arts Review*’s opening issue of 1973 ran a special section on ‘Fanfare for Europe’, a season of big exhibitions to celebrate the UK’s membership), by the close of the decade, the influence of Europe was being treated with suspicion, as a stream of big shows from West Germany showcased the radical credentials of German artists, while hinting at the changing balance of cultural power in Europe. At the same time, *Arts Review*’s reports from the new European art fairs registered the stirrings of the new, international market for contemporary art that would shape the decades to come.

right Jack Smith, *Sound Infiltration*, 1977, 61 × 61 cm, oil on board. © the estate of the artist. Courtesy Flowers Gallery, London

chooses and thus become the person enacting the cathartic drama.

Elsewhere it is possible at times to find a feminine (not feminist) sensibility reflected in Leapman's gentle repetitions, Donagh's delicate restructuring of acts of violence, and Julia Farrer's painstaking creation of geometric webs starred with pinpoint of light. In all is to be found the complete realisation of an idea. Sue Beere activates one wall with wooden frames that play with the relationship between visual illusion and reality. Tess Jaray floats geometric fragments in the infinite space of her canvases, at once still and suggestive of movement. The quietly sensuous concerns of Leapman and Jaray contrast with Leopoldo Maler's dramatic *Last Supper* – 13 chairs and a table surrounded by barbed wire, attended by plastic carcasses of lamb and accompanied by liturgical music.

Shortage of space prevents adequate treatment of Wendy Taylor's eye-teasing brick sculptures, Deanna Petheridge's ink drawings (Vorticism gone mad), teeming with architectural and military allusions, of Adrian Morris' investigation of the anxiety aroused by the sense of enclosure, nor of Frink, Lijn and Blow. Gillian Wise's impressive constructivist section is immaculately housed in an installation designed by Ingrid Morris. In it Terry Pope investigates the way we see reality and then confounds it by using mirrors to reverse perspective. From Pope's sophisticated use of materials one can pass to Chaimowicz's oblique meditation on the relationship between his private world and its public presentation in a gallery.

The success of this show must mark a great step forward in the move to end the cultural repression of women. The indications of self-discovery, untapped energies recently discovered, of cooperation, of content that has direct political and social relevance suggest that women artists today have the potential to become the most explosive force in future British art.

3 February, 1978

Jack Smith at the Serpentine Gallery, London,  
reviewed by Pat Gilmour

## Bones, minarets, testicles

Mallarmé talked of the colour of sound, Rimbaud linked colours with vowels, Scriabin made colour notations on his musical scores. To enter properly into the spirit of this retrospective of 12 years work by Jack Smith (that one musician felt he could conduct) one should perhaps sing the review as a recitative, although one would need Cleo Laine to do it real justice. For it, too, links music and painting, sound and colour.

As Kandinsky remarked, shades of colour, like those of sound, awaken in the soul emotions too fine to be expressed in words; in this impossibility and the consequent need for some other mode of expression, he thought the opportunity for the art of the future lay.



Called by Smith 'diagrams of experience or sensation', the paintings are extremely complex. Some look so much like writing – even if in the Cyrillic alphabet – that one tries to read them rather than experience them as visual pattern and stimulation. *Document*, I swear, says NO NO NO in letters of fire in the top left-hand corner. Beneath two floppy kisses, against a gentle field of eau de nil, a rainshower of small bombs, dog bones, Russian minarets and testicles clackety clack past a row of patchwork shells, through a grid of orange mutating to pale green, only to evaporate in the face of a footnote of red and black squeak and bubble. Or variegated horns, burping dubiously, snake along the axis of another canvas which is elsewhere precisely punctuated by 10 cool white bars. Or narrow horizontal lines change gently from one pastel to another while shaded grey peanuts levitate, rattling. One delightful drawing has stopped the apparently crazy flight of 99 staccato pins.

Well, you can see what Kandinsky means about mere words. One is alternately excited by vermilion, paralysed by intense blue, pierced by a shrill yellow, twanged by a resonating orange, silenced by a yawning white, absorbed by an elephantine grey. Above all, one rejoices in an exhibition which must make converts for abstraction, and help give the lie to current seditious nonsense suggesting paintings without people can be hardly human.