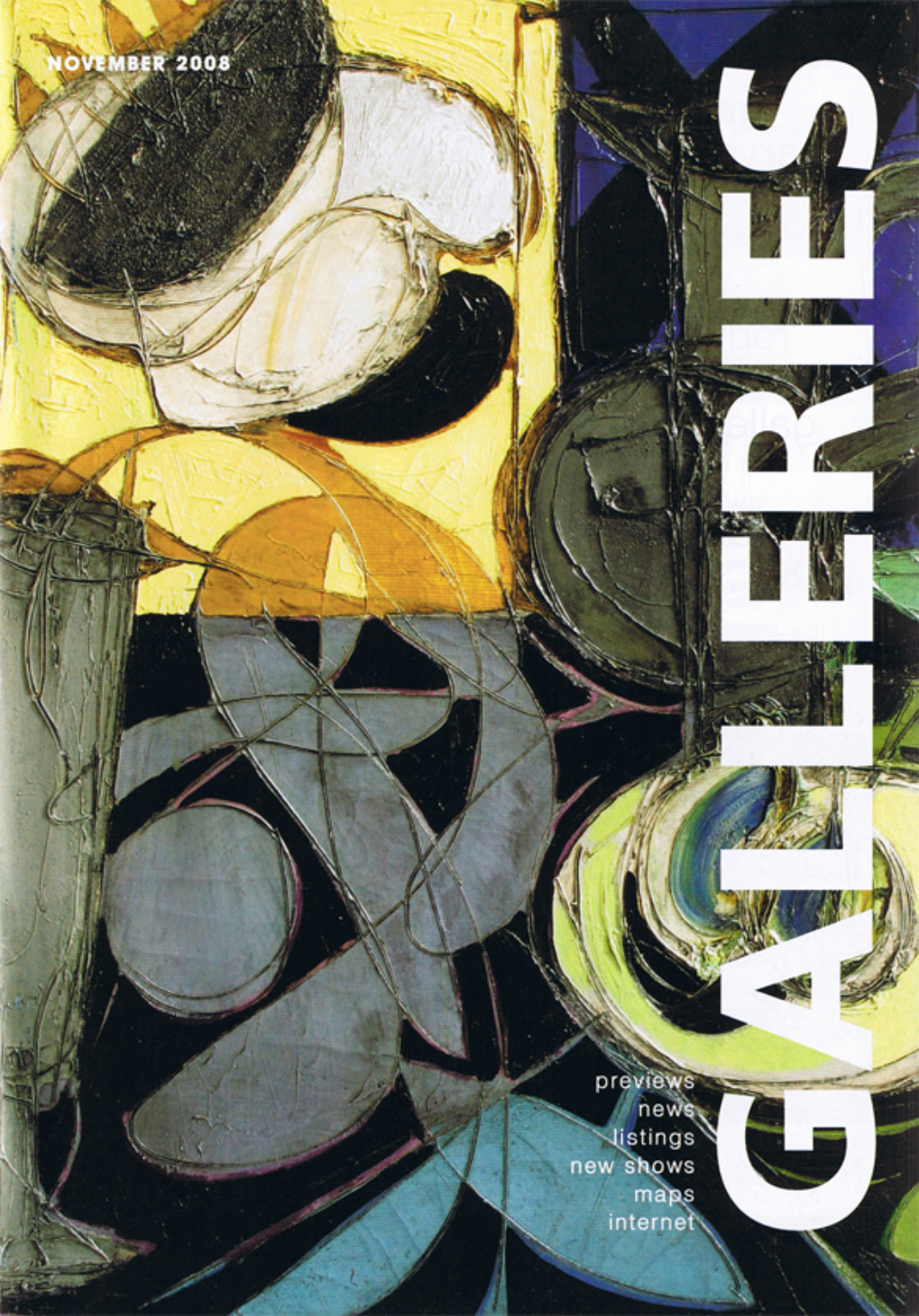
NOVEMBER 2008



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FOCUS ON BATH

Teresa Newman

The tourists are still out in force in Bath's shops and pubs, visiting the art galleries, apparently unfazed by looming recession. The dealers are philosophical too. Fifteen years ago, when I last lived in Bath, there were not many of them and the prevailing taste tended to the decorative and provincial. Since then, of course, the antique dealers have moved out and their premises have been colonised by living artists. Now there's a wide diversity and broad, enthusiastic client base.

November, largely local and West Country in flavour, promises some real treats. At the **Victoria Art Gallery** Peter Lanyon's rediscovered Cornish masterpiece, the mural *Porthmeor* of 1962, forms the centrepiece of an important loan show curated by Tony Hepworth. It includes the surviving original study, some post-war paintings and other works of the early 1960s – a time of revolutionary change which preceded Lanyon's early death. There's also a small show of Barrington Tabb's colourful, expressionistic cityscapes of Bath and his native Bristol – a passionate even visionary blend of memory and observation.

At **Beaux Arts** you can see Andrew Crocker's traditional-seeming English landscapes, with hints of strangeness – sleek contemporary pots by Emmanuel Cooper and bronzes by the Irish sculptor John Behan, whose bulls, ghost ships and charioteers reinterpret classical Greek or Irish myths for a modern audience.

The **Adam Gallery** often bring their London artists to Bath – most recently Hsiao Mei Lin and Barbara Rae. This month it's the turn of local Bath artist Celia Cook who is showing her bright and uncompromisingly abstract canvases. Using free, sometimes biomorphic shapes, she plays with colour and direction to negate the flat surface and create 'virtual' constructions. One to watch.

By now you may feel like patronising one of the excellent eateries around the Circus. After lunch, you could visit **Mauger Modern Art** in nearby Bartlett Street. For three years Richard Mauger has been challenging Bath's comfort zone, gaining a following with his stable of cutting edge contemporaries. November's revolving show includes Robert Bradford's plastic toy-covered constructions, Harry Simmonds' striking tonal portraits and Bristol-based Patrick Haines' poetic lines-in-space: his thorny branches (found and cast in bronze) with birds aloft, are deeply meditative.

Half-way up Brock Street, now becoming something of a hot-spot, is **White Room**, specializing in quality limited edition prints. The young owners favour geometric abstraction and op art (they stock prints by Bridget Riley, Vasarely etc) and currently have a delightful small show of Victor Pasmore. Meanwhile just across the road you can find the eponymously named **Brock Street Gallery,** this month showing vibrant paintings by Cuban artist Raul Speek. Then, close by, in Margaret's Buildings, **Anthony Hepworth** presents Peter Joyce, a landscape painter of lyrical vision, who has swapped the cliffs and hills of his native Dorset for the flat, watery marshlands of the Bouin countryside in the Vendée. Some impressively large paintings here, with viewpoints typically tilted up to a high horizon. They map distinctive features of the land – patterns of sea, beach, canals and fields, footpaths and fishing boats enclosed by harbours. But most are highly worked small paintings on board, some shaped, some collaged, all textured. Joyce is a wonderful draughtsman: criss-crossing these landscapes are networks of fine scribbled lines evoking fishing nets perhaps, or power cables, with an occasional scaffolding of sweeping black strokes. Delicious, affordable little works! ■

Full details of a dozen Bath Galleries may be found on map 14

From top

Patrick Haines 'Hermetic Bird' Mauger Modern Art

Peter Lanyon 'Upbeat' 1962. Private collection. Victoria Art Gallery

John Behan 'Ghost Ship'. Beaux Arts

Peter Joyce 'Polder Vanne' 2008 Anthony Hepworth