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VOGUE  
LONDON

FEV 85

**Boyd Webb is one of the British artists in this year's Paris Biennale, opening next month.**

**Patrick Kinmonth**

**looked into his work in London.**

**B**oyd Webb, in his photographed tableaux, proves how beautifully the camera can lie. We believe in this invented world, tacked together yet refined, and so, by an easy somersault of logic, we find that the authority of any sort of "reality" is rather called into question. A wry smile, close relation of the Cheshire Cat's, hangs over his arrangements of lino, carpet, hardboard and their denizens. He presents with the sparkiest visual intelligence work that is to the eye what an elusive epigram is to the ear. The process has been gradual, as his visual language has become more eloquent. He put words to his earlier work after leaving the Royal College of Art in 1975, where he arrived from New Zealand. In one piece, a benign, resolutely ordinary figure ("very hard to find people with that quality") nurses a lobster on a moquette sofa. The legend beneath goes, "As the living sap of a lobster is to the gourmet, so the condensation in the cap of a long distance swimmer is to the lobster." And so the quiet, urgent messages come from his work: be wary, do not believe what you see, pilgrim, do not believe what you hear. He is no Surrealist. His images are not from dreams. They are resolutely wide awake. But as he goes on, they have retreated from the world outside his studio in the East End. The first tableaux took place on railway tracks, outside betting shops, in fields, in rooms. Now the images rely on completely fabricated environments that quote blatantly from ordinary life, letting the bathroom lino star as the Niagara Falls. Sheets of hardboard become the side of a liner or, in *First Principles* (opposite), upstage NASA's men in space by becoming a lovely space station, a skein of fireside knitting and a toaster orbiting umbilically in contradictory weightlessness. He favours things that are misfits by simply being themselves: the lobster, with his ancient bewilderment and prehistoric allure; the early toaster, mawkishly unstreamlined, toast-burningly inept; the sniffy violin; the catfish flown in daily from the Far East, spiny malcontent, his dignity battered. Fishes out of water all of them. In collusion with men and women who, in peculiar attitudes, enact stills from stylised human dramas, he makes these objects perform soliloquies against the outrages of uniformity and banality that modern life would like us to accept meekly.

● Boyd Webb is represented by Anthony D'Offay, 9 & 23 Dering St W.1.

# Neo-logic of Boyd Webb