Special Room, Workmen's Hall

Pit survivors brittle and stiff
Like naked trees with roots in slag.
They play—twisted over long tables
With buckled arms moving in slow arcs
And notched fingers like crotchets over dominoes.
In their leather faces webbed with blue seams and time
Stare eyes over-ripe from long staring in pits.
They return each day to this bleak musty room
Bewildered and forgotten to play out time.

Heard and Seen

THE DUNN INTERNATIONAL

Who are the hundred leading artists in the world today?' The question is as pointless, and the answers as problematic as those of any competition, which offers a Mini-Austin or a fortnight in Majorca for two, if only you can guess the right combination of qualities in a detergent. 'Leave it to the computer', is ultimately the answer. But, in the meantime, if you are Lord Beaverbrook you can ask Sir Kenneth Clark, Sir Anthony Blunt, Mr Gordon Washburn, Mr Gabriel White and Mr David Carritt (with the help of Mr Alfred Barr of the New York Museum of Modern Art), and their choice will at least be that of the Best People: a list of which any fashionable gallery would be proud.

The Dunn International Exhibition, originally shown at the Beaverbrook Gallery in New Brunswick, had the merit of giving the Tate Gallery five weeks of moderate excitement. You were confronted at the very outset with some examples of 'pop' art, notably Robert Rauschenberg's *Trophy II*, complete with a real glass of real water on a chain (part of the picture? or a precaution against theft?), and Robert Indiana's *The Demuth American Dream No.* 5, a series of circular posters, which seemed to say very firmly that nothing was being left out. And, oddly enough, very little *was* omitted if the exhibition was intended to reflect the current scene. Even the high proportion of abstract expressionist paintings, regretted by 'M. Beaverbrook' in his (her?) foreword to the Catalogue, is a faithful enough representation of taste and achievement alike. Nevertheless, the sheerly repetitive accent of this principally American

idiom could easily become a bore, especially when, as in such a painting as Ellworth Kelly's *Red blue*, the uncompromising rejection of any echo of tenderness, even, reduces the picture to a degree of abstraction that is simply of mathematical interest.

There were in fact some astonishingly skilful figurative paintings, such as Richard Diebenkorn's *Woman in Profile*, and Lucian Freud's characteristically cruel and clinical *Hotel room* provided an English example. Some celebrated names were missing, but Miro's *Le disque rouge à la poursuite de l' alouette* was a welcome reminder of his zany genius, and a fine set-piece (*Santa Maria della Salute I*) by John Piper, and a characteristic *White relief* by Ben Nicholson and one of Ceri Richards's many *Cathédrale engloutie* studies, were a comforting assurance that not all the leading artists are American.

The Prizes (sensibly awarded to six artists without any assessment of an order of merit) seemed to go to the odd men out, at least in the sense that Ivan Albright's very personal account of city poverty and Alex Colville's extraordinarily exact realism (*Dog, boy and St John river*), as well as the abstractionism of the Japanese Kenzo Okada and the American Sam Francis, represented a highly idiosyncratic vision. That was welcome, if only as the sort of diversion which made you wonder why these particular paintings were chosen. And you could always return to the Graham Sutherland *Toad* for reassurance, and to the Picasso *Femme nue sous un pin* for proof that, whatever else may be true of contemporary art, it is certainly far from asleep.

PEREGRINE WALKER

SEMANTICS AND THE ADMAN

When commercial television first arrived to challenge the BBC monopoly the advertisements were in lordly contrast to the unending fatuity of the actual programmes. There was even a cult of the advertisement amongst those who were unwillingly committed to sitting in front of a television set with friends and relatives, and endless thousands breathed faintly audible sighs of relief when pretentious and incompetent plays were interrupted by the frolicsome whimsy and manly exhortations of the advertisements. Today, the advertisements no longer form a gay interlude in a slough of despond. The plays are better, the current affairs programmes are possibly better than those of the BBC. The advertisements slide insidiously into view, metamorphosed from their rather charming prototypes into something strange and unnerving for they too have changed and bear as much relationship to the early primitive advertisements as contemporary newspaper advertising does to that of 1864.

This has been gradual, and has perhaps been unnoticed by those who treat television advertising with glib contempt, an audience attitude appreciated and even welcomed by the market research experts who find such a conventional reaction pathetically easy to circumvent. Perhaps the biggest change has been in the angling of the advertisement. At one time the voice behind the advertise-

ment spoke down to the viewer, who was advised in a courteous Oxbridge voice to buy this washing-powder, that cake mix. The only exception allowed was the comic rustic voice for rural specialities such as cider and eggs. The Oxbridge voice is now heard much less, and except in prestige products like certain cigarettes, chocolates and watches (often imitation prestige products only), he is giving way to what used to be called a 'common' voice.

Similarly, the 'customer' in the advertising film, who occupies an analogous position to the viewer, has been up-graded. In the case of washing-powders she is often well-spoken and is a good deal more presentable than the 'adviser' or 'salesman', and she listens to the sales-spiel with a good-humoured contempt creating an immediate empathy with the viewer at home. The viewer identifies with this decidedly upper crust consumer, and because the customer in the advertising film is aware that the distinctly common salesman is on to a good thing, so this awareness infiltrates the viewer, who is also encouraged to feel patronising and superior. All this is done with accent indicating social levels rather than dialect denoting areas. The accents particularly favoured are those of a slightly ambiguous kind; the flat Midland 'a', the lazy dropping of aspirates, and the deliberate mispronunciations of words, the implications being that such words are found difficult by everyone. What might be termed the all-the-same-under-the-skin syndrome.

Although the use of class accents alters the entire meaning of the advertisement, it is just the manipulation of an existing word-pattern, though it does provide the opportunity to hammer in the message, not for the benefit of the customer viewer (who is obviously too intelligent for that kind of treatment) but for that of the salesman speaker (who is, equally obviously, one of the underprivileged and needs to get his own ideas in order). Yet it does appear that gradually the word-patterns are altering to accommodate the new angling of advertisements. They are losing the literary flavour, and the airy-fairy stuff that copywriters are supposed to dream of, the 'cool as a mountain stream' touch, has already an archaic flavour. The new trend is towards spontaneous ad libbing, if possible coupled with unrepentent enthusiasm: this is amply illustrated by one of the recent washing-powder ads where the only superlative used is 'wonderful'. But this is used three times in as many sentences. Five years ago, such a script would have got for the copywriter a speedy dismissal.

The pursuit of the lowest common denominator has the seeds of despair already present in it. In the United States the swing back towards nobilmente advertising has already started, but they are still one stage ahead of us, a stage we have barely infringed. The coining of new verbs, e.g. 'unzip' a banana, 'unpeel' a can, has begun.

Within the next couple of years this is a trend we must expect to see extended in Britain. The philologists even now are sharpening their pencils.

RONALD PEARSALL