

Further Notes on Ardizzone

There seems little doubt that the strand of sadness running through much of Ardizzone's work was reaction to the consequences of the war. – both material and social. But this is not an oeuvre that records the physical/material damage that was a consequence of the war. (Note- see Back to the Local, 'The Bombed Pub, 1949, 91.)

However, the association of Englishness has a long history. Whenever there is the desire to express Englishness, or England, be it in music, poetry, and visual art sadness, loss, nostalgia it is inevitably something that is not truly present but something that has to be called up from somewhere else. Without wanting to sound too precious about it whenever Englishness is made present it is marked by the fact that it is absent. Englishness is sad because it is always disappearing.

At about the same time that Ardizzone was presenting his picture of the local to the world two/check artists, Eduardo Paolozzi and Richard Hamilton, were gaining inspiration from the very bits and pieces of mass culture that were almost wholly absent from Ardizzone's work.

The local pub that was so often at the heart of these Bohemian groups was a place of conviviality and companionship, a place where one was able to overcome the anonymity of the city, as well as meeting like-minded souls. Ardizzone depicts the life of the local as revolving around two, almost contradictory, scenes. Happy groups of men (and to a lesser extent women) are talking with the barmaid as she serves them their drinks. In some of these scenes one can almost hear the din generated by these cheerful groups. Then there are the quiet, empty places where a reflective sadness seems to hang in the air where the solitary drinker is to be found. Sadness and joy can be found together under the same roof. This contrast is to be found across the whole of Ardizzone's London and it is the proximity of one with

the other that makes him so English. In English art and life sadness can happen at any time and in any place. There is always sadness in English joy, and its lyricism nearly always contains this strain of melancholy. It is a version of this that Ardizzone draws in his depictions of pub life.

Dogs

Ardizzone's dogs can be found patrolling the edges of the groups that form as neighbours stop to exchange news. They can also be found in places of stillness, where no traffic of information is taking place. Ardizzone often depicts them as a sort of generic dog. (Certainly it is not possible to assign them to any particular breed.) Only rarely will he provide enough canine detail for us to identify their pedigree, if they have one. (See 'Trickles of Spring', *Edward Ardizzone*, p. 156) Sometimes, these dogs seem to have convinced themselves that they, too, are a part of the conversing group. Standing with their tails raised, they try to catch the mood of those engaged in conversation. At other times, particularly when they accompany a solitary person, they will have their tails down and will match the mood of their owner's solitude and reflection.

The depiction of the cinema queue was one of the few intrusions of the world of mass entertainment makes into Ardizzone's world. (The Queue 1951 see below) He was, like so many inhabitants of these post-war Bohemias, scornful of those forms of entertainment that, for the most part, originated in North America. In the book we began this essay with, he and Cyril Ray were responsible for, *Merrie England*, 1960, the sorts of 'entertainment' that they deal with are all small in scale and possessed of a pedigree that took them way back to before the war. Even the working girls in Soho are depicted as small businesswomen, rather than the front line of a sexual industry. (See 'Evening Soho'. 1935.) They – fairgrounds, tattooist, pinball parlour, etc are all activities that would be soon be marginalised, or vanish altogether. (Note- 'Evening Soho', 1935.)

A comparison might be made between the world and the work of Ardizzone where there is almost a complete absence of American inspired popular culture (mentioned earlier) and the emergence of 'high' artists such as Eduardo Paolozzi and Richard Hamilton, who were basing their art on these very elements that were absent from the work of Ardizzone. Gone was the warmth of a local, gone was the faithful companion at one's feet and gone was that place to reflect on what might have been but never was. Gone was the local.

Conclusion

From a position of thirty years ago when I first began to enjoy Ardizzone's work and from twelve thousand miles away from my home in Australia the warmth, the affection and above all the forgiveness present in A's work is much more preferable than the left over's of a world that has been devoured by banks, multi-national corporations and paranoid state machines.

The world is sad. Ardizzone's English sadness is, as we have already seen, not violent. It is not pessimism that would maybe too angry. It is not a kind of depression that would be too unsettling. It is not despair because that would imply that one is not resigned to a state of affairs. Ardizzone's sadness has been described as being like a 'soft rain' that can fall on men and women in pubs, parks and queues and provide a perfect accompaniment to their reflective mood. (Note- ref.) But what is it they are reflecting on? Any number of things. The negatives/positives first. It will be about that which has disappeared rather than about something that is doomed. It is the contemplation of something that is done, over, rather than premonition of something that is to come. It may be about loss or disappointment. It is a pervasive melancholy, present around every corner ready to insinuate itself into Ardizzone's work at every turn. (Remember, even dogs were susceptible to it.)



The Queue

Picture of The Queue 1951