

Time Out

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Nick Nolte & Debra Winger
In 'Everybody Wins'

Josie Lawrence
Goes Solo

ART

Preview

Wizards of Oz

DAVID LILLINGTON ON
ABORIGINAL ART

An exhibition of aboriginal artefacts and paintings sounds like a glassed-in thing. 'Boomerang' at the Rebecca Hossack Gallery, includes paintings,

and art solely for its 'spirituality', or even its narrative content, means that bad art and good art are given equal status. And if there are no good and bad aboriginal works of art, only authentic and inauthentic ones, the dealers can sell everything at the same price using this anti-aesthetic as justification. This is bad for good artists. What we thought was a defence of aboriginal integrity turns out to be a means of further repression. The Aboriginal Arts Association even suggested a total ban on the export of paintings, but this wouldn't do the artists any good at all. The idea that aboriginal artists should accept poverty as proof of their authenticity is just a quiet twist in the history of white hypocrisy. Rebecca Hossack, it should be said here, is an expert on, and a passionate campaigner for, aboriginal art and artists. She wants respect and decent prices for her artists.

'Boomerang' consists mainly of

wooden 'sawyers', beaded paintings, boomerangs, manurens (decorated sticks), clubs, and, the centrepiece, a Tingira. However, when you read the literature on the subject you enter an aesthetic and moral jungle, a string of debates of almost theological complexity. Aboriginal conventions are not European ones. If you ask Rebecca Hossack which way round a painting goes, she will turn the painting round on the wall; it doesn't matter. Conventions are often made between aboriginal paintings and abstraction. But even recent examples, which are anything but exotic, are problematic if seen in this way. For example, they show a poor understanding of the way shapes and overall composition relate to the edges of a canvas.

Rebecca Hossack suggested that one of her exhibits resembles a Brancusi sculpture. It doesn't, and if you judge it by those standards it fails. But it's obvious to anyone (and Rebecca Hossack would agree) that such judgements miss the point: this art is interesting precisely because its aesthetic is wholly unfamiliar. It has to do with an entire way of life. It's the sense of a whole culture with all its parts integrated that fascinates us. Spirituality is fashionable and it seems to us that the most spiritual people on earth are the aborigines.

However, the plot thickens. Some critics point out that judging aboriginal

'Boomerang' consists mainly of wooden objects dating from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. With these, questions of authenticity don't arise. But they do look out of place. Is it even right that they should be here? Yes, people should see them, even if it is difficult to know how to approach them. When one of the gallery staff handed me a digging stick, I had the bizarre feeling that the object I was examining so reverentially might be the aboriginal equivalent of, say, a rolling pin. The boomerangs, which are beautiful and fascinatingly varied, are less of a problem, but it was with relief that I came across the Tingira. This is a convex, oval piece of wood carved only with neat spirals connected by overlapping three-pronged bands — slices joined by perhaps perhaps, the meaning of most Tingiras is unknown because they are 'secret-sacred' and the aborigines won't tell. This of course pleases us more than anything. It also raises yet another moral question, particularly for the good Ms Hossack, who takes these things seriously. Tingiras are only meant to be seen by certain people and this religion isn't dead, remember. It's alive. I'm proud that we've got this,' says Hossack, but it shouldn't be here really. If an aborigine walked in I'd have to take it down.

'Boomerang' is at the Rebecca Hossack Gallery until May 22.

ART: PREVIEW



Jack B Yeats

WHITESHAP

Because of their Irish connection that

public focus to the original status in Yeats's paintings. In a former, who has long championed Yeats's work, once pointed out that in Ireland the way to a Yeats. He also notes how important

clington have long shown the paintings of Jack B Yeats, brother of the poet W.B. Yeats, though for many years his work had been regarded as 'Lark Brown'. The impressionistic rigour of his painterly technique was admired, but in the 1960s and '70s the conventional view was that his imagery was suspect — how was one to react to the 45-year-old Yeats and his brother wandering in the spaces of the western art or over Ireland's coastal crags? 'What great pictures they'd be if it wasn't for all that Celtic-wizardry,' people said.

In these Post-Modernist times we can see that the unrefined, hazy, grey dis-

well the sense of an enormous, whirling atmosphere whose light transforms the landscape below, so that ordinary activities become a kind of magic, or at least, a miracle. When Yeats paints two children talking beneath a misted landscape, the strong light of the Atlantic looks like a magical, supernatural quality. Yeats belongs to a visionary tradition, though it's strange to think that for more years he than these cartoons for Jack under the pseudonym, A. H. D. The Dunster. He was a brilliant designer whose paintings would have been in the style of a modernist.

Robert Macdonald



The Squares by Vito Trevisani

Women Artists

VICTORIA MIRO

Showing one workpiece, the 11 artists here will produce scenic and original works of all kinds in the way of visual splendour and sophisticated modernism. Marina Abramovic's three

roughly made beaded cubes are hung vertically, at the height of the head, the head and the feet. Four tiny, dark, blue boxes by Marjorie Weber have fringed doors, all one and showing a glimpse of absolute darkness and absolute light. Danish there is the stretched plaster balls of Einar W. It's wood's own beauty, its whiteness turned to dust. A nearby painting by Kay Rosen should say 'Frost' but there's a black square where the 'd' should be. In the piece is 'Red Frost' one of Angela Bullock's best: seven twelve elevens in the corner; a plink on a rocking base supports the plate of a bookcase, and an elegant robe of conjoined lines is held 'like space'. The whimsy of the artists here are less useful if described in terms of the cabinet, that is, the ready-made, than in terms of elegance, poetry and wit — Kay, Kay and Frost.

Alison Scott

Critic's Choice

1. Twilight of the Years
Grisard
2. Packed Budd
Anthony Hunt
3. Jack B Yeats
Hossack
4. Value Passions
Grisard
5. Appearance: fashion
photography since 1940
13-14

