

EXHIBITION: TONY BEVAN

28 September 2005 – 8 January 2006

ORGANIZED BY: Institut Valencià d'Art Modern. IVAM

CURATOR: Kosme de Barañano

In collaboration with: British Council

.....

The exhibition of Tony Bevan offered by the IVAM is the first museum retrospective of this artist and includes a total of 53 paintings that define his artistic career from 1983 to 2005. Bevan has basically focused his work on two themes: architectural constructions, including his paintings of *Rafters* and *Corridors*, and *Heads*. In his "architectural" works, Bevan often draws inspiration from the ruined buildings around his Deptford studio in south London. He also includes images of architecture that appear on postcards or in photographs of places that he has never visited. Whatever the visual source, his spaces are always primarily mental.

A catalogue has been published to accompany the exhibition, with illustrations of all the works exhibited and a selection of eighty drawings, together with texts by the curator of the exhibition, Kosme de Barañano, by the Director of the IVAM, Consuelo Císcar, and by Jonathan Sinclair-Wilson and Klaus Ottmann.

Tony Bevan (Bradford, 1951) studied at Goldsmith's School of Art and later at the Slade School of Fine Art. This British artist is undoubtedly the most international figure in the second generation of artists of the so-called "School of London".

Heads are one of the fundamental themes in Bevan's work. They represent a more personal, internalized space; these paintings have an enormous psychological content. In the nineties he often went back to this theme, frequently using his own head as a model. These "self-portraits", set apart removed from any kind of conventionalism, reflect his lack of interest in providing documents or idealizing facial features. In fact, despite maintaining some degree of intelligibility, Bevan forces extremes of distortion and simplification with his geometrical reductions of the human head. The rawness and tremendously physical quality of his paintings is close to studies done by Géricault in the Beaujon hospital, works that evoke a similar brutality and alienation.

Most of the works in this exhibition have to do with representation of the human figure or with architectural structures, often bordering on abstraction. One of the most constant subjects in Bevan's work is the representation of the face. He rarely paints objects, although in the last two years he has developed a series of works called *Table Top*, in which he presents the work table, with bottles, jars of turpentine, etc., appearing in landscapes or small towns.

Buildings in ruins, with their ceilings and corridors, are also recurrent motifs in his paintings. These architectural fragments are not topographical views, they are mental spaces; and the heads he paints, including his own head as a model, are also internalized spaces. The works selected show us how Bevan has followed a process of simplifying his devices and his style over the last twenty years. In the heads he almost completely abandons references to the face in favour of an abstract tangle of lines, creating a kind of internal maze, an architectural space, as in the themes of the *Rafters* and *Corridors* already mentioned.

Bevan escapes from mimetic figuration and achieves a language of his own. His portrait is not a characterological rendering of external expressions, it is a look at the architecture of the brain, of the body as an organism. He admitted as much in an interview with James Hyman in 1993: *"Since I was a student I've been interested in physiognomy and in artists who used it. I did my thesis on Franz Xaver Messerschmidt's life-size busts and am interested in artist's handbooks, like Charles LeBrun's, that show how to represent individual emotions such as anxiety and sadness. But what interests me is how to get beyond the illustration of a single emotion, to be able to hold a number of emotions and actual thoughts."*

Bevan's images are not generated from the easel or vertical wall. As in Brancusi's sculptures, they originate on the floor. Bevan paints his canvases on the floor, in an "all over" style similar to Pollock, although it is not drip painting but a line that engraves, or rather sculpts, because with its density and pigmentation it projects from the canvas. Bevan makes us become aware of the

inevitable relationship and distance between referent and visual representation, and of the expressive value of the deflection and borrowing of the referent; he combines the Abstract Expressionist way of painting with the figurative approach.

Notable solo exhibitions devoted to his work include the shows presented at the National Portrait Gallery in 1985, the Institute of Contemporary Arts in 1987-88 and the Whitechapel Art Gallery in 1993, all in London. More recently, Bevan has shown his work at Abbot Hall Art Gallery in Cumbria (UK) and in various international exhibitions in Cottbus, Munich, Sydney and Los Angeles.