

BARBARA FREEMAN

at Wolfson College Oxford

14 January – 22 February 1975

Drawings / Homage to Albrecht Dürer

Lithographs / Prisons - Carceri

Paintings / Triangle series

Reliefs / Assassins

Barbara Freeman:

Born London 1937
Studied at St. Martins Camberwell and Hammersmith
Colleges of Art.

Recent exhibitions include:

University of Bradford 1973
University of St. Andrews 1973
New Lane Gallery, Bradford 1974
International Symposium, Prilep, Yugoslavia 1974.

Irrespective of material or style, the work of any significant artist usually revolves around a small group of guiding ideas or themes in this exhibition two seem predominant. The first is the struggle between calculation and spontaneity the second is the choice of a particular subject matter indicated by the careful use of titles.

Each work is intricately made; a close inspection reveals several layers of working within, through, or over a grid that provides a compositional frame. The layers, like the strata of rocks, appear, are eroded, and sink out of sight again only to appear in another cell of the grid. In the drawings a number system was used to control this process, elsewhere masking tape, tracings, templates and actual cutting or bending has been used to interrupt the flow or replace it by another layer. The details are swift gestures, but the whole works are strictly organised. This highly developed and individual technique seems to be the fruit of much study and introspection.

But technique is interesting only when it serves thought. In what sense are these works a species of material allegory on themes of melancholia, oppression and loss of power? The titles are signposts, but on what road are we travelling? What is described as a homage to Dürer and possibly Piranesi looks like the homage a hungry man pays to his dinner violent (but scrupulous) appropriation.

The layering technique suggests processes of memory, erasure, the passing of time, hence the melancholy and the fantasies of the prisoner in the condemned cell or in Plato's cave. In this respect the lithographs have an old-fashioned flavour: they expound a text, and that text is the litany of names of places where men suffer atrocious indignity. On the other hand the titles of the paintings are deliberately 'formalist' "Triangle: Titanium White" is what it says it is. Pigment (not the colour) is put through adventures on a field of related hue and tone: or to be more precise, above the field, since it is separated from it by a layer of creamy opaque resin. The technical devices are similar, transposed into oil-paint. Despite the dry manner there is a current of powerful feeling, but the use of the title forbids interpretation of that feeling so that we are brought up abruptly against an unadornable experience.

This exhibition is the work of a consistent and thoughtful artist: perhaps also a learned artist who comes on with a daunting singleness of purpose.

David Brett

