

**Arts**

**Review**

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ler works uncomfortably close to formica trays, and in his most recent work he is experimenting with mixing the colour washes sometimes applied, in an attempt to expand a technique which has often beautiful and reflective results. This is his first show for 23 years.

Elsewhere, gestural abstract canvasses (both large and very small) by Sher Rajah fill the airy gallery with colour. Areas of the canvas are left white-bare while elsewhere yellow and white paint thickly applied by brush reach a concentration of near form with the addition of strong notes in pink, purple and blue. (to July 30)

TIM MOOCK

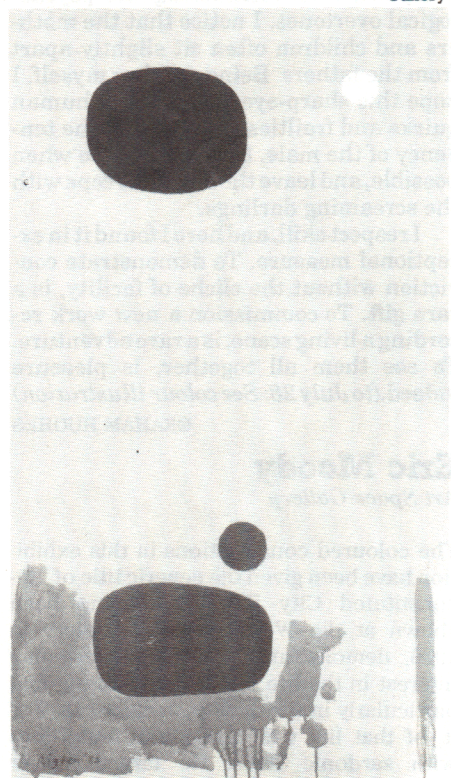
## Geoffrey Rigden

Francis Graham-Dixon Gallery

Geoffrey Rigden's pictures hover tantalisingly on that indistinguishable borderline between abstraction and figuration. Although his language of form is entirely abstract, those familiar with Rigden's work through visits to his Greenwich studio, or watching him work on exotic Turkish landscape drawings, will see the employment of an unmistakably personal, hieroglyphic sign language. They will also see how landscape forms are transformed by the artist's alchemical consciousness into a new and independent pictorial vocabulary of simplified shape, abstracted form and intensified colour.

Rigden's use of a spicy, intense and rich colour range is a further contribution to the highly personal and idiosyncratic picture that he creates. Colour and form become indivisible as each geometric unit — be it disc, triangle or square — carries a single colour that burns with iridescence, or else sinks with sombre gravity into already dark ground colour. Colour shapes thus vie with one another across the compartmentalised zones of Rigden's dark Indian red grounds. Nature is never literally des-

Geoffrey Rigden's *Ktima* at Francis Graham-Dixon Gallery



cribed, but is rather alluded to indirectly. Superficial association with the mood of sunsets over tropical lands is too literal an interpretation.

Two currents within Rigden's work — one towards a jazzy gesturalism, the other towards a coolly planned colour composition — echo the dual strands within post war New York abstraction. Yet this correspondence belies an inherent and incurable originality in the work of this in many ways European, even English, modernist painter. His work may show closest affinity to middle and late period Gottlieb — the 'pictographs' and abstract 'bursts' — but there is an English quality in Rigden's modest scale, careful touch, playful Nicholsonian pattern-making, and consummate orchestration of chrome, hue and tone. (to July 31)

PETER DAVIES

## Hind Nasser

Tempera Fine Arts, 101B Kensington Church Street, W8.

Françoise Tempera is currently presenting the first London one-woman show of the Jordanian painter Hind Nasser, born in Amman, where she now lives and works after graduation from Beirut University. Broadly speaking, the paintings in this show are of three kinds — large turbulent, stormy near-abstract sea pictures, of which the finest is that called *Sea Anemones*; smaller landscapes rather of the spirit of the desert and the seaboard, than of the physical configuration of the land; and watercolours and gouaches of stylised cityscapes. After this interesting London debut, I look forward to the next Hind Nasser show, which may well include examples of her more figurative work.

Hind Nasser is only one of a number of important international artists permanently represented at Tempra Fine Arts. Among others are the Andalusian fantasist Juan Antonio Guirado, and the Spanish philosopher/painter Manuel Quintanilla; sensitive landscapes and townscapes, notably of Venice by the English artist Bryan Ryder; window still lives by the prizewinning Venetian artist Ivano Zanatta; Expressionist flower paintings by the Italian poet/cinéaste Luciano Gasper; and faux-naïf animal and flower fantasies of great charm by the American-based Greek Yannis Amoryanos, many of whose images have been adopted for publication by UNICEF.

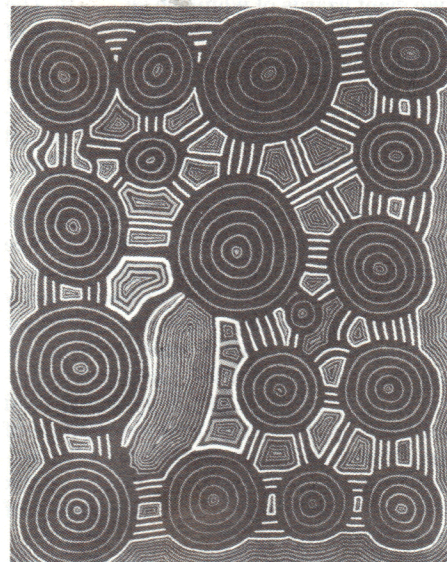
MAX WYKES-JOYCE

## Paintings of the Dreaming: Papunya Tula Art

Rebecca Hossack Gallery

I went to the Clifford Possum Tjapaltjarri show at the ICA on what passes in England for a brilliant spring day. No-one else was in the room. Sunlight filtered through green leaves wove in pale affinity over the sun-bleached hues of a hot continent; the paintings gave out power, quietly.

Clifford Possum Tjapaltjarri is the best known of the Aboriginal Papunya Tula artists of the central Australian desert. Western critics find it easier to latch on to a name rather than a school, but in fact



Anatjari Tjampijimpa's *Tingari Men's Dreaming* from 'Paintings of the Dreaming' at Rebecca Hossack Gallery. Possum is part of a movement that numbers over 100 artists. A selection of the others here have their first British group exhibition.

Papunya painting rose out of tragedy and farce; in the 1960s several nomadic tribes were herded together on the Papunya settlement 258 km west of Alice Springs to be 'assimilated' into Australian society. Among them were the Pintupi, who had first seen whites in that decade. In the '70s Geoff Bardon, art teacher at the Papunya school, noticed the children drawing stories in the dust and suggested that they make them permanent on the school walls. They seemed reluctant, so Bardon and his assistant painted an 'Aboriginal' mural. It fascinated the adult Aboriginal men, who asked for paints and themselves began to set down tribal mythology.

The paintings are executed on the ground in acrylic paint on coarse brown Belgian canvas. Seeing a bundle of them unrolled on the floor, they take on an entirely different life from the same paintings stretched on the stark walls of a European gallery. Flat, they are rough, part of the earth; hanging, they appear dazzling works of abstract sophistication.

All the works are in fact conceptual; marks on canvas trace stories of the Dreaming, the period when tribal ancestors emerged from the earth and created its topography. The Westerner can pick his way through the symbols — U-shapes for seated human beings, concentric circles for hills or breasts — though many meanings are shielded from the eyes of the uninitiated. There are no-go areas for artists too: as a character in Bruce Chatwin's *Songlines* says, 'No artist paints his own Dreaming' — the myths of his personal ancestor.

The dots that give Papunya painting its mesmeric quality echo the dabs of ochre painted on the bodies of dancers taking part in ceremonies. Although adopting synthetic paints (which hold up well in the gruelling climate), the artists instinctively use the colours in the landscape — earths ranging from beige river sand to sunset-hot rock, the silvery-white tones of stripped bark. Clifford Possum's *Goanna Dreaming* has a ground that pulsates with patches of white, dusty pink, ochre and slate blue, a subtle interlocking of colours bestrode by

two giant lizards of whiplash sinuosity. The tracks of the lizard ancestors in the act of creation flicker across the canvas. The central roundel represents a soakage at Yarumayi near Mount Allen, and symmetrically disposed U-shapes are seated humans, men of the Tjapaltjarri and Tjaungurrayi tribes.

Initiation ceremonies are male affairs, but many tribal stories are handed on to children by their mothers; women too have now started to paint. The Hossack Gallery show includes a large scale work of Pansy Napangati, similar in palette to Possum's but with a series of white starbursts denoting *kampurarrpa*, a delicious desert food gathered by the Kunga Kutjarra women of the Dreaming. Down the centre of the picture meanders a dry river bed, a black channel flicked with feathery patches of pale ochre.

Patches of landscape incised out of the desert, these paintings work on any scale, from small 3 x 5 ft. canvases to the 6 x 10 ft. size wryly called 'corporate'. The canvases are shaped according to the needs of the design; the most powerful painting in the Clifford Possum show was a roundel and, at Rebecca Hossack, Turkey Tolson Tjupurula's long banner of a painting serenely weaves snakelike lines, crossed with a fierce bar of black. Papaunya paintings are all bird's eye views, with each topographical feature observed directly from above by imaginations that skim the endless wrinkled earth.

Though working in the service of collective myths, independent painters' personalities emerge. Uta Uta Tjangala's *Two Snake Dreaming at Karrinwarra* is rough and bold; the ochre snake ancestors lie smoothly along the contours of the land that they have created, appearing both as creature and pattern. Like several other pictures in the Hossack Gallery exhibition, the painting is part of the sacred Tingari cycle which can be sketched, but not fully revealed, to outsiders. Maxie Tjampitjinpa depicts a Water Dreaming site at Watulpunya; wriggling red lines denote lightning, dots of pink and red the progress of bush fires; hovering patches of pale blue, storm clouds. Tjampitjinpa, one of the youngest artist in the group, demonstrates the recent tendency away from traditional ochres and black to a more 'Western' use of colour — though her particular combination of ice greens, glassy blue and hot pinks can hardly be called derivative. Kanya Tjapan-gati's painting — portraying another secret Tingari myth — is a supremely elegant network of white dot roundels radiating subsidiary dots of ochre, grey, red, pink. Without letting the uninitiate into its precise details, the work beats with the harmonious pulse of creation's interdependence.

Ironically, such painting looks deliciously soothing on boardroom walls, and for that reason (as well as investment potential) it is avidly collected by modern Australia's entrepreneurs, McAlpine and Holmes à Court among them. White Australia might drive roads over the Central Desert and mine the sacred places, but it is caught in the webs of the 40,000 year old tracks that preceded them. (to July 30)

SUSAN MORRIS