Arts Review

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Graham Davis' 'Waterlilies' at the Phoenix Gallery, Lavenham

Free Inside: Guide to the 20th Century British Art Fair, Cumberland Hotel, London

One of these, in the back room of the gallery, but which may best be viewed for full impact from the main gallery across the roofed-in patio, reads from left to right bright-medium light-dark; while another alongside it has on the left what I assume to be an Adam & Eve-like pair amidst a crowd; in the centre a Paradise tree; on the right a dark and empty night-stricken walled garden masquerading as Eden. These are highly colourful, exciting and thoughtful images, which, as all good paintings should, give one fresh food for thought at each reappraisal.

William Mills is of the same generation as Baer; was for very long, after war service with the R.A.F. and postwar painting studies at Goldsmith's, an abstract painter. However, about eight years ago a visit to Southern Spain drove him to Expressionist nearer-figuration as a landscapist. Chief theme in this show is the Welsh border country, with its dramatic terrain and its ever-changing pattern of light and shade. Notable are the large *Mountain Landscape* and *Landscape with the Rising Sun;* and a gigantic *Mountain Scene* of the monumentality one sometimes discerns in Richard Wilson's late Welsh pieces, and the sublimity of Ward's *Gordale Scar.* A happy pendant to Mills' part of the show are some flowerpieces in gouache and watercolour. *(to Sept 30)*

MAX WYKES-JOYCE

Alan Cotton in Provence

David Messum Gallery, 34 St. George Street, W. 1

It is good news when a dealer as distinguished and energetic as David Messum not only opens a sumptuous new London gallery, but begins with two living artists. The first show there was by John Miller (see our front cover, July 15). Now follows another first London one-man show. Messum's reputation has been founded on the British Impressionist painters of the early part of the century; both Miller and Cotton paint today somewhat in that tradition, usually finding spectacular landscapes in bright weather.

Here, we find an obsession of the most powerful type. Cotton loves certain parts of Provence so much, that for years he didn't dare to paint there at all, simply travelling there and limiting his brush to his native Colaton Raleigh in Devon. Now, the Southern sun has at last melted him, and he presents us with the intoxicating result. There is a 36 page colour catalogue giving not only the territory, but many of the artist's vivid diary extracts, too.

One of his favourite places is Roussillon, whose naturally occurring pigments give to the town its name, and to many paints their raw material. Cotton went down a quarry where " most of the world's yellow ochre pigment " comes from. He rejoiced in " such beautiful earth colours from cadmium yellow to indian red, and in such quantities!". The buildings there are colour- washed with pigments from the quarry " so you have this lovely harmony of the relationship between the natural things and the town itself ... The evening light strikes such a chord of brilliance that it's hard in an English context to believe the colours they do make".

Another of the four or five places we visit so enjoyably, is Gordes, a hill village with a dramatic silhouette including a big church and a famous early Renaissance castle. The latter, incidentally, is the only museum I know, where you can stay still, quite a relief after the steep, hot climb, and the exhibits march past your admiring gaze: they are pictures by Vasarely, and they move under the huge beams on a prolonged system of so-to-speak bicycle chains, just right to please a keen cyclist like me. Cotton's views of Gordes make much play with the strong geometry of the buildings both in silhouette and in plan; often, he paints below the skyline, so that there is no sky visible, just the burning colours of the land; but at Gordes, he makes a feature of the warmth of the sky, to contrast with the jagged shapes below.

He goes to Bonnieux: " I am using a tremendous lot of colours and canvases but hope it isn't a waste of money " wrote Van Gogh in the same place 100 years ago in 1888. Cotton, too, worked a lot here, but neither artist will ever be accused of waste in such a compelling context. He covers the Vaucluse, reminiscent of Petrarch's paradise home six centuries ago, and he scents the Luberon hills, whence comes, in my view, the most fragrant wine of the region. Indeed, it is difficult to suggest the essence of the show, without indulging in the rich vocabulary of the vintner. Savour the bouquet, roll the flavour...

Technically, nearly all the five dozen paintings are made not with brush, but with palette knife. This gives them a very strong construction, layer upon layer, segment beside sharply defined segment, so the geometry and perspective become of paramount importance, rather than any delicate shading. I see echoes here of Seurat in the careful chromatic balance, and at times the reverberations from Van Gogh are exciting without, of course, being in the least imitative.

Colour is the overall impact, and a splendid one too: so much so, that one is at times tempted to call Cotton an abstract painter, for all his preoccupation with the most seductive aspects of the world around him. He has been connected with television (TVS, to be precise), and I sense his skill as a communicator. He might one day, as sometimes happens on TV, become too facile, and allow his dissecting knife to run away with the intellect which has to guide and restrain it, just as on TV skilled performers can forget the underlying content of their programme, concentrating instead on the presentation of their own personalities. But this is a distinguished, memorable show. What I will treasure specially, is the aroma of lavender from the field in picture 35 *(See colour illustration).* It could easily be my favourite lavender field, just before you reach the great Romanesque abbey of Senanques. Wherever it is, I am grateful to this radiant exhibition for bringing it to London. *(to Oct 8. See colour illustrations opposite)*

GRAHAM HUGHES

Alan Cotton's *Lavender Fields in Provence* (above) and *Evening Light at Harvest Time in Provence* (below) at David Messum, 34 St. George St., W1. See review. Alan Cotton writes: "The emotional response to the landscape of Provence is simply one of colour. There is no doubt about the sensuality of colour affecting the feeling you have for this region. I think I found most exciting to do was to use a whole new colour vocabulary." ▶

Olivia Temple

Addision-Ross Gallery, 40 Eaton Terrace, SW1

Of Olivia Temple's last London show two years ago I wrote that this direct descendant of the seventeenth-century Dutch master Jan van der Hayden (1637-1712), virtually self-taught, had the "typically English virtues of restraint and low key statement". This is equally true of her recent paintings — oils, pastels and watercolours — with almost a third of the pastels given over to some sparkling studies of Miriam Rothschild's (what a pleasure was her study of natural parasitism *Fleas, Flukes and Cuckoos* in Collins New Naturalist series!) wild flower greenhouses.

The preservation of wild flowers is a major theme of the show, many of the paintings — *Bluebell Wood in Cornwall,* a brilliant evocation of a very difficult subject, *Dandelion Field Moorlynch, Poppies in Wheat,* for example — being of wild flowers in landscape. In this show, too, Olivia Temple is equally skilled in portraying dramatic landscape such as *The Lake at Glynn;* making telling rural vignettes as in *Abandoned Wagon Wheels;* and painting lovely details of the passage of humanity: *Old Blue Door; Old Courtyard in Pezenas; Old French Balcony* — though nary a person is to be seen in her paintings.

The full exhibition finished this week; but some of her eminently English, calm, enjoyable and thoroughly satisfying paintings are always to be seen at Addison-Ross.

MAX WYKES-JOYCE

George Bergen and Bloomsbury

Sally Hunter Fine Art

An interesting exhibition — but for the wrong reasons. Far from revealing Bergen to be an important or even likeable painter, this juxtaposition of his paintings with those of Vanessa Bell (whom he would introduce to friends as the 'greatest living woman painter' — which made her cringe), Duncan Grant (with whom he had an affair) and other contemporary artists, simply shows up his shallowness. He was a socialite and painted the portraits of men of the world — such as Lord Duveen, to whom his style is ironically well suited since it showed Duveen as silky, calculating and well-fed. The portrait of Charles Chaplin is equally creepy, since he failed to catch the comic's eye and the resulting look is evasive rather than reticent. Whereas Grant's paintings of Bergen, at work in the garden at Charleston or lying reading a magazine on a divan piled with cushions, are lively, with springy brushwork and warm colours, Bergen's paintings of still lives, famous people and landscapes look simply dated and cold. The landscapes