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STEVEN CAMPBELL : REINVENTING TRADITION

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INTRODUCTION

"Tradition for the artist doesn't mean what he should do but what he is up against. What one has to do ... is to make up one's own way vis a vis this. The mistake many artists make is to think that they can do what they like. They end up doing what someone else has already done"[1]

Steven Campbell's art is Scottish in character, because he draws on the imagery of a Scottish past, and applies paint with a bravura that has been compared to a traditional Scottish prediliction for painterliness. Yet he does not belong to a Scottish tradition of painting. "Tradition", the artist claims "is only important if it can be used and abused, and if it can trick an establishment into believing that what you do is part of it"[2]

Central therefore to the work of Steven Campbell is a subversion. It is the subversion of the entire language of painting. In a decade that saw painting as the premier art form, Campbell addresses something more critical than a mere superficial alignment to a European trend for a return to figuration.

Coming from a performance art background, Campbell has ap proached painting without any regard for the way it was traditionally taught at Glasgow School of ARt (He was a student there from 1978 to 1982). Painting therefore is simply another tool of expression with which to realise his ideas, ostensibly his obsessive fascination with the impossibility of fixing knowledge in the world. This is expressed in art through the exposure of it's provisional reality through devices and conventions, and amounts to what he has called the abuse of tradition. In the process the viewers traditional perception and understanding of Art is challenged.

Campbell's subversion, his re-invention takes the form of a parody of the devices of pictorial representation in a tradition of figurative art. Using the central motif of the struck pose he creates a world drawn largely from the aesthetics of the nineteenth century, that makes an absurdity out of that figure's relationship to that world. It is an absurdity both in the actuality of the space the figure inhabits and the complexity of the situations he is faced with.

Campbell reorganises his borrowings into an inventive new language, conveyed entirely by an equally innovative handling of paint. He paints by improvisation, with ideas developing in front of the canvas. He limits himself to six days to complete each painting. By being composed therefore in execution, rather than to a preordained plan, the paintings are records of the artist's performance as well as presenting a tableau performed by the dramatis personae.

This thesis is an exploration of the critical intention that lies at the heart of Campbell's art. His work will be examined in relationship to the past and present tradition. During this examination it will be necessary to clarify his relationship with the trend in Scotland for New Figuration with which he is irrecoverably linked. He has been grouped by association with other Glaswegian artists who share a figurative based imagery, but whose intentions are anathema to him. Campbell therefore has to be disassociated from the painters with whom he is associated to show how different his concerns are. To understand Campbell's painting however he must be seen initially in the light of his non-painting background.

CHAPTER ONE: 'FROM McLEAN TO LANDSEER'

Steven Campbell had never any desire to draw or paint in a
traditional academic manner. He came to Glasgow School of
Art as a mature student and quickly reacted against the
formal teaching methods in the painting department.   He
opted instead for the more open-minded mixed media group
under Roger Hoare, where his time was spent making perform-
ance installations. It was only when the group disbanded
that Campbell returned in his final year to the Fine Art
department, bringing his performance ideas to painting.

Performance in the 1970s was considered a way of bringing to
life the many formal and conceptual ideas on which the
making of art is based. Its base has generally been anar-
chic with artists impatient with the limitations of more
established art forms wanting to take their art directly to
the public. It was theoretically anti-painting in that the
insistence on ideas over product removed the reliance on
formal methods of creation.

When Campbell began making performance installations at
Glasgow School of Art, he was looking to the ironic stance
and parody of Bruce McLean. Allied to this was an interest
in the iconic social statements of Gilbert and George veiled
by a polite gentility and outward simplicity. All three
were students at St. Martins School of ARt where they react-
ed to the formalist concerns of Anthony Caro then head of
the Sculpture department. McLean found Caro's approach
(arranging metal girders, wood, fiberglass and other materi-
als in balanced compositions on the floor) tedious and
pretentious, and set about undermining what he saw as the
pompous and bombastic aspect of contemporary sculpture. His
performances were intended to bring back humour into art,
denying the studio orientated approach to art and becoming
instead the art object himself. His performances attempted

to subvert the traditional viewpoint that saw the aim of art as being the production of tangible objects.

In his first solo show (at the situation gallery in london 1971) entitled "Theres a sculpture on my shoulder" slides of famous modern sculputres were projected onto the wall above his shoulder. This irreverant attitude to art became important to Campbell in his attempts to draw attention to how we perceive art, or how it manipulates us in general. Gilbert and George also brought humour to performance. They personified the idea of Art by becoming the art themselves and declaring themselves 'living sculptures. By focusing a humorous attention on themselves on stage as artists they could in a serious vein comment upon traditional ideas about art. There was no distinction between their activities as sculptors and their activity in real life.

Underlying the aesthetic of Campbell's painting are the elemental features of his performance art, the dramatic struck pose, the theatrical use of light and dark, and the ironic sense of humour, all that as it were gave him "the kind of voice that I've worked out"[3] Allied to this, the art of improvisation taught him the ability to change tact in the middle of thought. This has allowed him more formal invention than an academic training in painting might have given him. The discipline of performance gave him a far greater range of possibilities to, he says, those who came out of College with just a painting tradition and with it"too much respect for the medium"[4]

The hallmark of Campbell's painting is the distinctive struck gesture with which he begins each work. It has it's genesis in theatre, the elemental gestures of Giblert and George, and performances where Bruce McLean (Fig. 1) mimicked the convention of posing in art, and in society, undermining it by making it ridiculous. Campbell's ges-

tures seem to be an end in themselves and don't bear a real relationship to the drama of the painting as in 'Young Man surrendering to the landscape' (Fig 2.). While a connection of defeat can be made between the eagle and his prostrate victim, the gesture of the standing figure is in itself meaningless. The pose is therefore stressed as dislocated in this context. Campbell is probably drawing on the role of the pose in theatre. There events are removed from their natural realm in order to be recreated, in an edited form for a purely aesthetic end by the actor. His emotions may resemble those of everyday life, but in the unreal environment, the realm of art, presentation is paramount. Somewhere in between, any form of accountability is lost, the result a complete stylisation with reality as only a provisional entity.

This is in essence what his 1982 performance at Art School entitled 'Poise Murder'(Fig. 3) was about. A cast of six men and women, holding a spyglass and a hammer moved and froze to music played by Robert Ashley on a Vorticish floor with a running track around it. Their gestures, a stylised movement mimiced the sado-masochism of apache dancing referring to real and imaginary murder and in the coup de grace the men killed the women. The finale aimed at a sense of remorse. Inherant however in the sylised movement (the stop-start technique emphasising the gesture) had been an inclination towards danger. Somewhere however in between (when the cast was moving) what might have happened or been implied was lost when the movement froze again. Accountability is mislaid and the gesture implies murder but only by an implied demarcation, reducing the pose to the pulp cliche of newspaper reports. The logic of an implied danger is something that Campbell carries through to his paintings. It is achieved by the displacement of a gesture in a claustrophobic landscape, where it becomes immobile, the logic of it's presence there an absurdity.

The complex considerations that Campbell had when setting performances in motion. props. setting, clothes. locating the cast and lighting, gave him an ability to set a scene which he brought to painting. He had mastered in particular the dramatic use of light and dark which every artist in a realist tradition must be aware of when nature is the model. Dramatic light is used intentionally to further a sense of unreality in the world he creates. It has been said however that he uses the scheme as a facist controlling of spectator response. that he is "engaged with ... some of the techniques of Nationalist Socialist Art, in particular dramatic lighting and perspective from below to pump up the operatic melodrama and pathos of the work"[5] Campbell however I believe is more concerned with emphasising the contrivance of his world via an overt abuse of theatrical devices. In this sense he shares in particular an affinity with the absurdist drama, formulated largely by Bertold Brecht.

They both share a perference for parody. Brecht in his early poetry turned the whole of German literary past (educated as well as it's folk past) against itself. Similarly. Campbell has used as a backdrop for his gestures a parody of the sentimental Scottish landscape of landseer. In drama Brecht believed that an audience's emotional involvement in characters and action tends to cloud it's grasp of the plays message. He tried to shatter traditional stage illusions of reality by using various visual techniques (such as painting not only backdrops but the actual props of the play) and artificial acting styles (with actors actually reading the script in an emotionaless way). This removes the audiences sense of identification with the action and increases it's awareness of the plays moral.

Absurdist dramatists tended to emphasise the illogical and

confusing elements in life rather than any positive virtues. The concerns were rather with the anxieties of the individuals trying to survive in an essentially hostile world. The jarring structure of the plays consistently denied any respite from the absurdities of the time and action. This forced the audience to think critically so that perhaps they could relate what they saw to real life conditions. Sartre, who influenced other dramatists had denied in his work the value of fixed moral codes and argued that each person must choose his own set of values. The archtypal abusurdist drama is Beckett's 'Waiting for Godot'. Stasis and silence are the conditions to which the main characters aspire, two immobilised actors watching the time slip by but going nowhere. The mind has been purified down to it's last bitter and almost unbearable pure negation, and kept alive simply by the force of that negation. The play because it is a play works by arousing responses in the audience. But when it sees the protagonists openly disavowing themsleves from the roles asigned them by the author whilst still conventionally them, the plays ironies deepen.

In a painting such as "Nasal and Facial Hair Reacting to Various Disasters" (Fig 4) Campbell brings the same criteria to bear. The viewer is confronted by a complex arrangement of absurdities that centre on two immobilised figures. Despite their centrality, their gestures make them incongruous to the world they inhabit. This disorientation for the viewer suggests the space which Steven Campbell chooses to situate the critical discourse of his work. It also suggests that the strangeness of the image should be seen as an entity in itself. The disorimentation (making the viewer critically look at the pictorial construction rather than deciphering the events depicted) is thus as vital to the meaning as the actual pigment with which they are made. The pigment is applied in a mock painterly fashion which Campbell calls "total ineptness of the first order"[6] rather

than something aesthetic. It is a perversion of the his-
torical characteristic of Scottish art, but done to seduce
the viewer into the failure of his strategems.

"I see my work as a complete failure. Most people produce
work which they think is successful because it looks con-
vincing, but I produce work which looks convincing, but
which the whole basis of it is a sense of failure absolute-
ly"[7]

The visual language that Steven Campbell made his own,
stemmed in part from the situation of being away from Scot-
land. On a scholarship to New York, he was able to dis-
tance himself from the tradition of Scottish art, and at the
same time assimilate images and ideas that were inherantly
British. He decided to invent a mythology of modern Scot-
tish art, that would parody the traditions of the past.
His decision to paint was mercenary. Being aware of the
international trend back to painting he opted for it on the
premise of exposure for his ideas, not to celebrate it's
revival.

"I painted because I wanted to insult the world of art and
be part of it and do something with it, but I'm not sure yet
whether I did this because I wanted to be a painter or I
wanted to learn what it was like to insult something and be
successful"[8]

Landseer was the obvious choice with his range of craggy
maintains, deer and tweed that everyone assoicated with
Scotland. "In trying to make an art that was nationalistic
in appearance he was the easiest to pick"[9] Staging land-
seer's Victorian pastoral with the dynamics of theatrical
lighting Campbell created a claustraphobic unreal world.
Here his cast of dramatic struck gestures, his hikers, could
encounter events drawn from the absurdist humour of P.G.

Wodehouse's adventures at Week Nook Cottage, which inspired the artist. Beneath a sham aesthetic painterly finish the hidden innuendo could exist locked into the logic of the pictorial world. Campbell was able to re-organise all his borrowed elements into what amounted to be a critical look at the implications of this very re-organisation.

His burlesque figures inhabit a fantastical pastoral world, a puzzling dream world that has the heightened reality of illustrations in nineteenth century childrens books. The compositions are complex, woven in accordance to the logic that befits the pose. On the surface this seems to compliment the prepensity in Wodehouse's characters for ingenious schemes which have a wildly improbable denouement. Each gesture is seen as a reaction of a hiker in dealing with various encounters somewhere between Oxford and Salisbury. The encounters are meaningless in themselves, though their titles suggest meaning as in "Two Humeians Preaching Casuality to Nature" (Fig 6) or "Fall of the House of Nook with Tree Blight". (Fig. 7) "Two Humeians Preaching Casuality to Nature" is a typical Campbell painting of this period. The Hikers have momentarily become Humeians, hybrids, part human, part Humean through a pun in the spelling. The implication therefore is that they are not strictly philosophers, their gestures a fake sign of assertion, their reality, dislocation in a hostile world. Campbell had seen Hume's philosophies endlessly debated on television. The inspiration stemmed not so much from the intrinsic value of the discussions but rather the endless forcing of ideas at the expense it seemed of that value. Campbell has then applied an aspect of Hume's philosophy, his attack on casuality, to his own posturing cast, who try fruitlessly to force order onto their surrounds. Casuality was a principle that stated that nothing can happen or exist without a cause. Hume (1711-1776) a Scottish philosopher believed that although one event always preceded another, this did

not prove that the first event caused the second. The constant conjunction of two events he believed built up the expectation that the second event would take place after the first. But this was nothing more than a strong belief or habit of mind taught by experience. One could never prove that there were casual connections between events.

Campbell is in a sense undermining this by painting a deliberate arrangement of forms that determine each other exclusively. Each element is deliberately considered in relation to the starting point, the initial struck gesture. The Humeian on the left hand side begins the painting, the dramatic diagonal of the tree added to impede any advance he might make. The second Humeian is partly concealed behind the intersection of another tree until a complex meshwork of limbs and branches fuses into an endless cycle. There is no progression. The Humeians are locked into a landscape that is nothing more than a theatrical backdrop eliminating all free space and offering no respite from the claustraphobic web at it's centre. Traditional spatial illusions of reality have been shattered, the second Humeian in particular seeming to defy gravity. A feeling of stasis is achieved and maintained. The figures are locked into a pictorial logic of their own, inviting but also deflecting interpretation. It is an image communicating with itself, a bogus narrative, with the void central to Beckett, a cast doing nothing, wasting time, reducing subject matter to a minimum.

The image then becomes a means for Campbell's real subject, painting and it's conventions. The image becomes meaningless, signs emptied of meaning by their displacement. Throughout the series the signs and codes of pictorial representation are taken apart, deconstructed only to be reassembled with a comic invention. In the struggle to restore order the humour arises but the restored order, the

new rality shows how tentative. how provisional, the exist-
ing nature of relationships between signs are. The sign-
post 'Between Oxford and Salisbury' a recurring motif in the
paintings inspired Campbell (Fig. 8) as a metaphor for his
limiting for the area of artistic activity. The sign be-
comes not only the geographical perameters of the activity
but more profoundly the polarities within which the demarca-
tion between the gesture and the implied relationship it has
to its environment can exist. It is not simply then the
signposting of a fictional world. It becomes a motif for
the rift between pictorial conventions and their accepted
meaning. This had been the preoccupation of his performance
work (Poise Murder). The rift spoken of becomes the scene
of the comic ingenuity. the range of half formed objects,
obscure details, distorted conventions with which the paint-
ings abound. Stags, fish, broken aeroplanes, ladders,
forrestry and people exist in an absurd logic in the pic-
tures.

It is not necessary to understand the diversity of Camp-
bell's references and what in their reassembled state they
are supposed to mean. It is rather. an arrangement that
will have its own pictorial logic. The isolated gesture
which has been removed from a comprehensible sign system
begins each painting. On a blank canvas it allows Campbell
artistic virtuosity. playful invention and irony which
resolves itself by it's own logic. The artist in the
process has displaced the conventions of traditional spatial
logic and relationships between forms. "The painting
starts off as one thing. and it it doesn't work I try some-
thing else. until memory of all these things is in it. but
none of them is particularly true except the one I've picked
to title the work. The picture is a summng up of all the
mistakes. It;s what's left"[10]

The titles then rather than suggesting another meaning

actually chronicle the working history of the painting.
The possibilities for the painting come from the artistic
demarcation spoken of earlier. This demarcation between
the autonomous gesture and it's dislocation in a surreal
world generated around it. serves only to heighten the
provisional nature of reality. Nature, with it's implied
terror. it's sense of impended danger resists man's attempt
to control it. By a fascinated scrutiny on how we see and
represent the world. Campbell has shown that representation
itself is impossible. The only logic therefore worth
consisering is the applied logic of the painting. Paint
then becomes the unifying factor, paint becomes the crite-
rion. the idea of the act of painting being all that mat-
ters. J.D. Fergusson (Fig. 9) (1874-1961) who epitomised
the Franco-Scottish tradition of painterliness, defined it
as an approach conceived by the action of light alone.
"Quality of the paint is the artists statement in paint of
his reaction to form created by the play of light"[11] This
method of belle peinture, richly coloured and finely brush-
marked was what Campbell considered the dirge of Scottish
painting. the banal the second-hand of which Fergusson saw
as exemplary. "The Scots characteristic of independence
and vigour. colour and particularly quality of paint which
means paint that is living and not merely a coat of any sort
of paint, placed between containing lines like a map"[12]

Campbell has taken this tradition of living paint and paro-
died it for a quite different purpose. Without any regard
for formal methods, he has used the paint to articulate
every mistake, improvisation and change so that the end
result is unanimously about paint. Through the unself-
conscious display of these changes and mistakes Campbell
shows his performing progression towards applying logic to
the absurdities of his composition. Paint is the site of
pure conflict, as words were to Barthes when he spoke of
language fighting not by the message of which it is the

instrument but by the play of words of which it is the
theatre. In Campbell the elements of the painting fight in
a parody of their conventional form in paint. Tweed, flow
ers and flesh now have their own code. They exist side by
side in a parodied tapestry, tweed in exaggerated herring-
bone, hair as stylised waves, flesh unhumanly pink and
vegetation tectured with thick impasto. Side by side they
have a language of their own. It is a language of paint.
In many ways the tradition is painterliness, but Campbell
has reinvented the tradition. In over-stating the paint he
discourages too literal a reading of the content, instead
focusing attention on the overall chaotic impression.

Campbell limits himself to six days to complete each paint-
ing. He therefore has to work quickly to resolve each
image. It means ultimately that each resolution is not the
finale of a pre-ordained role, rather the last note struck
in an ongoing debate. The painting is worked out without
the imposure of a formula instead following it's own course
to a unique inventive end.

Cambell's struck pose and pastoral landscapes do not consti-
tute a clarion call for a return to a figurative based
imagery. They are only the means to parody the supposed
logics of pictoral representation. Paint is not used in a
deliberately academic fashion but appears only as a parody
of painterliness. In both aspects, the mind of a conceptu-
alist is at work, the actual execution carried out as a
performanace. It is an operational process rather than an
attempt at an illusion of reality. Despite this Steven
Campbell is seen as leading a return to figuration in Brit-
ain, bringing to bear a Scottish fluency for paint. Where
this myth originated was in the 1985 Exhibition "New Image
Glasgow".

CHAPTER TWO: "THE FALLACY OF NEW IMAGE GLASGOW"

" I understand that there is a movement happening, but the
important thing is to learn whether one is part of it by the
fact that one is there, or one is part of it because of
something which happend accidentally"[13]

Campbell's success in America focused international atten-
tion on Scottish Art.   It was the catalyst for the grouping
of six painters including himself, Stephen Barclay, Ken
Currie, Peter Howson, Mario Rosso and Adrian Wiszniewski
under the auspicious banner "New Image Glasgow" in 1985.
This led to a belief, compounded by the hype surrounding the
show in a renaissance in Scottish art.

While Wiszniewski had achieved considerable success in
London (with a painting of his recently acquired by the Tate
Gallery) the other four artists were relatively unheard of.
The repercussion for Campbell was that the grouping was an
opportunist seizure of the enormous interest he had generat-
ed.   His artistic intentions might then suffer by associa-
tion with artists of a quite different concern.

The 'new' in the title was not valid according to Marjorie
Allthorpe Guyton.   She refers to Campbell and Wiszniewski,
whom she claims the market were tracing and who "had been
the (willing) victims of more dealer hustling, more unre-
served acclaim and more unguarded criticism than any other
British artists of their generation"[14] The more cynical
side to this was a widespread feeling that the Glasgow
painters' success stemmed solely from market hype.   Follow-
ing the success of British sculptures such as David Mach in
New York the market place was looking for canvas equivalent-
sy which they found in the bold, easily read yet idiosyn-
cratic work of the Glasgow painters.   Campbell's quirky
sense of humour was seen in particular to appeal to an

American market as an epitomy of Englishness. There was
therefore the feeling that the painters grouped by Alexander
Moffat, the curator (and tutor to all painters when they
studied at Glasgow School of art) were merely satisfying the
market. Moffat was criticised personally for opportunism
"pan handling wares of decorative talentlessness"[15] The
show it was claimed in the same review was a mixture of
ambivalences, that the group was not a group and that figure
painting was the only shared concern. Clarke sees the only
real link between these artists being Moffat himself, the
show a careerist exoneration, a timely seizure of popular
art for a completely aulterior motive.

Richard Chapmann the Third Eye Centre organiser had con-
firmed the contemporanious aspect of the six painters whom
he said were "unified by the adaption of a manner of deline-
ating the figure and applying paint that can be traced quite
specifically to moments in the history of art (past and
present implied)"[16]. The alignment however with modes of
expression however new and already known gave the painters
an automatic ready—made context for their work. This could
be seen as something aimed specifically at the market.
Perhaps those celebrating the painters overlooked the eco-
nomic factors determining the forms' content and direction
of art. The market demands for easel painting corresponds
with a shift to the right in the social fabric of Britain
during the Thatcher years. The decade not only saw a
greater interest in the arts, but a more conservative taste,
favouring safe and unoffensive options in painting. The
question to ask was whether the qualification for New Image
Glasgow painters came from existing or potential economic
success? The commercial viability of these artists (some-
thing that Campbell had shown already abroad) should not be
confused with an artistic unity of purpose. There was a
feeling that Moffot's studio at Glasgow School of Art which
had always favoured a dynamic figurative history painting

formed a personal bias in the selection. Moffat however had his own reasons.

In 1965 he and John Bellany had strapped their paintings to the ─railings outside the Royal Scottish Academy (Fig. 10) buildings in Edinburgh to protest against what they saw as "the submissive, the safety first the sickeningly sweet, the mercenary"[17]. What they fundamentally challenged was what passes for tradition in Scottish Art, namely the pursuit of the painterly at the expense of everything else. The approach as already discussed (chapter one page 13) in relation to Fergusson was confined almost exclusively to landscape, the salient mode of experiment.

Moffat's catalogue essay echoed his earlier grievance. He rejected the past as parochial and dull, the painters of "wee harbours and fishing boats"[18] in favour of the new painters attempting international stature.

"The new generation of Glasgow artists have with their uncompromising paintings staged a convincing revolt against this dull traditionalism, re-establishing these links with the main currents of modern art and thought which were an essential part of all progressive art movements earlier in the century"[19]

Although Moffat was to deny in the same introduction that they were uniformely a group, the implication of a similar response to current international trends was suggested. While they may have worked in comparative isolation from one another at Art School, they were grouped to be seen as a hope that Scotland was taking a place in a context wider than her natural boundaries.

The context within which all artists worked was a return in the 1980's to painting as a more direct expressive means.

This led to a new concern for subject matter and image making. It was seen as a challenge to the formal pre-occupations of the 1970's where painting as an art form was generally phased out. What was more in favour was a critique of the relationship in a work of art between the idea and the expression. Conceptual art addressed the idea rather than the result and performance was considered a means to make more accessible ideas on which the making of art is based. This is the background that Campbell came from, bringing his ideas now to painting as it was revitalised at the beginning of the decade. A Cologne based group, the Mulheimer Freiheit intitiated a return to painting coming as they felt from a conceptualist cul-de-sac. Their aim was to engage painting, not as an academic craft, rather vis-a-vis the holy writ of the establishment, and so turn it proverbially on it's head. A premium was put on energy and what resulted was often brash and outsized imagery, subjective in it's approach. The latter seemed to contrast with the conscious emphasis on anonymity that lay at the heart of much minimal and conceptual art. The act of painting was once again seen as a positive virtue, with no constraints by theory or dogma. The lack of respect shown to the medium was not only marked by a tendancy to overstate, but also by a pluralism in the range of subjects depicted. Taking directly from the past was regarded not as eccleticism but as a function; a curious anxiety to find models from the past to appropriate to ideas of the present. With the removal of hostilities to the act of painting came a desire for cultural identity, which had not been a perrorgrative of conceptual delimiting of the focus of art.

This optimism ("extravagantly promoted in the bienniels and art markets"[20]) for painting was symptomatic of the Glasgow painters. It was manifest by a desire to deal with contemporary issues against the styles of previous art historical conventions. Adrian Wiszniewski (Fig. 11) in his baroque

line and heightened colour is obviously indebted to Russian and Polish folk art. Yet he uses it as a borrowed language to present a contemporary though obsessively personal adolescent world. Peter Howson (Fig. 12) has combined elements of observed realism, his low-life urban characters heightened by the imagination to an heroic if somewhat overstated stance. In technique there is an exaggeration of form that draws from a tradition of Beckmann and a north European expressive realism. In the same way Currie (Fig. 13) takes a model from the past without denying his source. His aim was the creation of an epic socialist humanist art. By implication that required a democratic language realised by a realism in form and content. In his attempt what has resulted are steryotypical figures, a cast of emphatic gestures arranged in an overtly literal system and style. The debt to Leger and Rivera the Mexican muralist who shared similar socialist concerns is obvious.

Campbell's use of the figure as discussed in chapter one came not from the figure in painting, but the figure as theatrical gesture, the role of the pose in suggestive meaning.

However, the centrality of the figure, well drawn and confidently painted was seen as the unifying factor among the New Image painters. This was acredited to the formal teaching from life at Glasgow School of art, which had retained it's traditional methods throughout the 1960's and 1970's. Yet by admission the depiction of the figure "by a rejection of a hard-worn mastery over materials"[21] seemed to nullify any decension from the older generation of British figurative painters. An exhibition the previous year at the Tate Gallery showed among others the School of London under the pretext 'The Hard Won Image'. The 'hard won' image pertaining almost exclusively to a study of the human form, was cited as being a work of strong independent reality, true to

the subject and thoroughly wrought, "that it should speak to the totality of an independent entity, something that the artist has realised so fully that though virtually indebted to its source is no longer dependent on them"[22]. The hard won image was thus an intense study (with some of the artist's work on show taking years to complete) that attempted to find an equivalent of reality on canvas though with varying approaches. Freud painted only subjects he knew in a raw pitilessly factual existence. Bacon subverting all illustrational elements, seeking only an art to embody the sensation of reality without the boredom of its conveyance.

The methods used by the New Image painters seem as antithetical to those of the Hard Won Image painters as do their aims. With the former the figure is a hero, not in a real world, but in the novelty of the pictorial space, once more legitimated by the revival of the craft. It is this reestablishment of the figure that is endlessly the theme of these paintings. In Scotland, the figure historically had been largely unexplored, sealed by an aversion to narrative which was seen as the rite of literature. The preference for landscape reflected what Ken Currie called "sheer amateurism, coupled with feeble ambition and a raging paranoia about being influenced by political philosophical or literary ideal"[23]

The feeble ambition has been replaced by something almost over ambitious and unable to contain itself. Currie, Wiszniewski and Howson (along with Campbell the best known of the New Image painters) have embraced the re-emergence of figurative painting with enthusiasm but also with naivety. The Joie de vivre, the overt subjectivism that characterises their work lacks the same intellectual inquiry into pictorial representation that Campbell brings to painting. The enthusiasm is eclipsed by the derivitive nature of their styles, and the childhood images and myths of the past are

treated in a largely uncritical way. Wiszniewski's addescent dreamers and Curries proletariat are simply portrayed in the obvious literal narrative of the paintings. However if the characters in these paintings are heroic in execution, they are dreamers in nature. In search for an issue-orientated art, the issue is perhaps stated more than any real imaginative exploitation of the aesthetic or function of the figure.

If there was any connection, any sense of a genuine movement for Campbell, it was negated by a degeneration into the formalist pastiche of Stephen Conroy. (Fig 14) Associated as the second wave of New Image painters (and exhibited alongside Campbell in 'The Vigorous Imagination' exhibition two years later in Edinburgh). Conroy was quintessentially what Campbell had criticised in Scottish art. His painterly academicism seemed lucrative only because of its unchalleng-ing attractiveness, and lucious nostalgia for the old Masters. For Campbell this signals a reversion back into the establishment belle peinture, acceptable, adroit. The only pretext then for the survival of New Image Glasgow is its commercial viability.

"I don't think it will last as anything intellectual, be-cause for an art to go on, it must consume its youngest child, which is New Figuration"[24] The irony then is that what Campbell was initially considered a creator of, de-veloped into that which he had left Scotland to avoid.

In the same year as the New Image Glasgow Exhibition, Alex-ander Moffat was a selector for the British Art Show, the second of it's kind. While the 1990 British Art Show focused on work of recent British Art College graduates, the 1985 show sought an historical chronology. Those repre-sented were the major contributors to a critical debate on British art in the previous decades. Both Campbell and

Wiszniewski were selected. In placing them alongside artists such as Kitaj, Spencer, Burra, Bellany and Bacon, Moffat created a vague lineage, as if the two Glaswegians represented the contemporary state of these narrative paint- ers post-war battle with abstraction. This however would be a misnomer. It was not so much the creation of a line- age as an equation of contribution to an ongoing debate.

Campbell's painting has nothing akin to the aspirations of the older generation of British figurative painters. His improvised technique often spontaneous and by the same token slap-dash is diametrically opposed to the effort implicit in the hard won image already discussed. His abuse of the medium, and disregard for the conventions of figurative based representation place him outside the hopes of the earlier painters. Neither does Campbell owe a debt to a Scottish figurative tradition, John Bellany being the major post-war personality. He is however a precedent for the other New Image painters.

Bellany had himself been inspired by Josef Hermann, a Polish imigre who in the 1950's had introduced an expressive figu- ration to Scotland. Hermann's work dealt with man's situa- tion in a contemporary context though with a continuous perspective of his past and of the great art from that past which has helped define human experience for us. Bellany translated these ideas to his own localised world of the fishing town Port Seton where he was born, painting sub- jects (in a part mythical, part symbolic way) that were known to him from his own experience. He polarises the painterly concerns of Fergusson, laying emphasis on human values rather than on formal values of expression and co- lour. Bellany thus seems an obvious link to Wiszniewski, Currie and Howson in particular. They too deal with sub- jects very close to themselves and use the rejuvenated medium of paint and models of European styles with which to

depict them in an overtly subjective vein. The new there-
fore implicit in these painters is more accurately a renewal
and one dictated by fashion. Campbell however has engaged
himself with something more critical than an alignment to an
international trend. He deals with a wider question of
what is art and what sort of art can he make. The parody
of past English figurative elements is not a celebration, or
a continuity of that history but a critique. It becomes a
language that turns on itself. He unconsciously implies
some revision of established norms in every work, making
these revisions explicit as subject matter. The result is
the ironic comedy, the humorous invention with which each
canvas abounds, that truely makes what Campbell alone
achieves seem new.

CHAPTER THREE: 'BY ORDER : NO HUMANS'

"The kind of art Ruskin supported was an art which looked outward, beyong itself and which only seemed to be moving, and convincing if the spectator was willing and able to bring a full range of ideas and enterprises to bear on its elucidation"[25]

Campbell engages his viewer initially as was said, by the attractive painterly surface of his work. This rich sensuous quality of paint is directed "to seduce people into believing what I want to say"[26] However his great ability is to re-organise the visual language he draws from his nations past into a new reality that engages with the real present. His capacity to personalise his multifarious sources with a subversive ironic sense of situation elevates his art to something more than just dealing with a fictitious past. In his re-invention of the past he strikes a balance between stamping his own personality on the work without slipping into a form of self-expression. His art can be both humorous and analytical, the image a timeless improbable resolution that will convince in the hopes of Ruskin by accommodating the inquiry possible in the spectator. It is this capacity to subvert his manifold sources with an imaginative logic that breaks down the taboos on what defines and delimits art.

"The more I understand things it seems like this idea of absolute knowledge and an understanding of one thing seems to be more and more stupid. As soon as an idea is made solid in the world something happens to destroy it, all the ideas, seem to be more and more like this. So when I use and abuse knowledge and information and ideas, it seems to me that I'm one of the most honest artists around"[27]

This suspension of an ingrained way of thinking, the subver-

sion of traditional logic, probability and logic is what links all of Campbell's work. His fascination for science and philosophy and pseudo-science and pseudo-philosophy leads to the construction of absurd but somehow believable scenarios to take various ideas to their logical conclusion. He delights in upturning the rational and examining the way our mind tries to made sense of what he creates.

"I try to do paintings which are part of an argument. The painting itself is a debate where the different ideas are colliding in the image. The painting itself as thats happening is trying to explain these things"[28]

Campbell's hero of his second major exhibition was by admission interested "on a strictly amateur level"[29] in Science. It could almost be autobiographical. Campbell's vocabulary is drawn from a wide range of topics, a mass of second-hand pulp, informational drawings illustrations and old books. A slavish itemizing of these sources would be a near impossibility. The intention however is not to use the various themes and references for an investigation into their own intrinsic value and meaning. Rather they are used purely superficially as tangential scenarios to suppose but not ratify a situation. The situations in this case (twenty six in all) are introduced by Campbell himself. The protagonist, a beekeeper by profession but part amateur scientist moves to a small town, designed so that it can only grow in the direction, east. Consequently the centre of the town is in the west. He lives by the railway which traverses the town thus affording greater mobility. He is aware of a town (which at a distance seems to be made of gorgonzola cheese) and is amused by this and remembers Wodehouse talking at length about cheese mites and their impish ways. Disenchanted with his situation he heads west. Campbell then uses the man as a device to explore a world of convoluted encounters until he eventually returns to see his town

moving, carted away by termites. They carry away all his possessions and with them the last piece of the town, a sign which read West bound to termite town.

The twinning of interests part scientist part bee-keeper combine to give this man a particular viewpoint which colours everything he sees on his journey. The stage is then set. In one episode "English landscape with a Disruptive Gene" (Fig. 15) the beekeeper encounters two hunters walking in unison in a large green landscape. They appear to have lost something, a disruptive gene (cloned from a man and a dog who pretends he is a lobster) who is in fact sitting on top of their rucsacs. Oblivious to the fact that he is there the hunters stand bemused. On the surface the gene represents the constant metamorphosis in Nature, which despite Darwinian theories on the order of evolution still confounds man. As the gene changes, so too our theories are disrupted. The painting reflects this. If it is impossible to apply law to nature, then it is folly to expect the same for paint. The logic of the world then becomes the logic of the paint, as it follows in tangents the flux inherant in this world. Each painting therefore evolves itself into an encyclopedic vista with its own imaginative life, which in turn requires an equally imaginative response from the viewer.

In the culmination of the adventure, the centre-piece "By Order No Rhinos" (Fig. 16) Campbell synthesises all aspects of man's stupidity, in one of his most imaginative paintings. The bee-keeper comes to a field and considers it safe to cross because there are no rhinos visible. However the sign is broken. The Rhino appears and the victim shocked by the Rhino's blithe indifference to the rules set down by human beings walks onto a sweeping brush that was lying on the ground. The brush handle smacks him on the nose causing his shadow on the sign to ressemble that of a Rhino's Horns.

Perhaps the shadow suggests that the ordering human had no right to suggest such a law. Perhaps the sign should read By Order No Humans. In the tree above the sign, the last element, the most important becomes apparent. A man bearing a strong ressemblance to the struck bee-keeper emerges from the branches to seemingly direct the latter forward with his hands. Is the message then that man orchestrates his own demise. In the arrogance to attempt a control of nature, to order where there is disorder he fails. He has no-one to blame but himself.

In a later exhibition 'The Frozen Gesture' the same themes are continued set now against theories of art history and architecture. In the introduction Campbell is described as "an artist detective, an archaeologist of sorts, digging around for clues in the time takes him to complete a paint-ing. The clues like the plot are left unspecified, vague behind a veil, where the mystery, no less than the victim is the space of the painting. The hikers of earlier paintings have become critics, architects, builders playing on the analytical stage of Modernist pursuit. Stages are loaded with questions that are cited in the space of the plot and which locate a particular dialogue between representation and perception which ultimately questions the validity of those modernist tenets"[30]

Campbell once again employs the salient dramatic frozen gesture. The implication is still that the gesture has no indiginous meaning yet it is still the discursive heart of the painting. In the gesture movement and time are arrest-ed, the gesture is meaningless as a gesture but in its impediment its theatricality represents that space between the imagined and the real. In 'Down there between a Rock and a Hard place' (Fig. 17) the gesture is enacted according to be arrested. The men are not so much knocking down the building but recreating time. Their sledge-hammers make no

contact perhaps suggesting a time before the building was built and the quarry mined, perhaps suggesting the future, the ambition of the architect realised. Perhaps it is the destruction of the building, the replacement by one architectural vanity by another in an endless cycle. What Campbell here provides is a space where that which might gauge reality, the action of the worker with the hammer no longer points in any true direction. Its depiction in a world of artifice undermines the language of painting to make representation clear.

The use of the theatrical painted back-drop stressed the artifice of the world designed by the gesture. In' Pursuit of Mediocrity / We Present the Dream Home' (Fig. 18) the tasselled almost tapestry like curtain contains a landscape of the Greenwich Observatory which the dream house has a view of. It is a view which is unreal and has been pointedly determined by the artist alone. Continuing this theme a group of architects sit contemplating the plans of the house. They wear the same clothes (echoed by the skittles behind them) and sport masks on their heads making them as faceless as the buildings they build. These masks originating in Ancient Greek drama transformed the actor into a particular character just as a word or phrase can be taken to have two different meanings. The irony here of course is that even when sporting the masks the architects remain just as faceless as they would be without them. They are closed off from reality in their own contrived system. The reality of the branch and cages are just regarded as being intrusive on their ordering of dreams into mediocrity. The concern therefore is with artifice, reducing all representation to a meanginless activity, so as the architects are closed off from reality the artist himself is closed off, fustrate in a contrived system of signs.

What Campbell has brought to bear to painting ultimately is

an attempt at a new realism, based on the exposure of dogmas and signs, subverted from a variety of sources. It is an art that turns on itself to engage the problems of artistic representation. His paintings become a deconstruction of the codes that constitute this artistic representation. Theories of deconstructive criticism were first applied to the study of literary texts. It is an approach based on bringing a radical scepticism to texts, that unfolds their elemental contradictions. The contradictions exist because the complexity of language (and similarly pictorial signs) cannot be guaranteed to convey one single meaning, one contained reality. The individual signs and words that made up any language are arranged by their author to convey his meaning. It cannot be presumed however that a reciprocal understanding of that meaning will exist with the viewer or reader. Deconstruction is a study of the ambiguity of lan guage and signs, that gap between the idea and the execu- tion. It is a secondary reading that undermines the appar- ent meaning, the unambiguous truth of the text or an image. The result is a subversion of that text or image's apparent meaning. Campbell strives for a more general condition. Far from seeking a single and complete experience he allows through an emphasis on the gap spoken of an infinite number of artistic responses. It is part of a wider post-modern debate that turns overtly to other art forms to deny their singular authority, forcing an overall reassessment of the process of textual production. The referral is then to the medium and hardly through the medium to the real world.

The writer lyotard cited post-modernism as essentially a world suffering from aloss of faith in systems. Art forms he believed now distrust external critiism to the extent that they have sought to incorporte critical commentary within their own structures. Self-reference becomes a fascination. The self becomes a way of constructing things to come to an understanding of how language and other sign

systems constitute all human understanding. It is a crisis
promoted by the realisation that since human understanding
is articulated in language and language is strategy of
contradictions then language cannot articulate an authentic
understanding of humans. Campbell's form of critical com-
mentary is parody. Parody in a sense removes him from his
work, denying him an authorative subjective self-expression.
Instead he functions as a purveyor and realistributor of
someone elses ideas experiences and images reorganised with
an ironic sense of humour in an attempt at self-legitimiza-
tion.   What results in an incapacity to name, to illicit a
meaning though there are clues and references which the
viewer can reassemble. Disorientation is an end in itself.
It is where Campbell places himself in the critical dis-
course of his work, yet at the same time makes the work
intact. It discusses itself. It deconstructs itself.

CONCLUSION: ON FORM AND FICTION

Campbell's last show to date 'On Form and Fiction' at the
Third Eye Centre (March 1990) sums up what he had been
saying individually in paintings of the past in what amounts
to being an installation. Drawings and paintings now play a
supporting role in a total production.

Campbell had always hated the Third Eye Centre. He was
uncomfortable about showing his paintings there so the
concept of the show grew from a very specific response to
that gallery. He wanted to deny the space by tranforming it
completely. One hundred and fifty acrylic drawings wall-
paper the darkened space, on top of which he had spot-lit
ten large ornately framed acrylic paintings. (Fig. 19)
Each painting is surrounded by its supporting drawings
demarcated by a narrow band from its neighbours. Antique
furniture and household plants were placed in the room and a
re-mixed version of the song Je t'aime played in the back-
ground.

According to the artist there was an intentional Kitsch
element in the orchestration of the show. "I lit it to give
it a beauty, I wanted to seduce people into the knowledge
that this is a manipulation, you are manipulated, art manip-
ulates"[31] The attempt therefore was to say something about
how art in general is perceived, and so the installation
took on the ambience of a museum, to invite the viewer to be
willing or unwilling participants in the performance.

Campbell is now broadening his argument from individual
paintings to a much wider critique. He attacks the gallery,
the institutional forum upon which art is displayed for
public observation. The theatrical lighting is Campbell's
way of generating a mystical aura in the gallery which
reflects a general reverential attitude synomymous with the

place. As the gallery is seen as a place that promotes art to a status where it is above questionning, Campbell presents the assumed masterpieces (by their highlighting) as not what they seem. Deliberately badly painted they undermine the gallery's monopoly as the priveleged place for the supposed best of art.

The tone is then set by this theatrical transformation of the space. Campbell is orientating the viewer towards an overall impression, not towards conclusive results in the individual works. There is an underlying comic mode that becomes a tool of exposition, the uncovering of art as an array of devices tricks and conventions. The darkened space presents the entire concept as a whole and the spot lights manipulate our applied assumption that the larger pieces are the foresaid masterpieces. On closer inspection they are deliverately badly painted. While drawn from the studies around them they are not brought to any relatively higher degree of conclusion. The implication however was that they would be the most technically possessed. The artist however has situated his meaning in the initial response directed at the spectator. The distance he invoked from the works by isolating them in a parody of a gallery/museum was the distance at which he wanted to keep the work. Before trying then to unravel each painting, the viewer has been warned (whether understood or not) that this is a manipulation. If the initial warning was not understood, then a closer inspection of all the work will testify to Campbell's overall strategem. This deliberate incompetence is the furthest he has come to dismantling the conventional sacred ground of a realist concern. This he undermines deliberately by further reassembling his representational forms through a parody of the conventions.

It is a defiance of what Ruskin believed was the only truth worth considering in art, the faithfulness of imitation

giving the image authority solely by vitrue of the degree of
its resemblance to its object. The emphasis in Campbell on
badly formed work heightens his opposition to that distinc-
tion between badly done and well formed as a validation for
representation that is true.

To emphasis his continual undermining of pictorial conven-
tions Campbell parodies his own paintings. 'Not you as well
Snowy' (Fig. 20) is a repeat of an earlier painting 'Hiker
in a landscape Turned into a Marsh Overnight' (Fig. 21)
which may reflect the dilemma that art can only deal with
the same old subjects, in a recycling of a variety of repre-
sentations.

He has come full circle. Now he appears to examine the
codes of his own work, which had been the treatment of the
existing codes of visual culture. Consequently he creates
an even further distancing from his materials placing him-
self even further outside his work. The self-parody im-
plicit here shows he has begun to distrust the context
dependent nature of meaning of even his own work.

Perhaps this suggests for Campbell a movement again away
from painting. 'Two Men in Pursiut of Simplicity' (Fig. 22)
risking all the elements of a painted storm in search of the
ultimate encounter, the white (unpainted) sail, suggests the
terror and possibilities of the blank canvas.

In comic mode then Steven Campbell constructs a serious
purpose to discover what a painter can be or rather in more
general terms to explore the particular and peculiar forma-
tions of visual culture within which the artist must func-
tion at the present time.

Yet if this is a satire on himself it may be a warning that
he has said all to be said in painting. The movement to

some other medium will prevent repeating the themes once
again, the repetition in painting of ideas and conventions
that he was at pains to invalidate.

FOOTNOTES

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2. Steven Campbell
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5. M. Allthorpe—Guyton
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10. Stuart Morgan
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11.   J.D. Fergusson
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12.   Ibid p.70

13.   Steven Campbell
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14.   M. Allthrope-Gayton
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15.   William Clarke
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16.   Richard Chapmann
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17.   Alan Bold
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24. Steven Campbell
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25. Euan McArthur
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26. Steven Campbell
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30. Andrew Wilson
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                          (Oil on canvas)

17. Steven Campbell   'Down There Between a Rock
                          and a Hard Place' (1988)
                          (Oil on canvas)

18. Steven Campbell   'In Pursuit of Mediocrity / (1988)
                          We Present the Dream House'
                          (Oil on canvas)

19. Steven Campbell   Installation at the Third Eye
                          Centre Glasgow 'On Form and Fiction

(1990)

20. Steven Campbell   'Not you as well Snowy'   (1990)
                          (Acrylic on paper)

21. Steven Campbell   'Hiker in a landscape Turned83)
                          into a Marsh Overnight'
                          (Oil on canvas)

22. Steven Campbell   'Two Men in Pursuit of Simplicity'
                          (Acrylic on paper) (1990)

Fig.1

Fig.2

Fig.3

Fig.4

Fig.5
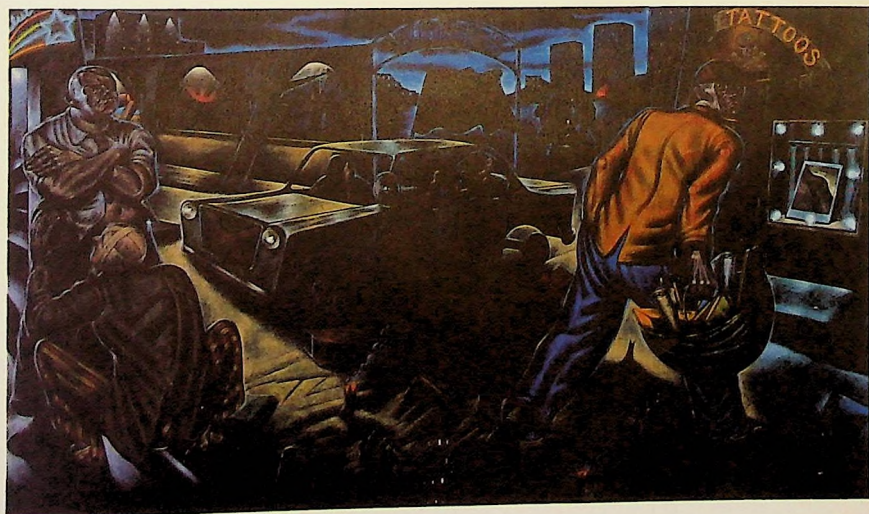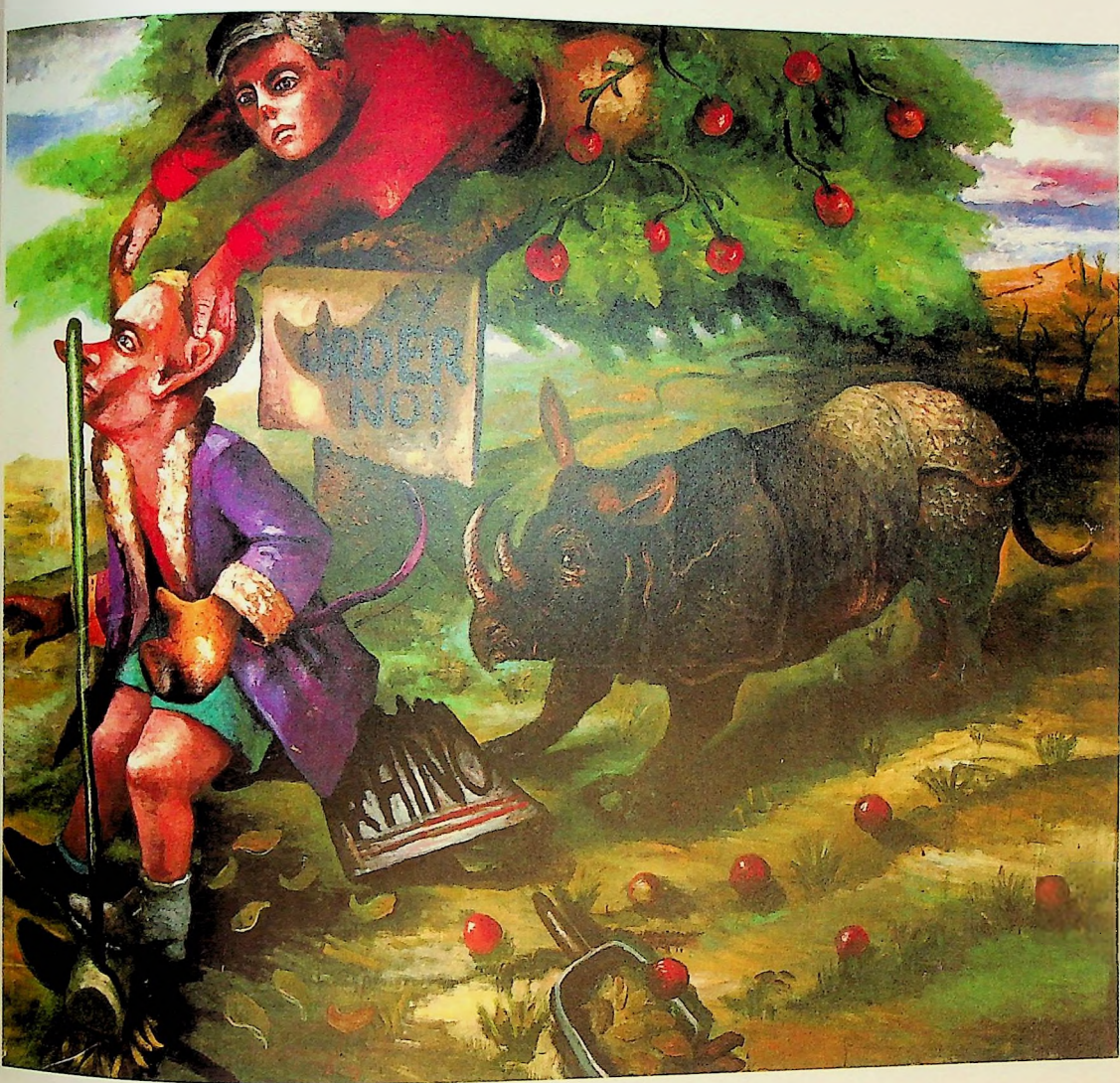
Fig.6

Fig.7

Fig.8
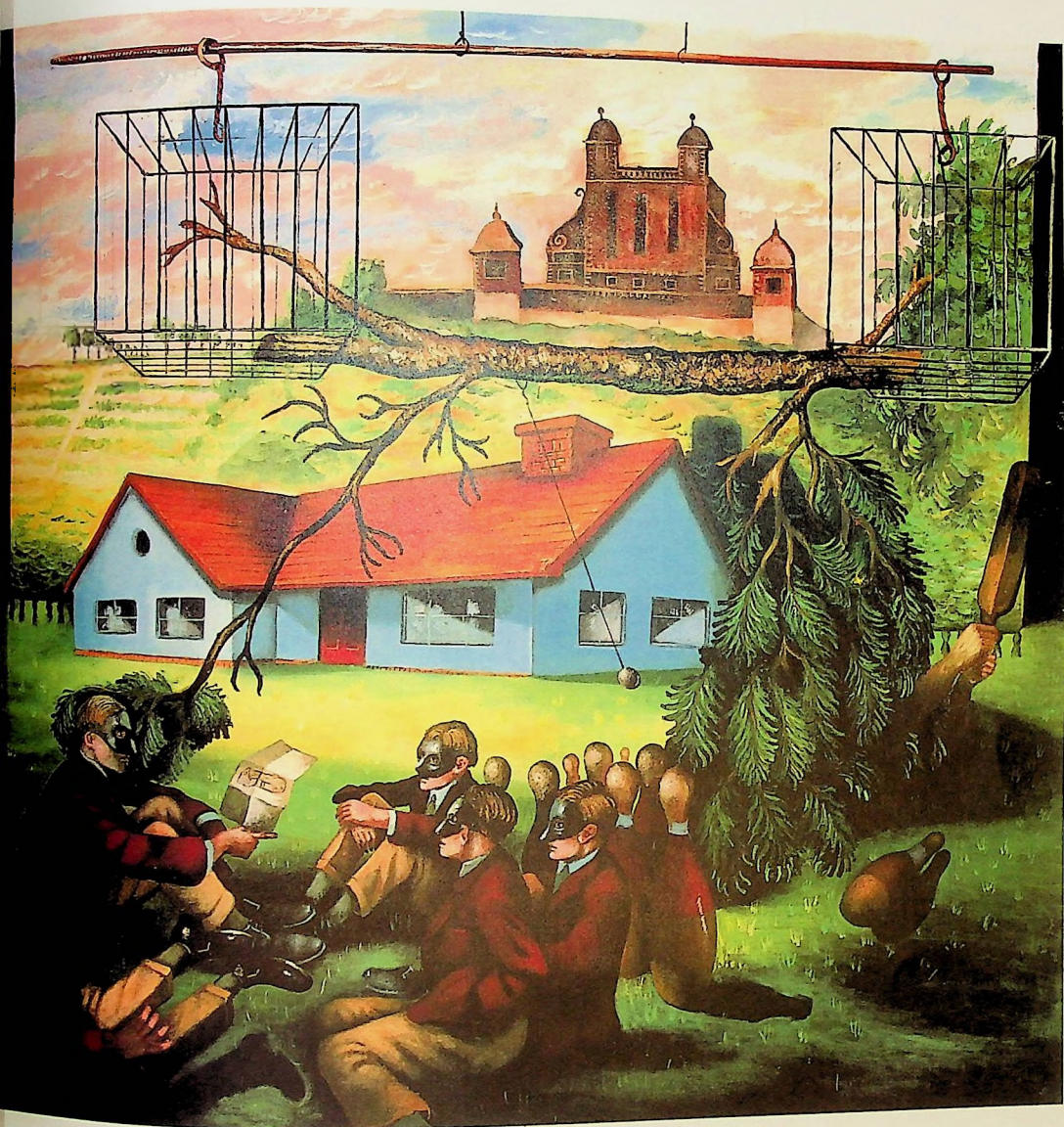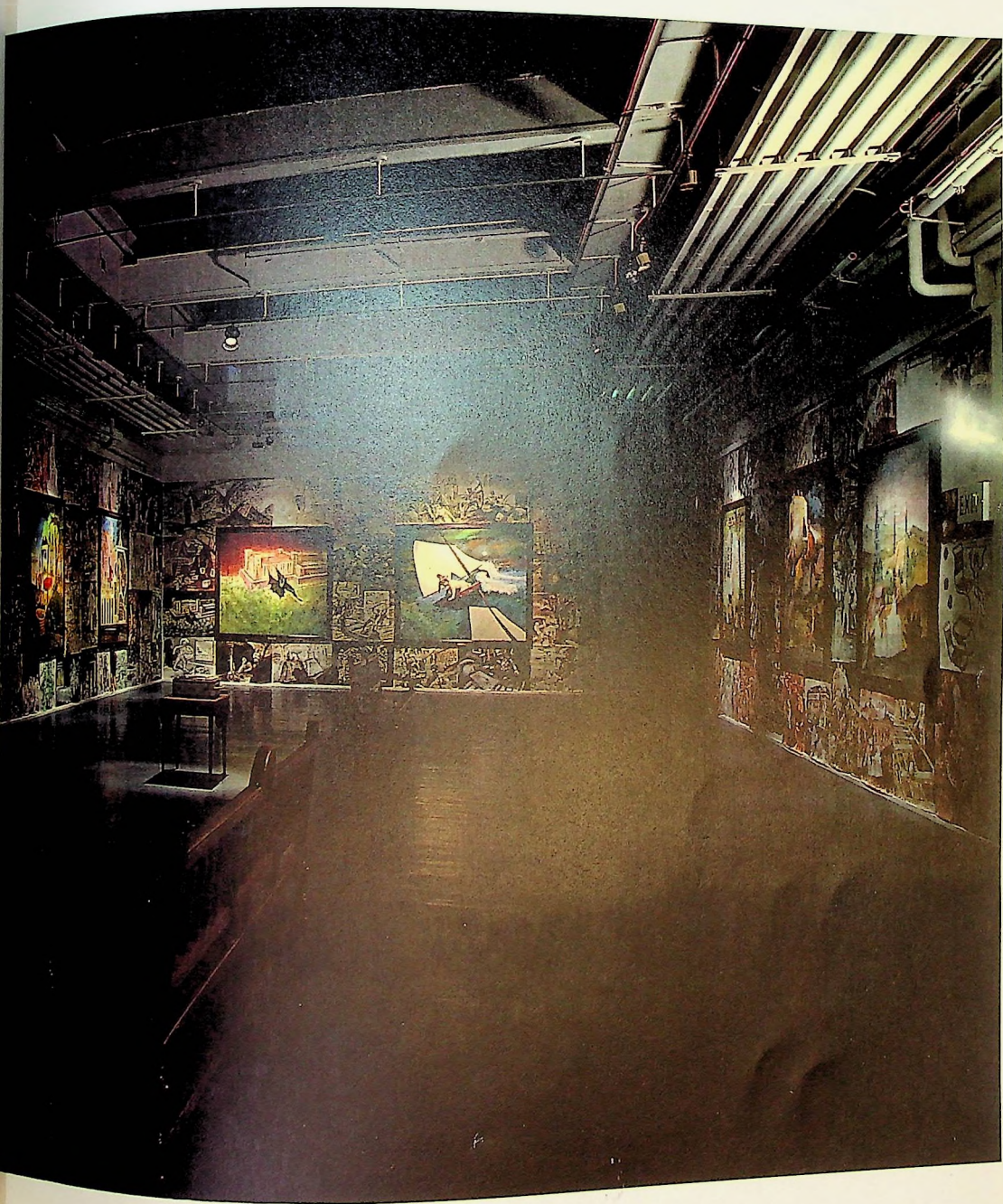
Fig.9

Fig.10

Fig.11

Fig.12

Fig.13

Fig.14

Fig.16

Fig.17

Fig.18

Fig.19

Fig.20

Fig.21

Fig.22