

Eileen Schaer is a self-taught painter, print-maker and sculptor. The fact that she is married to a painter, and is descended from a family of creative artists in different media, has meant that for all her working life she has been surrounded by contact with the techniques of her discipline; this has clearly helped. Brought up in Liverpool and living near the Cavern, her early years were dominated by the excitement of the Beatles and the popular metropolitan culture associated with them. And this influence must to some extent explain her art.

She labels herself a 'primitive' and will acknowledge no direct influence in her painting, save for that of Picasso. When tackled about this she is adamant, for example, that any relationship with the COBRA group of artists from Denmark and the Low Countries is coincidental. Nevertheless, she acknowledges that she is a Northern European artist (although some have compared her work to that of African painters) and that influences from the north and west are important in her creative process. In effect she reflects the *Zeitgeist*, the mood of her time. Brought up in convent schools, the influence of religious art – icons – is clear in much of her work. Look, for example, at her painting 'The Shepherd' (versions of which are owned by George Melly and myself) and you see a possibly unconscious Christian symbolism of a sleeping man, enveloping a sheep, being woken before dawn by a crowing cock. The image would not be out of place in a church. Although not of a religious mind, she, perhaps rather reluctantly, admits that her Catholic childhood influence extends into her understanding of life, perhaps even influencing the title of this exhibition.

In a sense we can recognize this in her painting, for her method of construction starts with no preconceived idea. She draws a line, and the line takes on a life of its own, changing from a crow, to a cat, to a building; sometimes extending beyond the formal boundaries of the picture onto the frame – and possibly, we sometimes imagine, beyond it. But it is the artist herself who takes us out of the present, **she** steers the pencil and surprises us with a complex image almost perversely controlled and uncluttered, one which she is reluctant to explain in words. At one level it is easy to enjoy her art, it is full of life and vigour, abounding in humour. On another level it constantly tickles our imagination and surprises us as we venture further into the images she presents. For this reason I happily live with her art and enjoy it every day.

David M. Wilson February 2004

