Frances Corner's *Portrait of a Young Woman* from her show at the Café Gallery, by the Pool, Southwark Park, Bermondsey SE16 to Dec 3, Wed-Sun, 10am-4pm

Knots and Crosses: Scott Kilgour and Ray Charles White

Rebecca Hossack Gallery

Henry Geldzahler, star of Hockney portraits, is a sort of Orson Welles figure of the American art world: large in build, personality and variety of professional experience. He has been a curator at MOMA in New York, and last month was responsible for one of the American sections at the Sao Paulo Bienal. It is interesting therefore to see him organising a show at Rebecca Hossack's gallery in Bloomsbury, particularly as the ideas behind it continue the feel of larger-than-life international connections. It features a friendship in New York between a young Canadian photographer, Ray Charles White, and a Scottish painter, Scott Kilgour. The artistic spur was research by Edmund Carpenter into the continuous-line drawings on Celtic stone crosses which then led to a visit to Scotland. This exhibition shows their different artistic responses to the Pictish cross-slab stones they found, a project they felt so successful that they have since visited sites in Ireland and are now planning further expeditions to Africa, taking the line on around the world.

Neither contributor is an illustrator. The photographs are serious close-ups, with carefully raked lighting to capture the worn outlines of carved shapes. They work with the"unlimiting textures and veilities of black and white", as Henry Geldzahler puts it. One photo clearly shows a host of small horsemen but the rest are of different types of pattern, from interlacing lines to exquisite details that can have stories read into them, such as *Sea Horse Tail*.

Part of the wider argument of the exhibition is about the symbolic significance of line drawings, and how they helped primitive communities to portray and control the powers that surrounded them. That idea of pattern imbued with meaning obviously appeals to the painter Scott Gilgour who writes of how these lines gave him an entry into abstraction. The marvellously interlacing Pict Knot is developed as a motif and then contrasted with the square lines of a window, or placed within a sharply geometric frame. *Pict's Angel* is an elaborated version of a fairly abstract photograph. Once the outline has been established there are three more versions in green, grey and black, with the rectilinear shapes of the modern world superimposed.

I didn't feel that the paintings were strong enough to work on their own. The photographs are technically beautiful but also studiedly understated. The most interesting thing is the relationships between them, particularly with some subtle hanging by the gallery. *(to Dec 2)*

ANDREW HUGHES

Tommy McMahon, Dereck Spawson, Ian Humphreys, John Simpson and Sheena McMahon

Merz Contemporary Art

Tommy McMahon was one of the first artists to show with the Merz, and remains one of the most distinctive. His drawing has a knuckled energy which invigorates a sustained series of paintings of ostrich-headed businessmen whose long neck underpin complex compositions. McMahon combines these with female figures (and colours) from Gauguin. The results have a sardonic charm, a blend of Billy Connoly and Walt Disney. Recently, however he has changed course, producing larger paintings which are far easier to take in at one glance. In *The Recruit* two men, one in Quality Street military uniform, the other, bearded, in a Hawaian shirt (rendered in thick, luxurious oils), face each other, almost touching, under a hot sky; in *His Own Man*, the companion piece, a pith-helmeted man salutes the Union Jack. There is a new lightness of touch to the social commentary, a new openness to the colours, and a new boldness of composition that sees McMahon vastly simplifying his draughtmanship. Gauguin has lost out to Sergeant Pepper.

Ian Humphreys' still lives are beginning to attract the attention they deserve. His vessels contrive to suggest roundness, fullness and promise without compromising the artist's insistence on the flatness of the canvas – his compositions explore vertical relations upon a plane rather than recession within a space. He is equally at home on canvas and on paper, where his chalky surfaces suddenly acquire a liquid translucence. Like McMahon, Humphreys brings new and generous life to his influences.