

FEATURES

begin to wonder where the Professor gained his reputation, for this *Ring*, as demonstrated by its latest instalment, *Gotterdammerung*, at the Garden, shows thought processes of the deepest triviality, combined with a woeful lack of visual sense. The basic tunnel setting by Peter Sykora is not only hideous, looking like a cross between an underground station and a carpark, but it is tattily constructed, tackily decorated – ‘Danger’ signs and manifestly fake metal doors – and lamentably costumed. It almost invariably hinders both music and action – Hagen sitting mute throughout the final scene of Act 1, fatuous use of magnifying lenses, Siegfried left lying on the floor during his great funeral march, and a final immolation and destruction of almost laughable ineptitude, is lit without any distinction by John B Read, and, despite the high quality of Bernard Haitink’s conducting and of much of the singing, left me impatient to get home and listen to this great work on a good recording, undistracted by visual miscalculations. In the Autumn Das Rheingold in Friedrich’s version will be added and the complete *Ring* will be performed at Covent Garden. I fear the worst.

After this kind of approach to stage design, what a great relief it is to visit the **Design by Motley** exhibition, to be seen in the dress circle foyer of the National’s Lyttelton Theatre until March 23. The three-woman team of sisters Margaret and Sophia Harris and Elizabeth Montgomery designed sets and costumes here and in the United States between 1932 and 1976, as well as setting up a design course which has trained scores of distinguished designers on both sides of the Atlantic. ‘Design by Motley’ became a byword for professional excellence, and the team may validly be regarded as the forerunners of modern theatrical design. This fine exhibition, sponsored by Courtauld Textiles, comes courtesy of the University of Illinois, to whom Motley donated their collected work, and who then collated and rationalised the collection. There are abundant set models, costumes and costume



Edward Bawden's linocut *Jonah's Whale* at the New Academy Gallery

Aboriginal artist Jimmy Pike's screenprint *Warnti Waterhole* at Rebecca Hossack Gallery. "People been coming here more than 20,000 years. The people gone, but the water still there. These big trees grow around the banks of Warnti. Their roots keep the water."



sketches, the sets ranging from the rather staid *Richard of Bordeaux* of 1932, to the far more exciting 1935 *Romeo and Juliet*, 1938 *Three Sisters* (a superb concept), the wonderfully spacious *Antony and Cleopatra* of 1953, and the very forward-looking set for Robert Bolt's *A Man For All Seasons* in its original 1960 West End production. There is also a helpful and stimulating video that forms part of this fascinating and extremely useful exhibition.

DAVID FINGLETON

* Prints

The Aboriginal artist **Jimmy Pike**, born in the Great Sandy Desert, Western Australia, whose ‘Desert Designs’ are showing at the *Rebecca Hossack Gallery* until March 2, is a celebrated character well loved throughout the continent. The exhibition consists of big screenprints, fabulous coloured rugs, sweaters and even T shirts. The whole of the lower gallery steps and floor have been freshly painted an apoplectic desert red to set off the big handwoven rug on

the far wall to perfection. In this design as well as in the main body of screenprints, coloured parallel stripes in curved groups set breathtaking primaries side by side. They act spatially rather than harmonise decoratively.

The only other living stone age group is in South Africa, where the Bushmen have an art parallel to that of the Aborigines. One can trace similar designs in prehistoric communities: in Brittany, Southern Ireland, Scotland, the ‘Mounds’ in North America, Mycenae, Carpathos, Japan, etc. The same parallel lines appear as shallow gouging on big stones, and seem to be the natural choice of nomadic society, for they are movement symbolised. Once the nomads settled down static symbols, crosses, strapwork, formalised drapery are merely decorated with these memories of other times.

The aborigines of Australia use linear patterns, easy to draw with sticks on the ground, as story-maps, space-time symbols, and spirit figures like the striking *Mangkaja* illustrated on last issue’s front cover, a white bird from Dreamtime. ‘... some people were frightened of this *Mangkaja*. They found him sitting down on a log. They tried to kill him, but he flew up very high, and where he landed there sprung up a waterhole, *Mangkaja Kura*.’

Jimmy Pike has the problem of reconciling natural nomadic movement with the static art of civilisation. Being an artist of talent and ingenuity, the landscapes he has done incorporate the same vibrant colour contrasts. Imaginative designs of rocky outcrops vary with straight landscape and the abstractions ... they dissolve into each other, each has the same mark of the individual.

Pat Lowe’s book on Jimmy – *JILJI* – has some wonderful coloured photographs of his rugs melting into the desert. Chapters include *Desert Children’s Games*, *Desert Medicine*, *Cooking*, *Insects*, *Dying in the Desert*.

At the *New Academy*, next door in Windmill Street, three memorial exhibitions give a fine showing, until March 2, of the prints of **Roland Batchelor** (1889-1990), **William Scott** (1913-1989), and **Edward Bawden** (1903-1989).

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