Gillian Ayres- Recent Paintings

Exhibition 7 October- 19 November 1989
Admission Free

Gillian Ayres (b. 1930, London) is one of the most highly regarded painters at work in Britain today. Since the 1950's she has, with constancy and assurance, developed an abstract vocabulary which is both profound and highly personal in character. She has characterised her output over the years as the unfolding of a unique, intuitive process. That travel, music, literature and mythology have influenced this process is suggested by the diversity of titles such as *Dido and Aeneas, Madrigal, Papua* that the works bear.

The exhibition presents a comprehensive selection of the large-scale paintings which Ayres has been working on over the last three years and, in addition, includes a number of pieces on a smaller scale. Ayres herself has indicated that all of her paintings are on a 'human scale' reflecting the movements and natural parameters of her own body. Nonetheless even the more intimate works are intended to affect the viewer "to get something of the quality of grand things in nature, but to make the paint itself do it". Simultaneously their rapturous sensuality immediately transmits to the viewer Ayres' delight in the possibilities of colour. The paintings are striking for their visual variety ranging from the most delicate of harmonies to the most turbulent discordancy.

The immediacy of the work reflects the directness of Ayres technique, which often entails beginning work on a canvas with her hands. This improvisational, even crude method is offset by long periods spent by the artist simply standing back and looking. This process is further complicated by her willingness or compulsion to rework paintings, sometimes over a period of years. It is the extreme intensity of contemplation and visual analysis which permits Ayres to set up compositions which rely largely on colour for their articulation and structure.

The round painting, or *tondo*, a form traditionally associated with images of religious contemplation during the Renaissance and the Baroque periods, has been adopted by Ayres in a number of works of recent years. A symbolically loaded form, emphasising harmony, unity and perfection, it also poses a particular difficulty for the artist in the absence of any horizontal or vertical anchorage for the composition. Ayres adapts to the form with relish, allowing it to emphasise the expansive curves of her own visual vocabulary.

This exhibition is a revised form of a show organised earlier this year by Arnolfini, Bristol. It will subsequently continue to the Castlefield Gallery and the Cornerhouse in Manchester.

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