

'New Contemporaries' videos LVA Women Live screening

The past few weeks have revealed the work of yet another generation of artists to leave the art schools, hopeful, but facing a reactionary and threatening world. How many of them have been taught to confront the disturbing issues of our time in anything other than a perfunctory way? Dialogue is after all essential for the artist and implies a concern for issues of the moment. There is undoubtedly a place for political art and all art is political to some extent. However, there seems to be an increasing risk in turning political subject matter into the content of a work of art without recourse to imagination or inventiveness, with the usual danger of cliché and predictability. Much current practice under the banner of political art, although genuine in its concerns, falls into banality for the absence of the mark of the artist or author. It has become fashionable in discussing political art in relation to film, for example, to play down the role of the artist/director and to discount the 'auteur' theory, seeing the corporate production as being more democratic and less bourgeois than the classic system of artist/author/director.

In producing and introducing personal work, that is, work produced by one individual through an artisan's practice which most fine art is still based on, the qualities of individualism and self-

expression cannot be dismissed with the same rationale, and if they are, then the work must inevitably appear prosaic.

Work selected for the video section of the 'New Contemporaries' at the ICA suffered very much from these problems. Feminism, sexuality, disarmament and Eastern Europe, all fashionable subjects of the moment, were treated with concern but the discussions ranged from the banal to the confused. *Triad* by John Willis, a multi-screen tape programme, attempted to deal with male and female nudity as seen by the woman and the man, but the images were highly suspect, the text full of platitudes and the punchline 'Higher art or voyeur art — that is your question' was quite alarming. The images simply did not lead one into judging the piece as anything other than soft porn. One suspects that this was not the intention of the artist. Another work, *Triangle* by Angela Jackson, described, through a loose narrative, a third relationship between a man and woman seen through his and her eyes — it seemed again that there was a dryness, lack of humour, perhaps a political involvement, but a lack of ardour in the proposal.

In the tape section, Steve Hewley's *We have fun drawing conclusions* stood out as by far the most intelligent and restrained piece of work. Using the well-remembered stereotypes of John and Jane he has investigated our assumptions. By using the images and text of the John and Jane books he has turned our preconceptions on their head. *Pershing Synthesis* by G.P. Jones sets out to be more ambitious, perhaps, by tackling urgent subject matter, the dreaded missiles. This example illustrates the risk of attempting to tackle such material without first establishing one's own identity and individuality as an artist. A juxtaposition and witty comparison between the properties and potential of video as a medium and the wretched missiles falls short of its objective for not revealing the mark of the artist — the work appears as a rather presumptuous pastiche on an earlier generation of video work, which may now seem hopelessly clumsy and tatty in the face of the new technology but which retains its radical integrity nevertheless.

On the other hand, Caroline Stone's

The Home Service, a tape shown in the first of the LVA Women Live screenings at Air Gallery, was a highly sophisticated and humorous observation of what would otherwise be mundane subject matter — house cleaning. Like Hewley, Stone has taken a prosaic subject and through the use of an individual construction and striking imagery turned it into a witty and slightly surreal comment on unpaid domestic labour.

The task is both daunting and exhilarating — to produce radical art which challenges the issues of the moment but at the same time surprises and raises awareness through vision and originality. Are we capable of producing that art or encouraging others to do so?

Tamara Krikorian

The Basement Group in Newcastle are organising an American month in October with a number of events planned including the Arts Council film package *American Artists; Disband* — a collaborative of five women artists: Illona Granet; Donna Henes; Ingrid Sischy and Diana Torr and Martha Wilson; and *Revolutions per minute* (The Art Record) which will be installed in a shop in Newcastle, and includes sound pieces by a number of artists including J. Beuys, Chris Burden, Terry Fox, Douglas Davis and Buckminster Fuller. *Revolutions per minute* will also be going to the Tate.

For further information about the Basement's events — contact Ken Gill, The Basement, Bells Court, Pilgrim Street, Newcastle-upon-Tyne. Tel. 0632-614527.

SOUTHAMPTON ART GALLERY

1 July — 29 August
Festival Exhibition of Marine Painting

22nd June — 29th August
New Waves — A different view from the bridge

17 July — 12 September
Kandinsky and the Fauves

Southampton Art Gallery Shop
for originals and reproductions.

Civic Centre, Southampton
(Closed Monday)



July 17 — August 7
GEORGE WYLLIE
'A Day Down a Goldmine'
A new installation

JOAN KEY
'Red Nudes'
Paintings, drawings and etchings
Two Third Eye Centre exhibitions

Galleries open: Tues-Sat 10am-5.30pm; Sun 2pm-5.30pm. Centre closed Mondays.
Admission Free.