

Britain's best on view at local gallery

A special two-part showing of paintings and drawings by British artists is on view at the L.A. Louver gallery, 55 North Venice Blvd.

The show, entitled "This Knot of Life," will eventually bring contemporary works by ten respected British artists to the Southern California audience.

The works, unified by attention to the figurative, run counter to many trends popular in contemporary art tastes.

"In Britain, in spite of all the changes of fashion dictated by the art world itself," writes Peter Goulds in an introduction to the show's catalogue, "certain consistent ideas have prevailed. This exhibition brings together a group of British painters who are preoccupied with making pictures that explore the figure and human landscape.

"To a generation in the seventies, their influence has been a thorn in the side of the argument that painting is dead."

Goulds, who is director of the L.A. Louver gallery and the curator of the current exhibition, amplified some of his thoughts to a reporter.

"I do believe the 70s were a very fragmented and difficult time in the arts," he said. "People tried to make sense of what was happening in the arts. Theory dominated in the latter part of the 60s and into the 70s. Some would argue it has dominated since the war.

"A lot of issues were put to rest by the forces that supported the art world, by critics, writers, galleries and museums.

"In England it isn't the active art world as we know it here. There are not so many art galleries. Most work is sold to foreigners or the state.

"The notion of artists earning a living from art is not generally as true as in this

country. An artist can be successful but not be able to make a living at it.

"Rather than being negative and counter-productive, this has developed a strength of character in British painters. Their care for artistic issues has carried on in relative isolation. I think that makes for very good painting."

Rather than being swayed by the shifting currents of contemporary art fashion, Goulds feels the provincial situation in Britain has allowed the artists to concentrate on their personal primary artistic interests.

The works on view at the Louver include recent paintings by David Hockney, who is currently working in Southern California, Lucien Freud, Sir William Coldstream, Howard Hodgkin and Euan Uglow.

The representation of British artists in this show, Goulds feels, is bound together by common interests and concerns, developed independently. That unifying knot is the emphasis on figurative painting and human landscapes.

Hockney, who is well known in this country, studied at the Royal College of Art. Goulds calls him "a tremendously powerful artist" who is currently painting his responses to Southern California's street scenery and portraits exhibiting his enthusiasm for art history.

Hodgkin, a trustee of Britain's National Gallery and a former trustee of the Tate Gallery, paints abstractions but Goulds explains that even that work begins with literal figurative subjects that remain faintly recognizable under layers of paint.

Euglow, who teaches at the Slade School of Fine Arts, shows a concern for the edge and picture plane in his work. As a former student of Sir William Coldstream, Euglow

[continued on the next page]

[from the previous page]

carries on some of his mentor's classical concerns.

Coldstream, a former trustee of both the Tate and National Galleries, is a noted art education. Goulds feels his concerns are classical and date back to the painter's association with Augustus John.

"These things are carried on, not abandoned, not discarded or wasted. He does not believe that they are no longer relevant to our time. You can see it in his work," says Goulds.

Lucien Freud, a grandson of Sigmund Freud, has also taught at the Slade School of Fine Arts. Goulds describes Freud's draw-

ings as having a "psychological tension. There is a tension in the relationship of the figure in the picture to its environment or to the artist painting it."

The first half of the show will remain on view at the local gallery through November 17th.

It will be followed by works from five more British artists opening on November 27th and running through December 22nd.

Frank Auerback, Francis Bacon, Peter Blake, R.B. Kitaj and Leon Kossoff will be represented in the second half installation.

The gallery, located at 55 N. Venice Boulevard, is open from noon to 6 p.m., Tuesdays through Saturdays.