

World of Interiors 1 November 2018



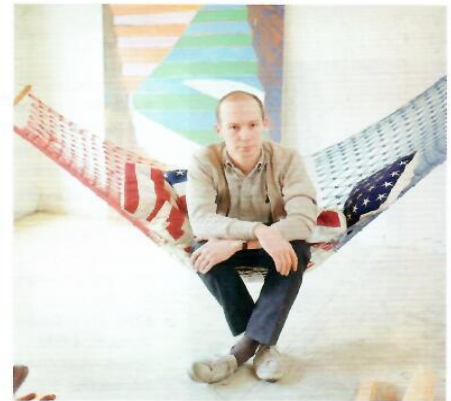
Richard Smith HAZLITT HOLLAND-HIBBERT Bury St, London SW1

It's said that Richard Smith was a quiet man. The British painter was a stylish dresser with a natty haircut and a moderate passion for jazz. But after he sailed for New York in 1959, he made himself a splashy presence. He took a downtown loft, collected uptown friends and mixed with fast types. He scored shows at the Green Gallery, the storied, short-lived venture of the rake and impresario Richard Bellamy. And he returned home to accolades and shows at the Whitechapel Gallery and the Tate; oil tycoons fêted him at the Venice Biennale.

By the time he died, in 2016, changing fashions had made his reputation as silent as the man himself. But with the market now hungry for candy-coloured abstraction, and Smith's output coming with pedigreed supporters from those early days, the London gallery Hazlitt Holland-Hibbert has assembled an ambitious survey of the early paintings, stretching from the time he arrived in New York on a two-year Harkness Fellowship, to 1963, shortly after his return. The show's curator, Marco Livingstone, reads Smith as a Pop artist, based on the work's references to cinema and magazines and the quotidian world. Generally, a title will point, and a pattern will riff: *Trailer* (1962) might have started with a design on a passing truck but this is splintered into a glorious fantasia of chiming hues. *Packet of Ten* (1962) begins with the pleasure of opening cigarettes and makes it a Pop opera of silhouettes. Livingstone notes that, while Smith's contemporaries in New York, such as Claes Oldenburg and Andy Warhol, were drawn to downtown grime or suburban banality, Smith looked uptown to the dreamworld of Madison Avenue advertisers. Some would say that his manner is too abstract for Pop, and see his roots instead in post-painterly abstraction, the high formalism of Color Field painters such as Kenneth Noland and Morris Louis – and Smith did go to visit them in Washington, DC. But while those painters could be sober and cerebral, Smith's is a hazy landscape glimpsed obliquely through the fuz of that second lunchtime martini. His pictures are hot under the collar – though that collar remains, like the man himself, buttoned up. Painting a tribute to Marilyn Monroe in 1959, he shyly titles it *MM*.

Really, with buoyant, stylish and puzzling designs such as *Pack* (1962), who cares to argue? Again, the picture's inspiration might be lowly, but Smith transforms it into a star under floodlights, a gliding candy stripe. How did his fortunes fade? Alas, tastes in painting changed, embracing more forthright and expressionistic moods. Smith left the fray for the English countryside; and sometimes life was more fun than work. He could also be too leftfield for the market, his pieces being sometimes highly sculptural, with canvases shaped into bizarre geometric reliefs, like commissions for Brutalist bus depots. The academic critics might have a taste for this nowadays, but the collectors, the oil billionaires, the rakes and bon vivants, they just want the pizzazz of these early pictures for their walls. And who can blame them? RICHARD SMITH: UPTOWN/DOWNTOWN 1959-63 runs until 14 Dec, Mon-Fri 10-6 ■ MORGAN FALCONER teaches at Sotheby's Institute of Art, New York

EXHIBITION diary



From top: *Pack*, 1962, oil on canvas, 172.7 × 213.5cm; Richard Smith in his studio, Bath Street, east London, c1963, photographed by Lord Snowdon; *Trailer*, 1962, oil on canvas, 213.5 × 152.4cm; *Kent*, 1962, oil on canvas, 121.9 × 129.5cm

Financial Times 3-4 November 2018

18 ★ FTWeekend

Critics' choice

Life&Arts

Visual arts Jackie Wullschlager

Richard Smith: Uptown/Downtown 1959-63
Hazlitt Holland-Hibbert, London

In the late 1950s every one of the young generation of British painters who would in different ways engage with pop art – Hockney, Hodgkin, Joe Tilson, Peter Blake – dreamt of living in America, but the first to go, in 1959, was the now little-known Richard Smith. The effect was immediate: in heroic-scaled canvases of joyous saturated colour and voluptuous brush marks there appeared punchy elemental shapes and decorative designs subtly referencing corporate logos, packaging, illuminated advertisement hoardings, the entertainment industry. The zigzags and half circles on gestural grounds in “Flip Top”, “Tip Top” and “Packet of Ten” inspired by cigarette cartons, the shimmering orange slab interrupted by green dashes around the edges in “Billboard”, the repetitions of semi-circles and diagonals suggesting strips of celluloid and the repeated frames of film in “Trailer”: in Smith, a tough urban stance transformed abstraction into a witty, exuberant

pop idiom without losing sensuous, refined painterliness.

As this revelatory exhibition of neglected but superb, thoughtful work shows, Smith’s was a tightrope act but the pictures feel intuitive, fluent, alluring as their glamorous consumer inspirations. Effortless too were Smith’s high/low connections, then innovative, between, for example, rich tactile brushwork, layered films of printed colour in mass market magazine photographs, and application of make-up to human skin. “MM” translates a photograph of Marilyn Monroe into languorous abstract marks and succulent hues. A trio of incomplete but suggestively three dimensional red circles stands in for the Andrews Sisters singers in “Patty-Maxine-Laverne”: human heads, or lipstick lips open wide in song, or theatre spotlights? The wit and ambiguity of apparently simple forms, and the soft, lyrical focus on a hard-edged world, are a delight.

hh-h.com to December 14

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Richard Smith's 'Packet of Ten' (1962)
Richard Smith, Foundation/Hazlitt Holland-Hibbert/Andrew Smart

FT Weekend 1-2 December 2018

Richard Smith: Uptown/Downtown 1959-63
Hazlitt Holland-Hibbert, London

Last days too for this bright, energetic, revelatory show of the unsung contemporary of David Hockney and Peter Blake. Smith was the first British artist of that generation to work in the US, fusing abstraction and pop in witty, sensuous, large-scale, high/low compositions.

hh-h.com, to December 14

The Week 10 November 2018

Where to buy...

The Week reviews an exhibition in a private gallery

Richard Smith

at Hazlitt Holland-Hibbert

Although his reputation has waned in recent decades, the late Richard Smith (1931-2016) can probably be counted among the most interesting British painters of his generation. Smith has routinely been described as a pop artist, chiefly on the strength of the colourful, zesty paintings he created in the 1960s – many of which took small, and apparently dull, details from consumer products and turned them into magnificent abstractions that were closer in spirit to the work of Barnett Newman and Mark Rothko than to that of Richard Hamilton or Andy Warhol. A selection of these pictures is on display at this new show, which casts a look at Smith's wildly inventive, infectiously optimistic early work. In his hands, cigarette packaging becomes totemic, while the pockets of



Flip Top (1962) 213.5cm x 172.7cm

a pair of Lee jeans are transformed into an expanse of sky blue, the white stitching traversing them like the vapour trails of jet engines. It's truly thrilling stuff. Prices range from £100,000 to £250,000.

38 Bury Street, St James's, London SW1 (020-7839 7600). Until 14 December.

Artlyst 14 November 2018



Richard Smith: Uptown/Downtown 1959-63

I was very much struck by the effortless elegance of the Uptown/Downtown series of paintings by the late Richard Smith, which have gone on view at Hazlitt Holland-Hibbert. Dick Smith (1931-2016) died fairly recently, at a reasonably ripe age, and these paintings come from early in his career – 1959-1963. Some were made during a residence in New York, culminating in a show at the then influential Green Gallery in 1961, others very soon after he came back to the UK.

It's hard to think of any British artist of a similar age – late 20s to early 30s – who is making art with this kind of authority now. Or, if a young artist or group of artists with a similar kind of confidence does exist, why they are still underground? They haven't succeeded in 'emerging', despite all those Tate and Arts Council claims concerning the help they give to young artists today.

One asks oneself why not.

It's true that Smith made his appearance at a crucial moment and had the good luck to do so in a particularly favourable environment. At the end of the 1950s, beginning of the 1960s, the torch was being passed from Europe to the United States, and in particular from Paris to New York. In

Hazlitt Holland-Hibbert

Modern and Contemporary British Art

New York itself, Abstract Expressionism was about to be challenged by Pop Art. A pivotal moment, which I have good cause to remember since I was there on the spot, was Roy Lichtenstein's first solo show at Leo Castelli, in the Fall of 1962.

As the paintings on view at Hazlitt Holland-Hibbert show, Smith's work was allied to Pop Art, but not really part of it. In particular, it owed a lot to commercial packaging, such as flip-top cigarette packs, enlarged to grandiose size, and perhaps even more to New York's huge hoardings and sumptuous window displays. He was never an aficionado of the humbler, more demotic elements in Pop.

As Robert Hughes wrote in Time Magazine in 1975, more or less at the height of the artist's success: "Colour pages and Bendel's window displays gave Smith, fresh from the pinched dampness and greyness of England in the '50s, much the same sense of abundant, amoral pleasure as reflections on water and glowing fruit on a table gave the Impressionists. Their colour was everything that colour in English art was not: exotic looking, artificial and rich."

But when Smith moved to live permanently in America in 1978, his celebrity gradually began to fade. His patrons never completely deserted him. His huge off-stretcher canvas constructions, dangling from the ceiling, found appreciative corporate patrons, not least because they were both grandiose and safely non-political. But he was less and less part of the scene.

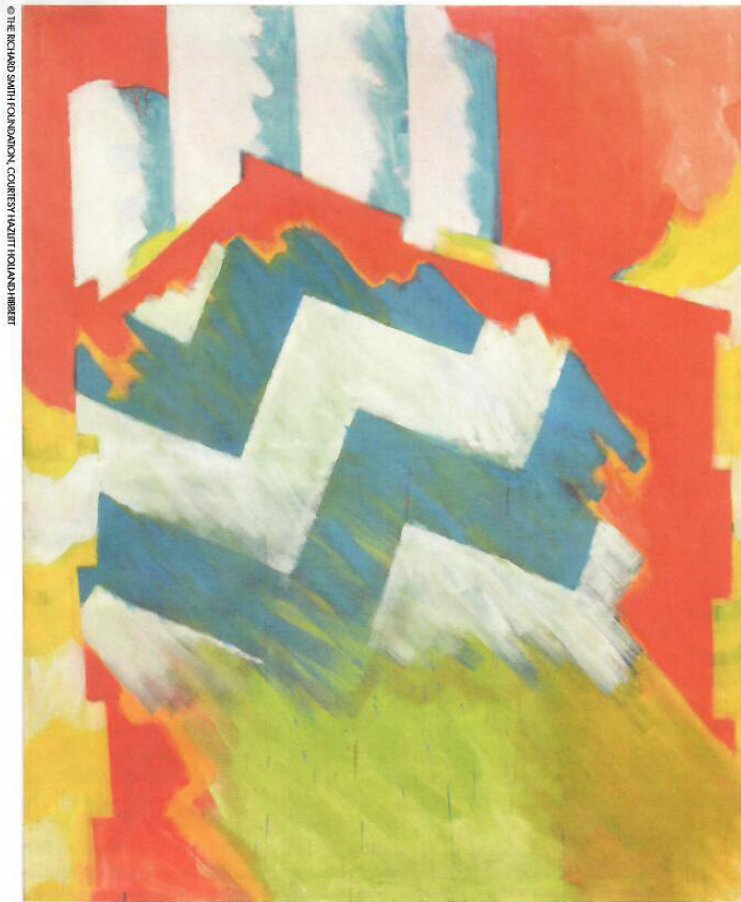
What can one say now, re-encountering these early works? First, that they are well worth revisiting: joyous and non-moralistic, they make much of the art currently being made in Britain look extremely dreary. Second, however, one wonders what sort of place future art historians will give them, after the huge technological revolution now taking place in art has slowed down a bit, or – don't bet on it – after this has finally run its course.

Richard Smith: Uptown/Downtown 1959-63 HAZLITT HOLLAND-HIBBERT 1 November – 14 December 2018

Words/Top Photo: Edward Lucie-Smith © Artless 2018

The Spectator 24 October 2018

BOOKS & ARTS



'Flip Top', 1962, by Richard Smith

Exhibitions

The ex factor Martin Gayford

Richard Smith: Uptown/Downtown 1959–63

Hazlitt Holland-Hibbert, London SW1,
until 14 December

Richard Pousette-Dart: Beginnings

Kettle's Yard, Cambridge,
until 6 January 2019

It is easy to assume that the contours of art history are unchanging, its major landmarks fixed for ever. Actually, like all histories it is a matter of shifting perspectives. As we move through time, the view backwards constantly alters.

The rising and falling critical estimations of the painter Richard Smith are a case in point. Had you asked an art-world insider in

1963 who the brightest rising star of British art was there is a strong chance — though other names such as David Hockney might have been mentioned — that the answer would have been Smith (1931–2016).

Appropriately, 1963 is the end date of an excellent little show at Hazlitt Holland-Hibbert gallery. This collates many of the most impressive pictures from Smith's earliest and most seductive period. At that time he was working in a fluid boundary zone between what was later termed 'colour field abstraction' and what was about to be dubbed 'pop art'. The pictures often take the form of hugely enlarged, softly atmospheric studies of packaging.

'Flip Top' (1962), for example — a favourite of mine — is a wall-sized image based on a then novel type of cigarette packet. That information alone places it in a distant age when advertising and the paraphernalia of consumerism seemed new and exciting. But the pop art aspect of Smith's work is not the most important or lasting.

Indeed, so close was he to that frontier with abstraction that it would be possible to look at most of these pictures without noticing their origins in advertising or cartons.

The qualities that make them special are hard to define. They include what painters call 'touch' — that is, the way Smith put paint on a canvas. His brush strokes are sometimes loose and free, but they are also hazily atmospheric. And the colours — lime greens and telephone-box reds prominent — are bright but simultaneously soft. Those hues, more than anything else, seem to announce the coming age: the 1960s.

The following decade was Smith's golden period. He was the British representative at the Venice Biennale in 1970, and subject of a Tate retrospective in 1975. After that, he moved to the USA, and his art and name fell into the oblivion that awaits ex-stars in any field.

He was one of those artists who are on top form for a limited time. In Smith's case, the best work came from more or less

*In the early 1940s, Pousette-Dart
looked to be more talented than
Jackson Pollock*

exactly the years covered by this exhibition. But his work is still admired by his peers and contemporaries (Peter Blake, Allen Jones and Hockney were among those who attending the opening). These early paintings still look fresh and strong.

The American artist Richard Pousette-Dart has, like Smith, tended to be relegated to the league of art-historical also-rans. But he is present in the celebrated photograph of the abstract expressionists taken in New York in 1950, a youthful figure standing at one side not far from Jackson Pollock. Then, obviously, he was considered a player. Nowadays Pollock, Mark Rothko and several others in the group are familiar names throughout the world; few, in this country at any rate, will have heard of Pousette-Dart.

An enterprising exhibition at Kettle's Yard, Cambridge, offers an opportunity to assess him. His, however, turns out to have been a slightly different case from Smith's. The latter flared brilliantly, but for only a few years. Pousette-Dart, in contrast, emerges as one of those who suffer from having talents that were too many and too varied.

In addition to painting, the exhibition includes examples of sculpture and photography. It is true, as is pointed out in the catalogue, that if you had compared Pousette-Dart and Pollock in the early 1940s, you would have concluded that they were rather similar painters — and perhaps that Pousette-Dart was the more talented.

A work such as 'Within the Room' (1942) is much like an early Pollock — a dense stew of symbols and geometric and organic forms. But it isn't an imitation. Clearly the two