

The Week in Art

by Daniel Thomas

FRANK HODGKINSON won the first Helena Rubinstein Travelling Scholarship, the largest art award given in Australia.

Now, five years later, he is the first returned Rubinstein Scholar to hold an exhibition (Hungry Horse Gallery).

In a few weeks he leaves once more for Spain, where he spent most of his time abroad. It does not matter in the least that he will be lost to us again, for the Rubinstein money, and the additional grant given him then by the Australian-American Association, should not be regarded as investment in Australian culture, but in an individual artist.

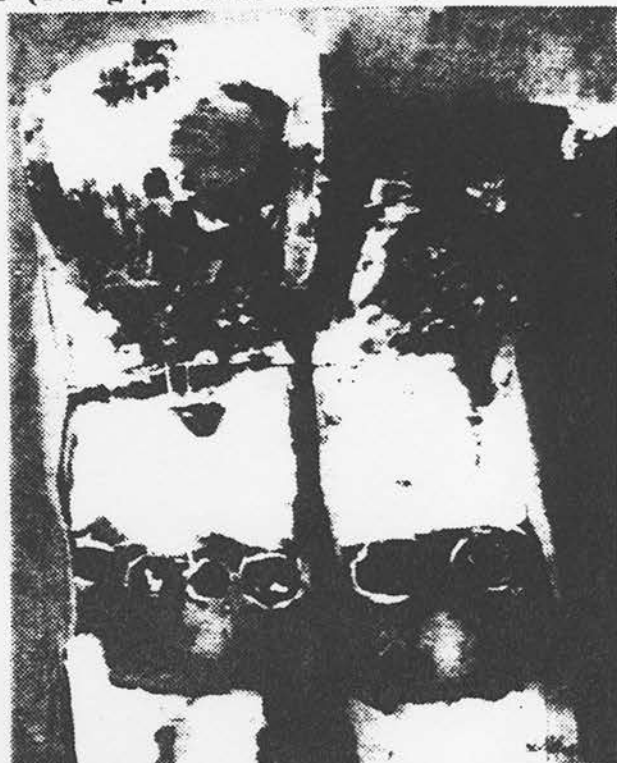
If his paintings enrich the general Australian scene well and good, but the best and most effective art patronage is particular, not general, and the artistic welfare of the individual must be the first consideration.

Nevertheless the exhibition does make an important addition to our knowledge of the new post-war Spanish school. This movement has been gathering impetus here for some years with Elwyn Lynn and later Douglas Watson. A fortnight ago two texture painters, W. Peascod and Sheila McDonald, shared the Maitland art prize, and at the same time we saw the exhibitions sent from abroad by Peter Kaiser, and the real Spaniard, Jose Guevara.

Hodgkinson has two very Spanish paintings, one a mysterious rough circle deeply traced in hot desert sand, "Nothing means nothing," the other a symmetrical square-winged totem, "In between time."

Deliberately Australian

Some of the pictures, however, are deliberately Australian. The 26 titles, which read in sequence almost as a poem, do not specify Australia, though they mostly refer to summer. But there is a clear visual reference to the close-up view of scribbly-gum bark in certain meandering lines, and to tree trunks themselves in



The Blonde Dark of Summer by Frank Hodgkinson.

escape his pretentious dullness either.

Much more interesting are the pictures, of various sizes, all of which are concerned with a single standing form cleft in two.

This is "matter painting" with a vengeance, and "mutinous substance" is one title of peculiar aptness.

Two of the finest pictures in the exhibition employ the same cleft double form (without the mutinous substance) but compress it into a withdrawn, proud image of self-sufficiency. For what it is worth their titles are "Burning Peace" and "The Barren Passion of Summer."

When Hodgkinson won the Rubinstein in 1958 he was still struggling to remove the traces of slickness that survived from his years as a very successful commercial artist.

The process is now complete.

He has been helped considerably by the deliberately reserved, unshowy Spanish School of painting, but he has not, in these paintings, at least he

there are a great many at only 10 or 12 guineas.

For so large a collection the standard is amazingly high. Such careful selection gives hope that the presumably inevitable debasement of this unique art will not proceed so rapidly or indeed that it might even be halted.

The Oenpelli style seems to have become extinct in recent years, however, and the few poor Beswick Creek specimens here are only three years distant from the excellent ones in the Art Gallery of New South Wales. One of them has a sad attempt at a naturalistic gumtree beside its X-ray kangaroo.

But nearly all are from North-east Arnhem Land and Millingimbi, and such excellent artists as Mungarawoi, Mawalan, and Daudi (previously known as Dowdie; but spelling standardisation seems to be in progress) are in good form. Most of the names are new, however.

more than poetic confectionery. Occasionally a larger form is attempted, say, a Rothko, and filled with twinkly gift-wrapped faces, but the pictures animated all over seem happier. A great improvement on last year.

ADRIAN LINDEN: Adrian Linden at Barry Stern's is a very young painter of Dutch birth, now working in Brisbane. He paints Queensland genre-copy, bodgies, skindivers — in obsessively parallel and concentric lines. One thinks of the Dutch art nouveau of Toorop, plus Sibley's techniques. It is all rather flat, but there are some ideas, and some humor.

ARCHIBALD REJECTS: Anthony Hordern's is showing some of the pictures rejected from the Archibald, Wynne and Sulman competitions. They are probably the worst of the rejects and probably mostly by amateurs, for it is not easy to imagine a professional artist who was rejected agreeing to exhibit here.

The better are obviously young students, like J. Parker or L. Broad. Sibley's Sulman reject is the one significant picture, but surely unacceptable as a genre painting.

Susan White's "Island Wilderness" is good in its curious Victorian way. The general technical incompetence is allied with generally vulgar minds; only one or two pure minded primitives are to be found.

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