

In 1979 the L.A. Louver Gallery presented an exhibition of British figurative painting and drawing entitled "This Knot of Life." It featured the work of ten painters and celebrated the strong presence of these individual artists following a period of critical assault on the viability of the act of painting as a relevant contemporary art activity. Many of us recognized that this had been an absurd attack, one that had its theoretical premise grounded in the rejection of drawing from life as part of studio practice and one of the foundations of art education. Much has been subsequently said of the so-called conceptual art movement and the dematerialization of art. It is now worth noting that the vast majority of its exponents are now quite happily making art objects and, dare I suggest, paintings of a sort. They have also given birth to a number of younger artists who not only cannot draw but ironically, in the grab-bag world of art fashion, are trained to take a thirty-second glimpse of art history and make immediate analogies between their T. V. inspired ideas and the life's work of Giotto, Velasquez and whomever else they quickly appropriate out of the hat as a substitute for the hard work of really looking.

R. B. Kitaj made reference to the presence of a School of London painting in his catalogue essay for the 1976 exhibition entitled "The Human Clay." Since that time, art critics have laid claim to this as a term of endearment that has its foundation in the work of six artists in particular: Andrews, Auerbach, Bacon, Freud, Kitaj and Leon Kossoff. The politics of the London art world and in turn, of the British art establishment, has shifted its support from one foot to another in order to embrace this notion and give credence to the idea that Britain has given birth to a new art movement—one that will stand the test of time and be counted alongside the French and the Germans and their legacy of Impressionism and Expressionism or whatever "ism" you favor. During the past eight years exhibitions have been mounted in Britain that have celebrated this idea and have specifically travelled the country with the support of the Arts Council. Also, many international exhibitions have been presented far and wide by the British Council while featured articles have gone on to discuss the idea of a school of London painting in various art journals. Does this mean that an art movement is in the making and that London should be recognized as an art capital to rival Paris at the turn of the century or New York in the post-war years? Probably, for a moment, but it is a movement that I suspect will be as correspondingly brief as the time it takes to comprehend the essence of a popular magazine. Soon the focus will shift to another city, Cologne perhaps, or some other cultural contender. However, when the dust has settled what will remain for posterity are the strong individual artists who are, after all, the real reflection of our time. This exhibition has set out to examine the work of a number of these individual British artists. It cannot be comprehensive, but this show does serve to reflect upon some of the personal interests and commitments to British art that have become an integral part of L.A. Louver Gallery's exhibition program.

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