

## Exhibitions 2

**Arthur Boyd**

(Fischer Fine Art, till 3 August)

**William Kurelek and Jahan Maka**

(Canada House Gallery, till 21 September)

**Clifford Possum and Papunya Tula Artists**

(Rebecca Hossack Gallery, till 21 July)

# States of mind

Giles Auty

The paintings of Arthur Boyd are at once apocalyptic and humorous. As if this paradox were not enough the artist paints, at the age of three score and ten, with the vigour and imagination of a 25-year-old. The exhibition currently at Fischer Fine Art (30 King Street, SW1) is, in fact, a celebration of the artist's 70th birthday. The late Peter Fuller was an advocate of Boyd's work in particular and of the independence and idiosyncrasy of Australian painting in general. Boyd's mode of painting looks crude and uninhibited, qualities many continue to associate closely with other aspects of his homeland.

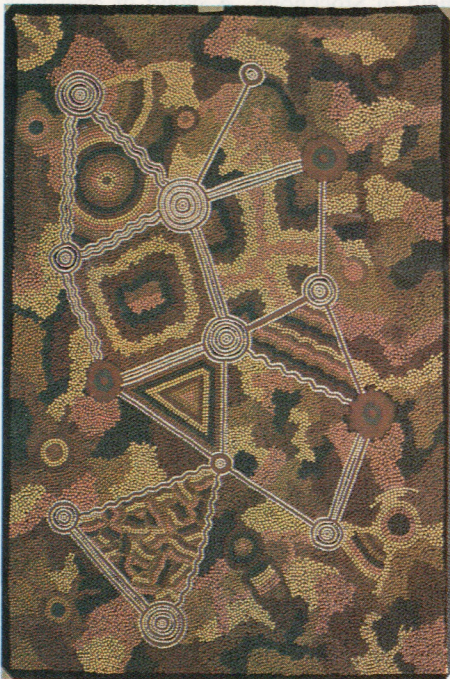
Boyd's precise artistic origins lie in the 'Angry Decade' in war-time and post-war Melbourne, when a group of young artists who had little in common except sensibility, poverty and lack of formal education attacked the complacent and insular society they lived in with the nearest weapons to hand: paintbrushes. However Boyd, who came from a more artistic background than his peers, had developed before this a degree of proficiency as a 'straight' landscape painter. Boyd's subsequent conversion to a lyrical and very personal form of expressionism had its background in the influence of surrealism and of Herbert Read's writings. In Boyd, the elements of violence and incongruity required by surrealism were modified somewhat by the artist's informal religiosity and his acute sense of place. Overtones of his interest in Brueghel and Bosch also seeped into the billabong culture. Boyd's has been consistently one of the odder visions of our time and his current series of works hardly breaks this pattern. For some 30 years, Boyd has divided his time between Australia and England, where he has a base in Suffolk. Many of his recent paintings relate to an Australian interpretation of *The Magic Flute*. Here is painting which glorifies vigour and imagination at some cost to organisation and clarity.

While those influenced by surrealism flirt with the irrational as a supposed means of unlocking a deeper wisdom, few have done so at any great danger to their everyday senses; in short, surrealism is suitable for a spell at the studio, while acumen is more appropriate for an afternoon at the accountants. But what of artists for whom irrationality becomes not so much an occasional, invited guest, as a permanent, unwelcome visitor?

The late William Kurelek (1927-77), whose works share an exhibition with those of the late Jahan Maka (1900-87), another of Canada's leading artists, at Canada House Gallery in Trafalgar Square, was born in Alberta of Ukrainian parentage. Kurelek is remembered now in Canada as a painter of evocative prairie landscapes and for his award-winning children's books, but the works in the present show chronicle his less well-known years in England from 1952 to 1959, when he suffered from acute depressive illness. What precise contribution, if any, a brief stay in Penge — subject of a lively drawing — or other South London Siberias of the spirit may have made to this state remains unknown. For most of his stay in England Kurelek was a patient in Maudsley and Netherne hospitals. While in the latter he was aided by Edward Adamson, who was among the pioneers of the use of art as therapy for the mentally ill. Adamson's huge collection of art from this source can be seen today in a converted barn at Ashton, Northants (telephone weekends: 0832 73783). I am no acknowledged expert in psychiatric analysis of art but Kurelek's

work from this era strikes me as knowing and melodramatic rather than driven. In adding that the artist made a full recovery, became a convert to Rome, married and so forth, I cannot help retaining a suspicion that many might prefer his macabre, Bosch-like inventions to those of his calmer, reclaimed mind.

Jahan Maka was a Lithuanian immigrant to Canada who, like his counterpart Alfred Wallis in Cornwall, took up art in old age after a lifetime of manual labour. His work is primitive but interesting yet lacks entirely the extraordinary sophistication to be found in the Aboriginal paintings of Clifford Possum Tjapaltjarri and Papunya Tula artists at Rebecca Hossack Gallery (35 Windmill Street, W1). Painting after painting shows extraordinary pictorial subtlety and beauty by the standards of Western museums — or even those of the outback. Possum is the veritable Poussin of Australian aboriginal art.



'Water Dreaming', by the Aboriginal artist Clifford Possum Tjapaltjarri