

artscribe

International

July 1984

In Edmondson's new paintings human images emerge dramatically (even melodramatically at times) out of a matrix of thickly applied, intensely worked paint as if they are materialising out of glutinous darkness – a darkness made physical – or as if appearing into a dream from the darker reaches of the unconsciousness. His handling of paint may owe something to (or has perhaps something in common with) that of the abstract Guston, in the way in which shifting layers of paint and sharp dislocations of local colour will not allow an image to stay still. In the figurative elements, Kokoschka is recalled, especially in *Asleep in the Daytime*, where the sleeping couple are realised through a flurry of strokes that writhe like worms and animate the picture surface in contradiction to the repose of the subjects. This contradiction is not the outcome of any ineptitude of handling, of inappropriate means to a representational end; Edmondson's treatment of his subject is constrained by an essentially expressionist concern for invisible inner realities. (In this approach Soutine is a powerful, and acknowledged, presence.)

Sleep, the overt subject of several paintings here, is presented as a time of intense activity; falling to sleep the dark entry into a time and territory in which the clarities and differentiations, and the apparent certainties, of the waking life do not exist; waking from sleep a return from

darkness burdened by indistinct memories. Our experience of the nocturnal and the oneiric is the true subject of these paintings, and it is the paint itself which conveys much of the drama of the night.

The images Edmondson creates are often nightmarish, as in *The New Flag*, in which the flag itself is composed of writhing agonised figures undergoing a dreadful metamorphosis at the end of the flagpole; or as in *Night*, where a ghastly female figure hovers above a sleeping male figure, grasping in both hands an enormous eel (dark Freudian suggestions here). Above the recumbent figure in *Antony* a dreadful winged apparition flies into the space of the painting, formless and inexplicable.

Alternatives, perhaps the most surely achieved picture in the show, is more serene. A recognisable female figure is set against the backdrop of a city under a murky sky, her right hand spread as if in offering. But offering what? It is a mystery. And mystery is integral to these powerful and enigmatic paintings. □

— Mel Gooding
