

## INTRODUCTION

In an age when the chief aim of so many young artists seems to be simply to “épater le bourgeois”, it is reassuring to find a painter content to await the laurels of deserved fame rather than succumb to the temptation of momentary notoriety. In Nicolas Granger-Taylor we have such a talent. A passing look at his work persuades one that here might be an artist of some promise. Initial resemblances which come to mind are to Coldstream and Uglow. On reflection however, the artist’s peculiar individuality quickly emerges. Unlike Coldstream, Granger-Taylor works, not by establishing points on his picture surface but by sketching in his forms with blocks of colour. Using a wide flat brush he articulates the subject area in a series of planes. The dashes of red which suggest Uglow are not after-thoughts, but all that remains of an earlier underpinning. He is, in the simplest sense, creating a form. Granger-Taylor is not obsessed with detail and finish. He does not slavishly follow Euston Road dictums. His accomplished draughtsmanship does not preclude a depth of expression, but rather encourages it, his less highly-worked canvasses achieving success on a different level. If a painting has the desired effect Granger-Taylor is quite content to leave it alone, even though, as in his expressive self-portraits it might apparently owe more to the explosive expressionism of Bomberg or Auerbach.

The combination of these two approaches, in such works as his portrait of *Kim Barrett*, results not so much in the carefully analysed formalism of late Coldstream as the deeply-felt character sense of earlier works by other Euston Road painters. With this in mind, other, more deeply felt allusions to older masters become evident. While the artist might yet have to perfect his assurance of handling, the essence of his intent is clear. His *Half-length nude, head turned* looks out at us with something of the cool disdain, enigmatic eroticism and self-assurance of Manet’s *Olympia* or a nude of the School of Fontainebleau. Granger-Taylor is not afraid to temper his light earth palette with a deep midnight blue ground to lend such a nude an unusual warmth and emphasise the intimiste appeal of the image. She demands that the viewer participate. We are forced to interact, to become involved in a highly charged, one-to-one relationship with the sitter, no longer a model, but imbued with something of the magical quality of the candlelit madonnas of Granger-Taylor’s spiritual mentors, Schalken and de la Tour. The artist’s arrangement of his models is carefully considered. Posed for maximum effect, they meet us head on, merciless. His use of the wood panel emphasises an attachment to Renaissance models which might be interpreted as self-indulgence. But this is more than mere virtuosity. These are “cabinet pictures”, intended to be studied and enjoyed in private.

Eschewing the shock tactics of his contemporaries, and at the same time avoiding the coldly analytical, Granger-Taylor presents us with a series of extraordinary paintings which reaffirm the power of the work of art as a contemplative object of unadorned sensuality and visual pleasure.

IAIN GALE  
The Independent