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PRESS RELEASE

## **REAL ALLEGORIES**

**20 July - 8 September**

**TERENCE BOND GRENVILLE DAVEY JÜRGEN DRESCHER BERNARD FRIZE**

**RODNEY GRAHAM ALEX LANDRUM SIMON LINKE ALLAN McCOLLUM**

**PAUL MORRISON JULIAN OPIE ANDREW SPENCE**

Any exhibition which groups together the work of more than one artist invites questions about the grounds on which the chosen work has been selected and about what common interests unify the range of different work.

The work in this exhibition shares certain general and significant characteristics. At first sight much of it appears to evoke the classic minimal work of the sixties and early seventies - regular, geometric, singular, flat, abstract. But contrary to Judd's and others' claims to autonomy, detachment and non-referentiality, this work is also purposely indexed to something in the real world beyond art. At least in one way or another the formal hermeticism of the works' abstract style is upset, unravelled and contradicted. In terms of ideas the works' strongest links are with that aspect of conceptual art which developed out of a critique of American high modernism.

But such general terms are not in themselves enough to provide a coherent grouping - there is much work around at present which more or less satisfies these conditions. Thus it is necessary to specify further lines of demarcation from within this general range of work which has emerged recently in this country, Europe and the United States. It is possible to separate out two main bodies of work which can be differentiated both by the types of world they seek to represent and by the ways in which they aim to make that representation.

The first group is united in its tendency to reflect upon, or to take as its starting point, the relationship of late modernist art to the material conditions of the culture within which it exists. The second tends more to emphasise a particular individual's own experience of the world, to take as its starting point that person's psychological state rather than a set of more objective conditions.

This exhibition aims to draw attention to artists whose work belongs to the first of these groups. The work is united more by a range of interests and a sense of direction - a sense of what counts as significant issues and problems for modern art - than by a

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commitment to a set of stylistic or technical protocols. Such common ground that exists is given primarily by a strong sense of history, a shared sense of what the best art of the last thirty years has produced, enabled, and eclipsed. In practice a substantive grasp of history amounts to a recognition of constraints and limitations. It seems clear that a part of the legacy of late modernism has been a prolonged and exacerbated hiatus, wherein the demands of producing an emphatic surface have become all but irreconcilable with those of making a vivid representation. In one way or another all the artists exhibiting here can be seen to be working within the difficult and restricted space given by the terms of this condition. Such restrictions may seem extreme, but they also provide the framework for a rigour which has enabled these artists to resist the many false promises which have regularly punctuated art since the hegemony of modernism began to break up in the 1960s.

The work is in general analytic rather than emotive, and is reflexive rather than indulgent: it reflects on the forms and styles it employs as opposed to just exploiting them as just another tasteful resource. It tends to question the logical and philosophical justifications of late modernism rather than to moralise against them. Its apparent homogeneity is underscored by a sense of paradox and contradiction.

Some of the work deals explicitly with the apparent autonomy of contemporary art and its actual relationship with types of reproduction, circulation and distribution; some reflects upon the assumed distance between high modernism and aspects of mass culture and mass production; some addresses the relation of abstraction and representation; All reflect on art history and its almost paralysing effects - the real difficulties in making vivid representations without sacrificing the achievements of late modernism. The principal techniques used in these works are quotation, displacement, schematisation, condensation and parody.

If the work in this exhibition shares a particular formal character it is that the work is in general singular, contained, precise, and often quite compact. This aspect of the work also serves to distinguish it from other work in the general area which relies for its effect on a kind of theatrical or melodramatic juxtaposition between parts, in the manner of the other prominent tradition of modern art which initially developed from the work of Duchamp and Surrealism.

The title of the show is taken from the sub-title of Courbet's group portrait of 1855 *The painter's studio*. *A real allegory summing up seven years of my artistic life*. Allegory is usually defined as the personification of an abstract idea, although it is used more generally to denote a form of doubling in a work of art whereby a depicted event serves also to express a further, coded, layer of meaning. Courbet's allegory was 'real' in that his work involved not the personification of an abstract idea but a series of political relations in contemporary France.