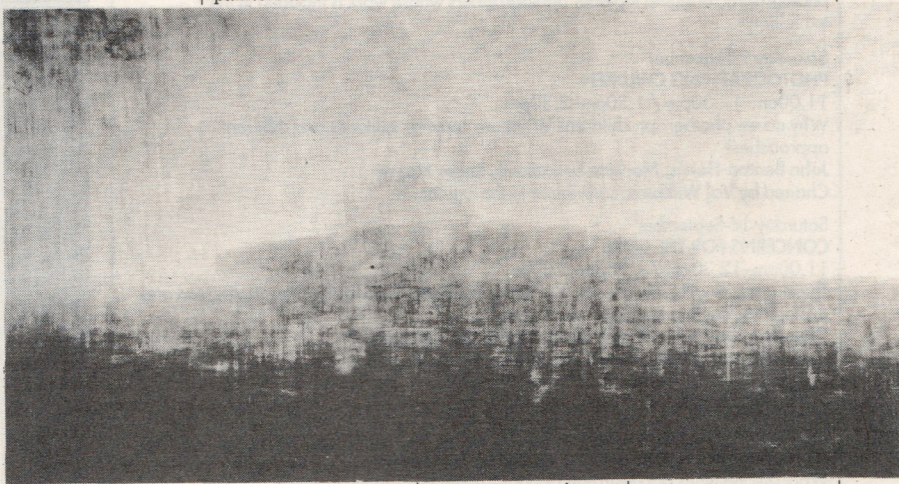
Tim Allen

Rebecca Hossack

Described by one critic as 'vivid, hectic, visionary, deeply emotional', Tim Allen's work is part of a wave of late '80s romantic painting and may perhaps be said to represent the state of that art. It puts one in mind of painters as diverse as Turner, Arnold Bōcklin, Puvis de Chavannes and



Gerhard Richter, but it is completely Allen's own and utterly contemporary. As much as anything it resembles those of Monet's waterlily paintings that have branches hanging in the immediate foreground, almost indistinguishable from reflections on the water. Allen's most important strategy — and the one which, I think, most gives his paintings their mystical appeal — is his simultaneous concentration on the two absolute ends of the visual field: the Monet-like veil is as close as it can be, as close as spots before the eyes, but through it we discern a horizon, apparently the sea's: in other words a distance at the other limit of vision. However, since the paintings consist entirely of layers, areas scratched out, patches and streaks, the two distances, far and near, intermix and at points seem to interchange. The whole creates a visual hum, a crescendo of transparencies. Allen insists on the optimism of his painting, and that any mysticism in it is of the here and now. And yet I couldn't help feeling that the Ancient Mariner's ship might suddenly appear out of that misty bedazzlement of colours.

David Lillington

4. Through the Looking Glass
(Barbican)

A survey of the fine art and independant wings of British photography since the war which celebrates the flood of good work emanating from our darkrooms. Starting with Bill Brandt it keeps up the quality throughout.