

time it is possible to see the European Catholic and missionary contribution stirred by this very danger to the adaptation of new methods and new attitudes, such as those that seem to be implied in the two Roseveare incidents.

Heard and Seen

KOKOSCHKA

Kokoschka is one of the few great modern painters that the art-publishing trade has not preconditioned our minds to. The usual jading influence of a torrent of monographs so bamboozles the mind that, by the time one gets to the pictures, an assessment is the last thing the mind is capable of or inclined to do. The reason for his escape from this kind of attention is, I suspect, because Kokoschka has nothing in common with the art movement that nearly monopolizes our attention, the school of Paris; he is outside the tradition of Paris, owing nothing to the discoveries of the early years of this century there. His unique personality is so secure in its own conviction that far from being in need of lateral help from a 'school' he defies any categorization at all. He cuts across any attempt to label him. The question of style which is so central to any evaluation of modern art is brushed aside with protean energy, and it is this unexpected impatience that is the most disturbing and individual quality of the retrospective exhibition at the Tate Gallery.

However extreme and exuberant the artists of the school of Paris were, they possessed that precise instinct for balance and interval in drawing and painting, that instinct for measure that enables even their more unconsidered pictures to retain an authority because of it. Kokoschka's balance in drawing and painting is imprecise; not only the more obvious lack of it in the paintings but the subtle lack of it in the drawings, gnaws away at our confidence, however attracted we are by the verve and vitality which almost persuade us that the qualities we miss are not central to the problem of all art. In Kokoschka's painting the intuition seems to have been given full scope and a decisive divorce from any idea of intellectual clarity. One might think here is the ultimate ideal of what the romantic artist aspires to be—always protean, verging on the inchoate, with more than a dash of madness. These qualities he shares with Soutine, perhaps more remotely with Altdorfer, qualities of expressionism verging on vulgarity which have never been welcomed in the Paris tradition.

The almost reassuring traditionalism of subject is deceptive; it is only when one looks deeply into the paintings that colour and the deliberate lack of

definable interval begin to play on the spectator in a strangely hallucinatory way, contradicting the stability and concrete nature of the subjects he paints. In all the paintings there is an underlying element of frenzy, of dionysiac fury, a Panic urge, which is the central communicative nerve, and this incessant oscillation not only confuses one's sense of place but also, within each individual painting, one's sense of time. There is nothing to pin down and the attempt at definition becomes an act, a crime, against life fatally disrupting the Shiva-dance of the elements composing the picture.

Kokoschka is undoubtedly one of the three great portrait painters of our time. The early portraits, those done before the first world war, are compulsive in their characterization, the colour is eerily phosphorescent, the atmosphere is claustrophobic (a quality which grows in the middle period paintings), and there is a definite feeling of marionette-like instability in all the sitters. I do not believe that this is anything to do with the time and the society they were painted in—the idea that they are a reflection of the world of Robert Musil, etc., is perhaps too obvious an explanation. The decline and collapse of the empire, and the experiences Kokoschka had during the war when he was almost fatally wounded, did not so much influence the direction of his path but accentuated qualities and defects which were already fully established in his art. These qualities implicit in the early portraits, become more obvious in the middle and later periods of his life.

In the pictures painted after the war, for instance, the 'Self-portrait with Crossed Arms' and the 'Power of Music', the feeling of immanent change of unbalance, combines to produce an art of such claustrophobia as to be almost suffocating. The achievement of the colour range is an extraordinary *tour de force*; vermilion, ultramarine, green, blue, ochre and pink jostle each other; and this violent juxtaposition is emphasized by the very texture of the paint. In nearly all the pictures of this period the precise point of balance of the figures is never defined; all give the impression of being in the act of moving or of losing balance in some way, and this, in combination with the colour, is intensely disturbing. Yet there was a marvellous resolution to the extreme position Kokoschka had come to, and it is now that the great landscapes appear, with their amazingly intricate structure of accent and counter-accent.

In Kokoschka's landscapes all the accent is in the colour, vibrating, illusory, cutting across the form, never still, baffling definition; colour which is emphasized by the brush, sometimes heavily loaded, sometimes very thin, constantly eliding and changing direction. This dazzling display of skill is exhibited against the counter accent, i.e., the subtle underplay of duller earth-colours and the occasional definitive passage of drawing. One is vivified and enriched by the breathless exuberance of the performance, with its command of point and counter-point; at the same time the effort to grasp the intricate structure is too much and the spectator retires exhausted and baffled. There is a definite feeling not only of exhilaration about these landscapes, but also of vertigo and panic, which does not only lie in the colour pulling the eye from point to point with-

out rest, but in the complete absence of any stabilizing horizontals. Certainly the diagonals give a tremendous breadth to the picture, but because they are not classically placed they produce a feeling of unbalance, as though the ground were heaving and receding under one's feet.

The only modern parallel to these paintings that comes to mind, apart from some of Soutine's is the series of variations by Francis Bacon on the self-portrait by Van Gogh, in which the horizontals have been deliberately distorted and slide down the canvas to give a sickening feeling of instability and illusion, but the comparison is less than apt, perhaps, because of the enormous divergence of the two artists' intentions. Kokocshka's fascination consists in his ambivalent power to exhilarate and confuse the spectator at the same time; Bacon uses diagonals purposely to disturb the spectator in the most intense way.

The landscapes recall historical precedents too, Rubens, Turner, Altdorfer. The breadth of Turner's 'Burning of the Houses of Parliament', the atmospheric insight in his 'Rain, Steam and Speed' and the cosmic energy of Altdorfer's 'Battle of Alexander the Great', not to mention the colour, are all brought to mind in these remarkable paintings. What is missed is the masterly placing of the horizontal intervals which makes Rubens in his last landscapes, such as 'Baucis and Philemon', such a great artist.

It is in the last pictures by Kokocshka that the restraining counter-accent of dull colour is disposed of and a vision which is already incandescent, is transposed into the interior brilliance of the prism. Subtlety is deliberately jettisoned and as a result the large compositions evaporate into decoration, losing precisely that force that a more sensitive colourist, such as Monet, kept.

PATRICK REYNTIENS

Reviews

THE QUEENS AND THE HIVE, by Edith Sitwell; Macmillan; 42s.

The reign of Elizabeth I is a perfect frame for a canvas by Dame Edith Sitwell. Feminine, intricate, gorgeous and terrifying, the story calls out the highest craftsmanship of this erudite and evocative poet. Dame Edith has called her study *The Queens and the Hive*, implying in the latter part of the title the elaborate cellular structure with its female principle, its doomed males, the dripping mass of honey, the myriad poisoned darts. But she has deliberately put the first part of the title in the plural, reminding us that, for a major part of the story, there was a rival Queen-Bee in England, the imprisoned Queen of Scots. A rival in every way, legitimate against illegitimate, married against spinster,