

# THE PIPER GALLERY

## *New Possibilities: Abstract Paintings from the Seventies*

**(16<sup>th</sup> November – 21<sup>st</sup> December)**

Many of the visual art works made during the 1970s found themselves neglected as attention focused on the rise of conceptual and performance art. In this exhibition, The Piper Gallery demonstrates that, even as modernist certainties were challenged, new possibilities in abstract art continued to emerge, with a vitality that may even have sprung from the precarious position in which seventies' abstraction found itself.

New Possibilities, curated by Megan Piper and Sandra Higgins, presents works by 14 artists from the 1970s: Frank Bowling RA, Graham Boyd, Barrie Cook, William Henderson, Albert Irvin RA, Tess Jaray RA, Jeanne Masoero, C. Morey de Morand, Mali Morris RA, Patricia Poullain, Desmond Rayner, Alice Sielle, Trevor Sutton and Gary Wragg. All these artists were born between 1922 and 1950 and are still working today.

The choice of works here does not restrict itself to a particular approach, nor does it claim to be a comprehensive survey. What results demonstrates some of the eclecticism which emerges as a central feature of seventies' abstraction. The pieces shown were made by artists at different stages of their careers, working with a wide range of techniques. Through the general diversity run various different strands: there are 'painterly' painters; Op artists, and some whose work relates to Op art; some whose work is ostensibly reductive and others who aim at a type of maximalism; quite a number also work with geometry. But, what is most exciting is seeing the combined work of these different artists that is rarely, if ever, shown together. Consequently, the exhibition offers unexpected, new connections that bring forth new questions about this period.

For example, Frank Bowling is well-known for concerning himself with the material structure of paint and, in the 1970s, he began to pour paint directly onto the canvas, observing the way the wet acrylic slowly flowed from top to bottom. This style of action- painting creates energetic and innovative works with colours that meet and mesh forming a dense textural build-up at the bottom edge. Although very different in style, Albert Irvin is also fascinated with colour and uses dynamic ranges to achieve his expressive and communicative force, full of vitality and ambition.

Desmond Rayner once said 'There are far too many shades of grey all around us. I like colour for its own sake. I enjoy juggling with space. Relax and enjoy the works at surface level, that's all I ask...'. For Rayner, visual art is a form of pleasure and a source of entertainment and this statement of intent concisely sums up his straightforward philosophy regarding his own artistic practice.

Throughout Graham Boyd's work, there is a desire to capture and draw our attention to light and colour, particularly to the fugitive or transient qualities of the works and the way these can alter our perception of space. Each of Alice Sielle's paintings are formed through a series of overlapping sequences, at times suggesting futuristic architecture or theatre sets that become increasingly figurative.

William Henderson is one of the three so-called Artscribe artists in the exhibition, whose work was promoted and written about in the magazine Artscribe during the 1970s (the others are Gary Wragg and Trevor Sutton). Where many painters in the exhibition looked to America for inspiration, Henderson saw himself as a European painter, one excited by the work of classic modernists such as Dubuffet, Braque, Picasso and Kandinsky. Trevor Sutton sees his art as making simple statements about colour; he looked to America, particularly the minimal painting of Ellsworth Kelly, through Abstract Expressionists, such as Rothko and Newman.