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Art exports by MARIO AMAYA

Whatever one thinks about Britain's economic contribution to a Common Market, there is no doubt that our contemporary art is already being accepted abroad as a rich and lively export.

British Week in Brussels has presented a staggeringly strong-looking selection of British art which amazed even the London critics who flew over for the event, and which had the artists themselves (so often confined to bad hanging space at the Tate and usually limited to small galleries here) almost finding it hard to believe that the works were actually theirs. The gigantic exhibition halls of the Palais des Beaux-Arts, which will contain the show until October 22, for once seemed the perfect setting for young contemporary painting.

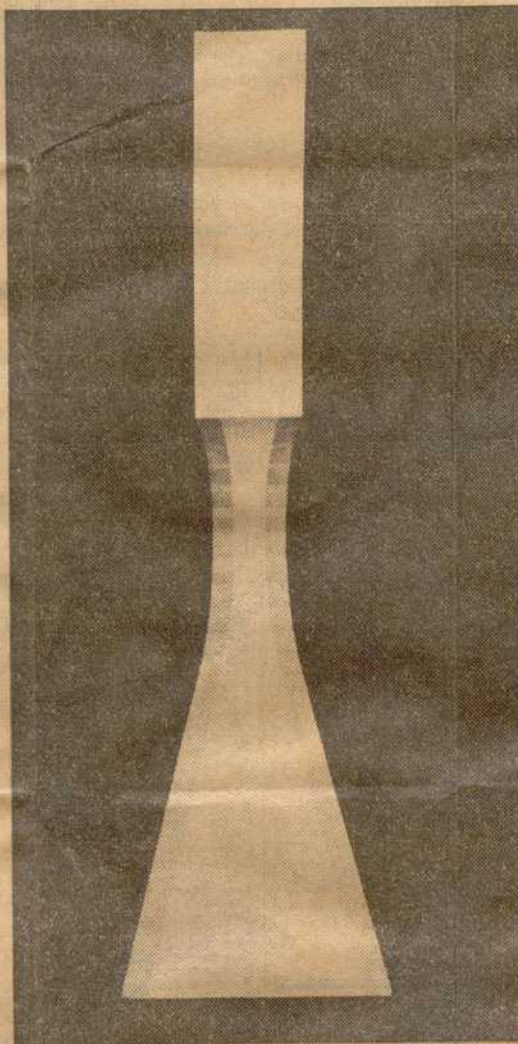
The artists represented were supposedly selected from either past or forthcoming Biennale stock, but there was little theme or reason in the grouping beyond that, other than gathering together large-scale works by British painters who are at this moment being generally talked about on the Continent. The response to the exhibition was so favourable on the part of the Belgians as to give General de Gaulle yet another sleepless night.

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The show included Patrick Caulfield, who is *hors concours* at the present Biennale in Paris; Bridget Riley, who will represent us at Venice next year; Richard Smith, who has just won the coveted Grand Prix at São Paulo; Bernard and Harold Cohen and Robyn Denny of the last Venice Biennale; and John Hoyland, who won the Young Artists award at the Tokyo Biennale. Peter Phillips, who has never exhibited in London in a one-man show, was thrown in for good measure. Allen Jones, who won the Prix des Jeunes Artistes at Paris in 1963, and Joe Tilson, who was at the Venice Biennale last year and who also won the San Marino Biennale prize in 1963, were also present. David Hockney was included as well, for who would dare have an exhibition of younger British painting without him?

Of all the artists John Hoyland looked the most sophisticated with his great walls of acrylic stained into stretched cotton-duck. These pared-down abstractions of simple geometrical shapes, vibrating in a field of brilliant colour, some of it blurred at the edges, some of it running slowly away with itself, speak casually of minimal forms, but at the same time hold within them a softness, a sensibility, a feeling for material that makes them something more than just reductive geometric exercises. The pictures seem to say with a firm and assured voice that art is not only about movements.

A wall of five Patrick Caulfields misleadingly look as though they might have been designed as a



An example of Richard Smith's work: "Wallflower 1964"

series; in tones of grey, blue, white and black, they display a less strident, flamboyant Caulfield, a Caulfield that appears more pre-occupied with the close colour values and abstract harmonies that can be gleaned from such unlikely subjects as views of chimneys, a parish church and the Ghibelline crenellations of a battlement. The

easy way out is to label Caulfield "Pop"; in fact, he has returned to subject matter in such a way as to make the abstract versus figurative battle seem total nonsense.

David Hockney's *Boy About to Take a Shower* of 1964 perfectly illustrates how he has slyly, perhaps even with a giggle, moved out of Pop into something much more

personal. His *Atlantic Crossing*, with its golf-ball waves bobbing against a flat-topped sky, re-appraises shrewdly the lesson of Matisse, but with a twist of faux-naïve irony that lets us in on the game of style and illusion.

It was an achievement to bring together some of Richard Smith's best works for Brussels, at a moment when he was exhibiting at Sao Paulo. His large *Proscenium* of 1966 dominates, with its cut-out arcs set against a reflective metal surface that has been scratched over so that it acts like a curtain between us and our reflections. The cooler hard-edge shaped canvases of the year before, in strong colours which kiss each other ferociously wherever they meet, have an authority and grandeur hard to match internationally at this time. That Smith won the important Sao Paulo prize is one consolation for his having just missed winning the Venice Biennale last year. Like most British artists, he is more appreciated abroad than at home.

In a town cluttered with fluttering Union Jacks and traffic-dodging double-deckers, with Lord Snowdon doing the honours, *Gloriana* at the local opera house, and Princess Margaret's tiara-ed head in every shop window, it was only fitting that the artists themselves should put in an appearance for a week of events following the opening of the exhibition.

The Banque Lambert, which houses one of the great modern art collections as well as being one of the most beautiful buildings in Europe (designed by Gordon Bunschaft), was the scene of sit-down supper for British artists and their friends. On the same day the Friends of the Tate, who had flown over to see Belgian collections and museums, visited the Banque Lambert. When told they were invited to see the exhibition in the Palais des Beaux-Arts of younger British painters, one bespectacled gentleman, perhaps summing up the whole English attitude to its own art, remarked to a lady in a mauve hat: "Oh, we can miss it out; after all, you see that sort of art any afternoon at Robert Fraser's."