

# LISSON GALLERY

LONDON

## PRESS RELEASE

### JOHN VIRTUE

The centre-piece of this exhibition of ten new works by John Virtue is a striking triptych. Measuring three by five meters, it is the artist's largest and most ambitious work to date. These new landscapes are clearly related to earlier work, but in them Virtue takes his abiding interests to a new level of development. Each work is monochrome, built up from interwoven layers of black ink, pencil, charcoal, shellac and gouache. The final picture is then made up into a grid of up to eighty individual sections, each depicting a different but related view of his local landscape.

For the last twenty years Virtue has pursued his commitment to developing the language of British landscape painting. For most of that time he has lived in the Lancashire village of Green Haworth; his intimate knowledge and observations of that Pennine area fuelled his work for over a decade, and the results were seen in his last show at the Lisson Gallery. In the winter of 1987, Virtue moved to the village of South Tawton, in Devon, and now the natural and social geography of this area forms the centre of his work.

There are few artists in this country who have been able to reconcile the formal and technical demands of modern art with an attachment to the English landscape tradition. For most either the modern sense of structure and surface has prevailed in the work at the cost of an engagement with the specifics of topographical detail and perception, or it has had to be sacrificed for the sake of those concerns. A part of Virtue's brilliance lies in his ability to hold these apparently antagonistic elements in a highly charged tension. Subject and surface work together to produce a modern embodiment of the traditional genre. The works seem equally and simultaneously to evoke Constable and Cubism, Piper and Pollock.

There is no single, privileged, viewpoint in any of Virtue's landscapes; the artist does not preside over the scene, but organises multiple and fragmentary perceptions into a unity of equivalents. This absence of a safe, secure centre - for the artist or the viewer of the scene points to another sense in which his are modern representations. But as Richard Cork states in his essay to the catalogue which accompanies the exhibition, "Ultimately, Virtue offers an art of resilience rather than despair. Defying the inevitability of death, he persists in raising up stubborn monuments to the grandeur of perception". This will be the fourth exhibition of Virtue's work at the Lisson Gallery since his first introductory show in 1985. The catalogue has been produced for this show in conjunction with the Louver Gallery, New York. John Virtue will be having a one man show at the Louver Gallery, New York from the 17th of March until the 14th of April 1990.

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