

Artist whose spirit lies in the Surreal

PAINTINGS by the 90-year-old Surrealist painter Eileen Agar, who was in on the birth of the Surrealist movement in Paris and contributed to the first International Surrealist exhibition in Britain in 1936, are on show in London.

She has not done a new range of paintings for the show — the exhibits range in date from 1931 to 1983 — but the fact that she is showing at all at 90 is a great tribute to a spirit that has refused to grow old.

It also underlines the fact that modern painting is not really expensive if you steer clear of the main line "names" that attract investors. The exhibits at Birch and Conran, of 40 Dean Street, central London, range in price from £450 to £8,000.

Her work lies in the mainstream of twentieth-century developments. She says: "We all walk on two legs, and for me one is abstract and the other surreal — it is point and counterpoint." The paintings are patchworks of bright colours — the abstract leg — with here and there a figurative element, a snake, a bird, a fish, providing surreal echoes of the physical world.

In 1931 she put her finger on what the twentieth century was trying to do when she wrote: "In Europe, the importance of the unconscious in all forms of literature and Art establishes the dominance of a feminine type of imagination over the classical and more masculine order."

The catch is that educated, urban modern people have lost touch with nature and have a lot of difficulty in giving the unconscious free rein. The spectacular Aboriginal desert paintings from western Australia on view at the Rebecca Hossack Gallery at 35 Windmill Street, central London,

CONTEMPORARY ART MARKET

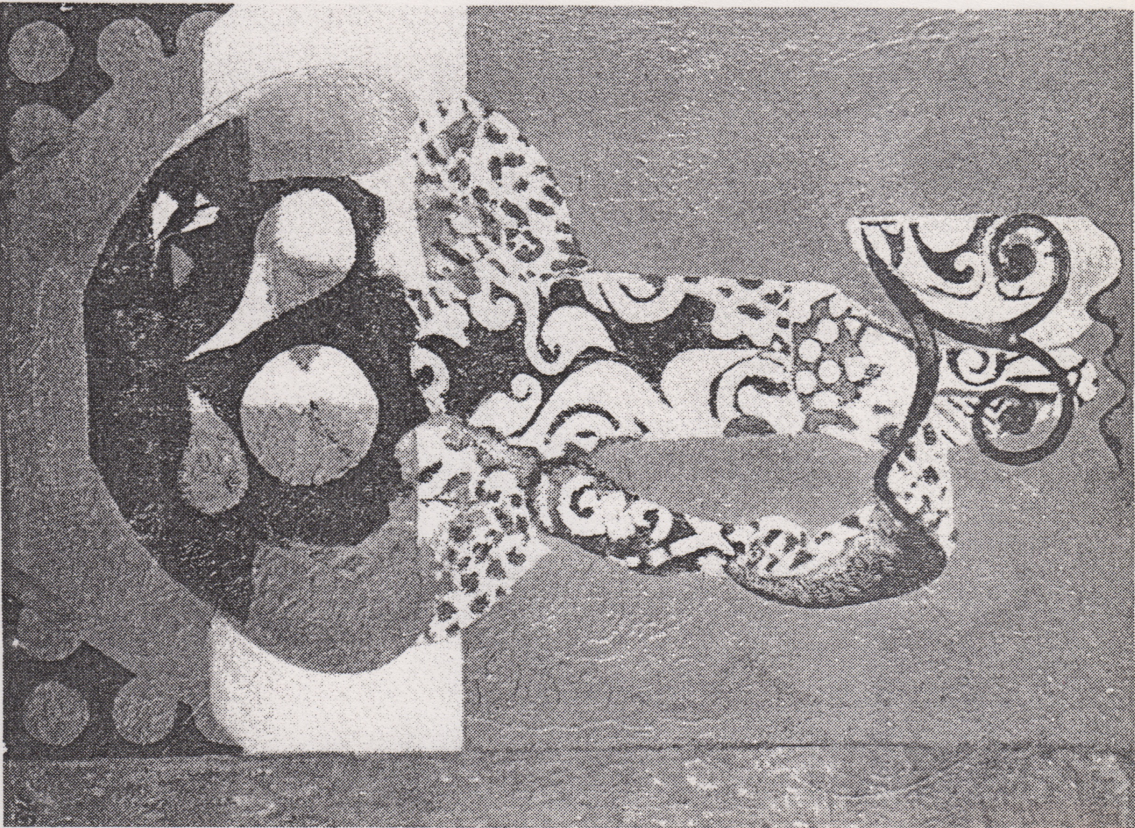
by Geraldine Norman

demonstrate that artists from a primitive culture can resoundingly beat the sophisticated Westerner at his own game.

The paintings, from a remote community at Balgo Hills, tell stories of the world's spirit ancestors, the Dreamings, who created the world and every creature and entity that exists — but they are told through a symbolic code of circles, lines and dots that derive from the ceremonial designs that have been traced in the sand as part of the ritual life of the desert for thousands of years. The prices are in the £650 to £5,000 range with one huge work at £15,000.

If the desert artists outshine Agar, who has been feeling her way back into the same unconscious for 90 years, they make Mario Rossi's exploration of it look positively artificial.

Rossi is one of the new wave of Glasgow artists who have made a return to figurative painting fashionable in the 1980s. He was born in 1958 to a world dominated by cinematic and media images. His exploratory patternings do not go back to nature but to other people's pervasive dreams. Many of the new paintings on view at the Anderson-O'Day Gallery at 255 Portobello Road, are inspired by the film *The Big Head*. Prices are between £6,000 and £8,000 according to size; there are small ones at about £1,800.



One of Eileen Agar's Surrealist works, *Woman Bearing Fruit*, on show in London