

## ARTS REVIEW : MARCH 1997

anyone has seen before (since Penrose has generally been too busy promoting others to show himself) it is good to find again the strangely beautiful and poetic portrait of his first wife Valentine (*Winged Domino*, 1937), the Tate's *Grand Tour*, and three assured oils which Hull and Southampton were between them sufficiently perceptive to acquire. Whatever he got from Max Ernst and Man Ray, Miró, Picasso and the rest of his garland of friends, Penrose didn't waste the basics learned under André Lhote. Francis Watson

## Equestrian Artists

**The Society of Equestrian Artists Exhibition Quantas Gallery** The English are rightly regarded as a nation of animal lovers; dog and cat foods are big business and riding schools abound. Show jumping has a huge following judging by the popularity of the sport on television. Interest in horses is not an English monopoly but the country's school of sporting painting is unparalleled anywhere else in the world. The 17th-century Francis Barlow was the first English painter to specialise in sporting scenes, but it was not until the following century that hundreds of artists were to specialise in the genre. To call George Stubbs a sporting painter only gives a narrow view of his genius; ranking with Hogarth and Gainsborough he was among the greatest English artists of the century; he also painted wild animals as well as being a considerable anatomist. The tradition of sporting art, especially horse painting has continued in the country until the present day and it will, therefore, surprise most people that the Society of Equestrian artists was only founded this year. A half dozen or so painters of horses organised this exhibition and in the course of doing so decided to found the society. Seventy-three paintings and drawings and 13 sculptures depict horses engaged in a wide range of activities: grazing, racing, being used for hunting, playing polo, ploughing, haymaking as well as standing still having their portraits painted with or without a rider. There is also one picture of donkeys.

Unfortunately many of the works in the show are of poor quality occupying a category which ranges from the barely competent to the near awful. Leading the field with the rest nowhere (except when he paints a mounted rodent dressed as a highwayman) is Terence Cuneo, and his picture of the Duke of Beaufort rightly gets star billing in the window of Quantas. Commissioned by 200 well wishers to celebrate the Duke's 40 years as the Master of the Horse, he, the Duke, is shown mounted resplendent in scarlet and radiating a quiet good humour, with the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh looking on in the background.

There have been some excellent equine artists in England this century, notably



*The Smiths, Mr. Snocker Corkhill and his Son, by Christopher Killip at the Photographers Gallery, Cardiff.*

R. P. Bevan, and Alfred Munnings at his best is a much more considerable painter than many would allow. In the 1920s William Simmonds did some splendid wood carvings of carthorses, for example, 'The Farm Team' at present on loan from the Tate to Gloucester Art Gallery. It is difficult to believe that horse painting and sculpture in England is in quite such dire straits as this exhibition suggests. The situation needs to be tested by a competition for paintings and sculpture sponsored perhaps by some horse racing organisation or periodical. Successful artists in the field should find patrons. There are many who would be more willing to commission a horse portrait than one of a person. (This exhibition is now over.) David Brown

## Photography

Guide books instruct us as to the finest vantage points from which to view a scene. This authorised form of the vista will approximate closely to the treatment of landscape as depicted by academic painters and photographers. (In fact, early photographers incapable of discerning the picturesque for themselves had access to manuals containing precise instructions on where to position the camera.) Irrespective of subject matter the scene as witnessed from the carefully selected observation point will be accessible for pictorial appreciation and supply a detached visual gratification. Through guide books and other media the modern traveller is now well-programmed with the rules governing this stationary, picturesque attitude, and appreciably skilled in their application and evaluation. The views became paintings and photographs made real and reflect the continuing presence in our consciousness of the conservative approach to the land evolved as long ago as the 17th century. Some painters have fought successfully against this tradition but the inherent static constraint of

the photograph has made more problematical the photographer's rupture with longstanding convention. Jenny Okun, a young artist whose large colour and monochrome pictures are exhibited at the ICA, addresses the restriction of the fixed viewpoint; the abstraction of the picturesque. In order to achieve circumspection and the inference of the eye's roving consumption as it accumulates the unfolding aspects constitutive of experience, the limitations of the fixed exposure have had to be overcome. To achieve this Okun pulls the film through the focal plane to release it from the constrictions of format. The result is a strip effect superimposing image upon image: each individual section incorporating elements of the whole. This may sound mechanical, if not superfluous in the age of the movie camera, but it allows the simultaneous gathering of several moments within the confines of a still picture. After careful deciphering the prints reveal the vision of a constantly changing world at variance with the sophisticated timelessness engendered by the picturesque.

Chris Killip, a Manxman, is also a searching, extraordinary photographer. His truthful pictures exposing the native people – not the economically threatening immigrant tax evader: – of the Isle of Man can be seen at *The Photographer's Gallery*, Cardiff. Eschewing the picturesque these pictures explore the same area as Strand's Hebridean shots and evince the mutually sustaining rapport existing between man and his environment. The exhibition and accompanying book (Arts Council £4.95), introduced by John Berger have set unprecedented standards in the accountability of the photographer and serial presentation.

D. G. Lee

## Rosc '80

*National Gallery of Ireland and University College, Dublin* If a criticism could be made of this year's impressive collection for Dublin's quadrennial celebration of contemporary art, it would be that it tries too hard. *Rosc* is the Irish for 'poetry of vision', and the organisers declare they wish to redress a bias in Irish culture towards literature at the expense of the plastic arts. Less ambitiously, they also want to bring the youth of Ireland to an appreciation of modern art.

The National Gallery of Ireland is showing 40 Chinese paintings from the 14th century to the 20th, sent by the Metropolitan in New York; University College the works of 51 contemporary artists. Seven of the latter are Irish.

Two intentions go with the two halves: to display the inheritance of the new from the old and to suggest art provokes the same responses as poetry. Both ideals are intellectually questionable, and with no definitions provided it is not clear what they actually mean.

The individuality of the modern artists represented itself questions those pro-