New works not quite at the cutting edge



John

is dull

to his

Along for the ride: Sophie Michael's three-minute film 'Carousel (2009)'

The Edge of Painting The Piper Gallery, London

REVIEW BY HANNAH DUGUID

An exhibition titled The Edge of Painting brings together a group of artists, none of whom use paint in the traditional sense. The premise being that these are paintings in their contemporary form, the edge of what a painting could be. To say that painting's no longer about paint on a flat surface is hardly revelatory. Since Picasso first stuck a real postage stamp on his depiction of a letter, painting hasn't always been about paint. And looking around this exhibition, it's difficult to get why the painting question really matters at all.

Cornelia Parker defines her work as a "drawing". It's made using rattlesnake venom suspended in black ink, and spattered on a white surface. Antivenom suspended in correction fluid is spattered on the glass directly above it. A snake's poisonous bite as medium is both compelling and disturbing, like a snake. But this work is from 2004, which weakens its relevance to this exhibition.

Martin Creed's Work No 907 uses masking tape and coloured paper to create two geometric images. An arrangement of humble materials, precise and simple, which exudes the sensual quality of paint.

Technology weaves through the show in work by John Stezaker, Giulia Ricci, Tom Lomax and Tim Head. Stezaker's best known for constructing montage using famous faces from film stills, or landscape layered on faces to create haunting surrealist imagery of starlets with empty caverns replacing their eyes and skull. Stezaker's work in this show is an abstract grey collage

titled Edge. It's rather dull compared to the magical effect of his other work

An inkjet print by Tim Head shows a cluster of circles in shades of dark grey. As the show's about painting, it's tempting to compare and consider whether this work is part of a progression – as the curator Tess Jaray suggests. But it falls flat alongside iconic black paintings from the past such as those by Kazimir Malevich. Or black paintings by contemporary British artist Keith Coventry.

Cathy de Monchaux's fantasy scene State Secrets inhabits a glass box on the wall. Tiny models of hunting dogs and unicorns made

of wire and Elastoplast fight it out in a wiry white forest. It's the only figurative work Stezaker's in the show but worrying piece Edge about whether this work is painting or not detracts from its dark and mythical compared pleasure. Is it painting or sculpture? What could it be? Such questions can other work feel like being trapped in a lengthy academic thesis.

The work on show is domestic in scale and everything hangs, or leans,

on the wall. There's paint on steel by Rana Begum and Nike Savvas's polished aluminium hangs down in strips like a disco curtain. Tess Jaray's work Migration, Wide, Orange, layers cut-out shapes to make tiny triangles like flying birds in the sky.

There's no harm in considering what painting could be these days. But, then, is a print a painting, and where does drawing fit in?

To 30 December (020 7148 0350)