

LONDON REVIEWS

striving for effect – each picture seems the natural expression of some inner energy.

Nearly all the colour is white or off-white; you may think that white is a monotonous basis for an abstract scheme, but then you must think of broad silk curtains surging in a wind, tempting you to look out of your window through the curtain to the mystery garden beyond, with a few tiny flashes of bright red or blue to focus your view. Then you will have the sense of drama implied in these understated, memorable visions. (to July 15. See back cover, last issue of Arts Review)

GRAHAM HUGHES

Clifford Possum Tjapaltjarri: Songlines IV

Rebecca Hossack Gallery

In the 1970s a local white teacher, Geoff Bardon, took a step to stem the prevalent spiritual and cultural disintegration among Aboriginal peoples. An art movement was born and today the Papunya Tula Artists' Company has become known worldwide, from Sydney to New York.

Rebecca Hossack was the first to introduce Aboriginal work into this country and this is her fourth annual show. As with all ethnic work once it has been 'discovered', the quality tends to be diluted. For this reason the gallery has set about assembling a selection of top-notch examples including many by the leading Papunya figure Clifford Possum.

The paintings draw on mythological and ceremonial sources, particularly on creation stories where ancestors are depicted first as dreaming then spreading their internal vision by 'singing the landscape into existence'. Such a litany passed down and kept alive by word of mouth among nomadic groups has evidently a vital force that soon becomes apparent in the paintings.

Clifford Possum (and his co-exhibitors) employs what Europeans would describe as a pointilliste technique allied to a restricted repertoire of signs and symbols such as circles or sinuous lines, signifying kangaroos, serpents, spears, campsites, fire, wind or water. Often the picture surface will also have the look of a chart marked by footprints or with upturned U signs symbolising human beings past or present. The fact that the works are in the main executed in rich earth colours reinforces the sense of the desert habitat.

Thus *Rainbow Snake Dreaming* tells the elaborate story of a family avenging itself on a snake who had killed most of its members and of their subsequent celebration. *Honey Ant Dreaming* (illustrated on the last front cover) remembers the ancestor Yurumpi and seems to recreate the dreaming distillation of the ancestral spirit.

There is an undeniable fascination in 'reading' the pictures in this way. But beyond that the paintings have a vigour and resonance that enables them to stand up in their own right and be counted as strong visual statements. *Honey Ant Dreaming* and *Water Dreaming*, for instance, both by Clifford Possum, have a formal balance and beauty which is particularly striking. And in this

context what is significant is not the meaning of the signs but the arresting conviction with which they are painted. Somewhat uncannily both these works combine a vibrant surface with a contemplative spatial 'interior'. *Initiation Ceremonies*, on the other hand, pulsates with rhythm and action so that it is tempting to compare it to a medieval jousting ballad or even a modern pop lyric!

Among the other exhibitors look out for Walimpirringa Tjapaltjarri who was the last tribesman to come out of the Gibson desert in 1984 and whose work is among the most purely iconographic in the exhibition. I was also particularly taken by George Yapa Tjangala's *Snake Dreaming*. Two exceptionally sensuous snakes slide together up the picture surface, inevitably reminding us of our own creation story of Adam and Eve. The surrounding pattern features the most wonderfully concertina-ed hexagons I have ever seen, syncopated this way and that into truly amazing variations.

For Aboriginals the strength of their art movement represents a resurgence of pride. Coming as it does at a time when we are conscious of our own alienation from nature, its appeal for us may be equally deep-seated. Paintings like these which touch convincingly on the unity of man and the universe have a special wish-fulfilment value. (to July 21. See last issue's front cover)

JANE NORRIE

Baroque and Rococo in Venice

Walpole Gallery, 38 Dover Street, W. 1

Before you make your Grand Tour to exotic places this summer, be sure first to penetrate the modest facade of this splendid London gallery. The building has been through many vicissitudes, including, latterly, use as a women's club; finally its fine first floor interiors were restored to their original early 1800s glory, and opened in 1987, with the aim of staging at least one big exhibition each summer. I have seen and admired them all, and this is quite the most distinguished.

Italy is in the news right now; as host to the football "mondiale"; as host to British opera in the Florence Maggio Musicale; as host in London's new Accademia Italiana in Rutland Gate, to a lavish survey of the little-known Renaissance frescoes in the Palazzo Schifanoia in Ferrara; as theme for the sumptuous Grosvenor House Antiques Fair in London, just closed, with its Grand Tour miscellanies; as originator of a hitherto unknown contemporary of Vivaldi just discovered in Manchester and first performed in Manchester City Art Gallery on June 22; and Italy is star performer in several still current exhibitions which Arts Review will be covering, including the stunning glimpse into the Venice Carnival in "The Art Machine" at Glasgow's McLellan Gallery; Italian drawings at the Scottish National Gallery, Edinburgh; "Venice observed", with seven Canalettos lent from Goodwood and elsewhere, and 42 Guardi's and others, at Chichester Festivities' main exhibition in the Chichester Bishop's Palace; and distinguished, detailed

international picture studies at the Heim Gallery in St. James' London.

But all these lovely events are quite insignificant compared to this week's good news that the Italian government has withdrawn Venice's recent application to be the site of the next world fair after the forthcoming 'Expo '92' in Seville. Venice will therefore not immediately be ruined by sudden millions of tourists nor by pollution nor by the Adriatic tides, and we can all breathe a sigh of relief that the Serenissima has survived yet another ecological challenge.

The Walpole Gallery provides an ideal background for such musings. It may have been Kenneth Clark who first made the point that Venice is so beautiful that it belongs not to Italy but to the whole world. Here in Dover Street, is some vivid evidence about the beauty and variety of Venice; and, if you are so minded, you can take it away with you, because it is nearly all for sale. Clovis Whitfield of the Walpole, and his Italian colleagues, have spent some years to achieve this remarkable coup. They have located many masterpieces and brought them to the market, at a time when masterpieces so often hurriedly go under the hammer at the auctioneers, so seldom remain on display for long at the private galleries.

Here are some 40 paintings from 1650-1800, including four Canalettos and three big figure groups by Jacopo Amigoni. Amigoni, as the admirable catalogue (£10) observes, was even more international than was usual in those international times: born in Venice, he worked in Munich, England and Madrid. Pride of place for me, however, must go to Horace Walpole, whose portrait by Rosalba is one of the few loans. (The present Walpole Gallery adopted Horace's name, because Horace lived nearby in Arlington Street.) The Rosalba pastel was painted in Venice in 1741, and is now lent by Lord and Lady Walpole. Recent doubt as to the identity of the sitter is well analysed in the catalogue. Joseph Smith, British Consul in Venice, lived there from 1709 till 1770, and sold pictures so effectively to British tourists, that Horace Walpole contemptuously called him the "Merchant of Venice". Smith is well represented here.

Of special interest is Longhi's *Music Lesson* of c.1760, recalling as it does, the charming, intimate Longhi series of Venice high society life beneath Tiepolo's ceilings in the Palazzo Rezzonico; the harpsichord here has amazing Venetian baroque legs and may have been connected with the famous castrato singer Farinelli, a life long friend of Amigoni. But the point of the picture, is to remind us that Venice was a great centre of music, with concerts in the four big hospitals the Mendicanti, the Pieta, the Ospedaletto and the Incurabili, as well as in the churches and the palaces. *The Continnence of Scipio* by Pittoni recalls a rare Roman act of mercy, popular with painters of furniture and cassoni; and, as Scipio forgave his adversary, you must now forgive me for being unable to mention more of these delectable hints at bygone grace. (to July 20. See colour illustration)

GRAHAM HUGHES

A View in the Veneto by Marco Ricci (1676-1729/30) from 'Venetian Baroque and Rococo Paintings' at the Walpole Gallery. See review