

MAY 23RD - JUNE 27TH 1987

## Evenness of quality from the Alton Art Society

A CHANGE from the more usual Hampshire museum circuit exhibitions (no disparagement; they are often excellent) sees an exhibition by members of Alton Art Society at the Allen Gallery, Alton, this month.

I confess I find art society exhibitions difficult to review. The annual shows are generally large, several hundred exhibits; impossible to mention more than a fraction; how to be fair, how to give a realistic impression, how to avoid always mentioning the few leading members? And visually, like all large exhibitions, far too much to take in properly — to spend, say, 30 seconds on each work in a 300 exhibit show would take two and half hours, without counting time spent in walking, checking against the catalogue! And how long is 30 seconds when the image took hours, days, weeks to produce?

So the smaller scale of this Allen Gallery show is something I welcome. Even so, there are 82 pictures, plus a further 14 pieces of sculpture, so plenty to see. And I know that I'll come round with the same names again, but that is how it is; these are the works that, for whatever reason, stand out for me.

Names such as Arthur Wren, who manages to move away from the normal run of art society pictures with images that explore much less well-trodden ground — images such as a b c (no.5) and Grandad at the Races (no.32). I liked, too, George Carter's venture into something close to photo-realism in Goosequill and Gemstones (no.12), though he needs to take the technique even further for even finer detail. Pamela E. Pell's Boxes (no.35) is also distinctive in its use of even areas of gentle colour, totally opposed in feeling to Hilda Frank's very dark pastel of an unusual and exotic subject, Jacaranda Grove, Melfort, Zimbabwe (no.59).

Paul Banning's study of Winter Beeches, Combie Wood (no.43) is vigorous and confident, and Fiona Mearns also shows ability in her pen and wash Cottage Garden (no.45). Mediterranean atmosphere is well depicted in Philip Dunthorne's The Yellow Door, Chora, Patmos (no.64), an everyday street scene with a single figure. Dorothy Dean's Little Fiddler (no.81), a small boy playing a violin, is sensitively drawn, some may find it verging on the sentimental, if that matters. And what to my mind is one of the best of the pictures is also one of the smallest, Sheila Halliwell's Jane's Room, (no.78) making very subtle and effective use of whites and near whites.

### THREE FIGURES

Half of the sculptures are by one exhibitor — LHP Wilding. All competently done: I think African

Boy (no.86) to be the most effective. Arthur Wren comes round again, very amusing with his three figures enjoying The After Dinner Speech (no.93). Both of Betty Willcocks' pieces are good, and Pamela E. Pell completes an interesting display.

Overall I think this exhibition gives a good idea of the range and type of work being produced by members of Alton Art Society. The quality, indeed, is remarkably even, so that if relatively little leaps out, this is certainly a show

that will give pleasure to many visitors.

Meanwhile, out in the garden is a much more anarchic exhibition of painted wood sculptures by David Gross. Perhaps they juxtapose uneasily with the art society work; in any case they merit, and will get, a review to themselves — watch this space next week. But don't visit the Allen Gallery without seeing them. The Alton Art Society show continues until June 27th, David Gross's work is there for longer.

Peter Sanger

## ART SOCIETY EXHIBITION AT GALLERY

Work by Alton artists is on show at the Allen Gallery this month.

Alton and District Art Society's members have produced a vast array of paintings and sculptures.

There are 96 well-chosen pieces in the exhibition, which lasts until June 27th, and there is something to suit every taste.

Landscapes once again predominate with oils and watercolours of some well-known scenes lending a comfortable familiarity to the show.

Some artists have travelled further afield to find their source material and the contrasting features and light of the continent mingle easily with the more traditional English subjects.

By contrast, Arthur Wren, whose sense of fun is readily apparent in a sculpture entitled "After Dinner Speech," has turned his back on such tried and trusted formats and, because of that, his work stands out.

So, too, do the collages of Patricia Lesley Smith.

Flowers and animals retain their popularity with an interesting variety of treatments of similar subjects.

For those who have missed the Society's last two shows, this exhibition is certainly well worth a visit to catch up with the latest work of their favourite artists.