

Working title: Great Bustards of Fire

It would be easy to ridicule Sir Kyffin Williams for his total rejection of modern art. However as his remarkable popularity shows, he is not alone. His latest show at the Albany Gallery (they run one every two years) comprises around 25 oils, and about 50 pencil and watercolour sketches of his favourite, rural themes, not yet seen in public. The largest pictures measure up to four square feet. After a fall last year, the 86-year old artist has been unable to work at his usual, vigorous pace and so the exhibition includes pictures from as long as 15 years ago. Kyffin Williams has made his reputation with pictures of Welsh country life and sees no reason to change. 'I was brought up as a countryman and [the country] has always been part of my life,' he told Galleries a few weeks ago. 'I am not a person to surprise people,' he added, continuing, 'to change one's style shows a lack of conviction'.

His trenchant views on conceptual art ('it's not art, it's theatre'), aired on Radio 4's Desert Island Discs, may have caused hilarity among the cognoscenti but they spoke directly to the common man. Kyffin Williams's complaint is that contemporary artists although very creative don't know how to draw, paint or sculpt. Blaming the 'art establishment' and art schools for destroying not only art but also humanity, he believes that drawing and loving things are intimately connected together. 'But love is a dirty word.' Furthermore, 'There is no such thing as modern art; [the period from which it comes is irrelevant, because] it can only be good, bad or indifferent.

This is the man who as a member of a House of Commons committee, criticised William Coldstream's plans for reorganising Britain's art schools back in the 1950s. This is he who helped to found Oriel Mostyn in Llandudno – which draws another blast of vitriol for ignoring the Welsh public.

'Everything is against the public; they are not allowed to have an opinion.'
And this is the one who protests vociferously against Welsh Arts Council policies. One feels a pang of embarrassment for an old man in a rage. But isn't a lot of this very much what William Blake was on about? Save your pity. He's happy as he is, at loggerheads with the authorities, an unrepentant traditionalist, and not a bad painter as well.

397 words – oops I'm slipping!

Picture from the Albany Gallery. The show opens 15 October.

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