

## Relaxing exhibition — now special plans for Fiftieth?

ONCE again, the annual exhibition of Alton Art Society — its 49th — had marked similarities to its predecessor exhibitions. Heaven forbid that members should not be free to paint exactly what — and how — they like (which, as most members are painting for relaxation and enjoyment, is likely to include a large proportion of acknowledged picturesque scenes).

But I do wonder how much individual members, particularly those of less experience, feel under some kind of pressure to paint pictures that will fit the society's general ambience, rather than developing their own individual ideas.

As before, oils and acrylics in last week's showing were hung separately from watercolours, pastels, gouaches, drawings, engravings and screen prints; I will start with the former. A. E. Gabie had a good composition in his "Cornfield", the strong perspective lines of the field and hedges being balanced by a nicely variegated sky. Wendy Stavert's "In the Forest" made excellent use of the abstracted shapes created by twisting tree trunks and branches. "Avington Park" was clearly depicted by Patrick Edwards, the building reflected in a small lake, a well-observed sky above.

I particularly liked the atmospheric effects in Sheila Halliwell's small square painting of a "Fell Farm", the farm grey stones in a grey misty landscape. And A. E. Gabie (again) had another strong composition in "Liss", making effective use of the outlined shapes of a pattern of fields.

### CURLING CATS

Joan Greaves had an unusual picture in her "Curve of Cats", six (I think) cats of differing colours curled up together on some vari-coloured cushions — this gave rise to interesting, sinuous patterns of shapes. Mrs. M. R. Glasspool showed a family scene that, these days, is more usually recorded photographically. "Jackie's 21st birthday", a pleasingly informal group.

Tana Riviere had highly competent paintings of bunches of flowers, painted richly and strongly, in "Summer Flowers", "Autumn Flowers" and "Pink Harmony", whilst Mary Towsey struck something of an original note in her "Up, Up and Away", a large, narrow, vertical picture contrasting the drooping shape of a bough heavy with apples with the vapour trail of a distant plane. I enjoyed several paintings by Mary Towsey, "Beachcombers" being most effective in its atmospheric simplicity; "The Secret" and "Listening", pairs of geese and duck respectively, were also fun.

Joan Blacker had captured nocturnal atmosphere well in "City Lights", whilst Mrs. L. Lintott's "Buttermere" was clearly and competently drawn. I sensed an upwards jump in quality when I came to G. W. James' "Summer Haze", highly impressionistic, the soft yellow sun echoed by the vague shape of a nearby tarn, the outline of hill shapes separating the two. Dorothy Dean's "Roses" in a jug showed a good range of subtle hue variations; in the same way Zweena Ta' Bois' "Old Farnham after Rain" nicely contrasted the greens of a dull day with the red of old brick.

And so to the watercolours, drawings, etc. I admired Betty Haggard's use of pastel on rough-textured paper, as in "Onny Bridge, near Ludlow". Freda Prideaux had three good oval framed groups of flowers; however all such groups have to stand up against the outstandingly well arranged, finely detailed watercolours by Viola Peacock who, as ever, had pictures in this show which have to be the standard by which others are judged.

### BALANCED WORK

Patricia Lesley Smith, whose work I cannot recall having seen before, had an excellent study of "Cut Pound, Alton", a most intelligent balancing of shapes, subtly contrasting colours (brick-red and orange), accents provided by paned windows, and so on; whoever you are, Patricia Smith, please stay with the approach this picture shows. The same artist's pencil drawing of the "Gilbert White Museum, Selborne" also makes effective use of strong, simple shapes.

I then noted Margaret-Jean White's "Felindre" as good, but confess that I cannot read my notes about the picture content! Toni Goffe had three straightforward, well-selected pen and wash pictures of buildings in Winchester, and Harwood. Eve, a characteristically broadly painted watercolour of the "River at Heady Park", the mood (as ever with this artist) beautifully portrayed.

L.H.P. Wilding's two nude studies against a dark background were well-drawn in diagonally shaded pastel; "Nude Study" was more effective in its simple design than "Jane", where the complexities of the shapes were less satisfactorily resolved into the picture organisation. Joan Wingate had a simple study of a cat atop a post absorbed in watching (doubtless) some small rodent whose number was up, "Concentration". Her "Garden Visitors", four blue-tits pecking at a suspended coconut was also effective.

Finally, in this group, I noted Alec R. Thomson's highly competent pen and ink drawing, "Black and White, Trotton", F. R. Raymond Capey's sketch of an orchard, "Old Apple Trees", and, one

of the best pictures in the whole exhibition, a fine screen print by Guy Vaesen of a "House and Courtyard, New Orleans", lovely use of colour — predominantly purple — and shape in the lamp hanging above, a twisting staircase in the foreground, and the light central area of a distant courtyard.

There was relatively little pottery and sculpture. Les Hutchings' "Carving in Juniper" was characteristic, and, for me, highly enjoyable, not to say sensuous in its use of shape and surface. I preferred the simpler composition of K. J. Beadle's enamel "Moon Pods", to the more colourful "Standing Cross". Patricia Dodson used thin, rippling waves of stoneware well in "Flower Form", "Large Flower" and "Set of 3 Pods", and Joan Harries, C. Molyneux, Margaret Colson and Eileen Shepherd all showed good ceramic pots, bowls and vases.

The Art Society's exhibition included, as usual, a children's art competition on the stage, which I will not describe, but which — all else apart — often showed a splendidly wide-ranging group of ideas and treatments that tended, as it always does, to make the adult show look rather prosaic by comparison. The old rule for actors applies to artists too!

I look forward to the society's next Annual Exhibition, its 50th, and hope it can use the excuse of a half-century to put on something rather special — start planning now!  
— P.J.S.