



Richard Smith, CBE (1931-2016)

Nationality

British

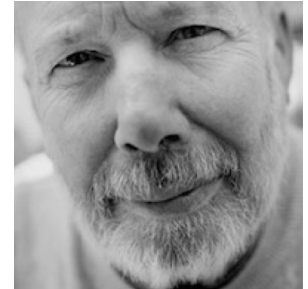
Education

1948-1950: Luton School of Art

1952-1954: St Albans School of Art

1954-1957: Royal College of Art

1954-57: Studied at Royal College of Art, London



Taught

1957-58: Hammersmith School of Art

Background

Smith lived from 1959-61 on a Harkness Fellowship in New York. The painter combined the formal qualities of the work of abstract painters, such as Mark Rothko and Sam Francis with references to American commerce and culture, with its lush seductive colours, exploitation of magnification, soft-focus effects and its stimulation of fantasy. Smith's interest in mass media sources and in commercial photography (magazines such as McCall's, Vogue and Harper's Bazaar) brought him briefly within the orbit of Pop art. His ambition to make painting share a common sensibility with media outside conventional fine art, such as film and photography, began to wane by 1968 because of what he felt to be their preoccupation with the recent past.

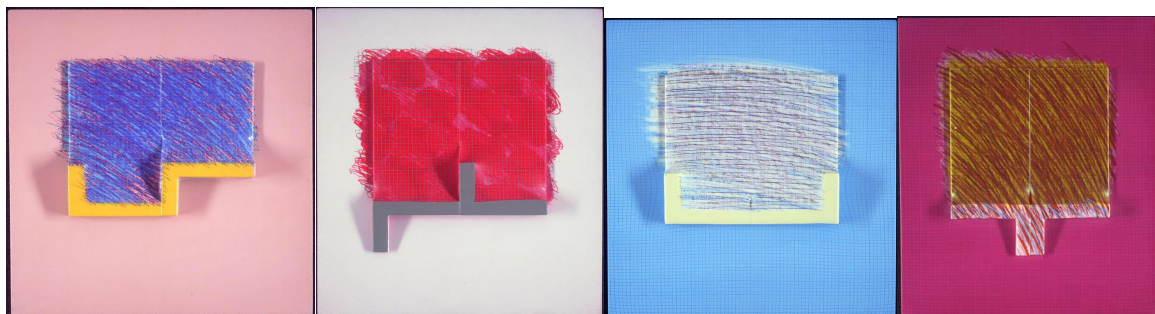
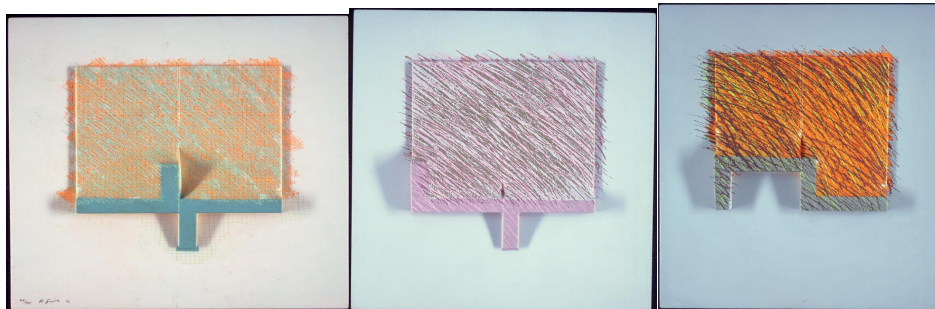
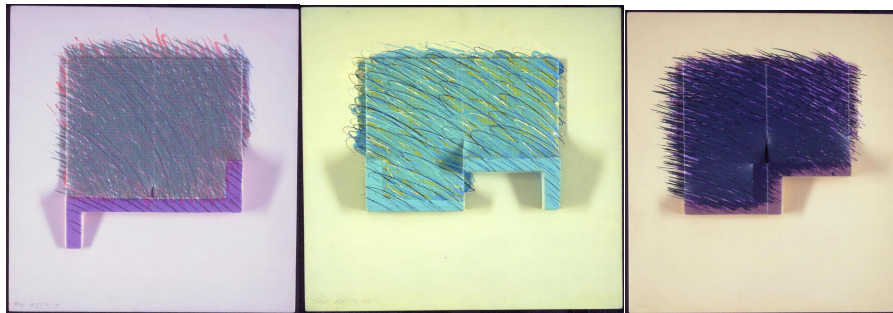
The artist

Crucial to Smith's development was the conjunction in 1956 of the impact of Abstract Expressionism with the writings of Marshall McLuhan, exalting the means of communication over imagery. In 1959 he was awarded a Harkness Fellowship, and travelled to New York where Smith's eyes were opened to the ambiance of American commercial culture, with its lush seductive colours, exploitation of magnification and soft-focus effects, and its general stimulation of desire and fantasy. Thereafter imagery was put aside in favour of shaping the painting's support. His works became bulky as he cut and folded canvas over shaped stretchers. The artist's first one-man exhibition was held at the Green Gallery, New York, 1961.

Smith enjoyed huge success when he was awarded Grand Prize at the São Paulo Biennial in 1967, going on to represent Britain at the Venice Biennale in 1970. He was appointed CBE in 1971, and the strongest affirmation of his career was the retrospective exhibition organised by the Tate Gallery in 1975. He has works in major collections such as the Metropolitan Museum, the Museum of Modern Art, the Tate Gallery and the British Museum.



The Logo Suite (Group of 10 works)



Vacuum-formed screen-printed sheets are held in relief by wooden supports. The image of squared sheeting is obscured by density of scribbling that sometimes overflows onto the support, and the moulding divides in two, creating a mirror-effect. Colour schemes and materials evoke an office ambience, while the title implies that this set of prints reflects on its destination as art for a suite of offices, cultural insignia for an up-market organisation (such as CNAA itself).

In Logo, two-dimensional materials (sheeting) are transformed into relief form. Instead of the representation of sheet packaging we are presented with stylistic packaging made into the representation (hence its title). Smith was now involved self-consciously in making the medium of office requisites (from literal equipment to the function of smart furnishing or wall decoration) into his aesthetic 'message', with the attendant danger of being taken literally for what it seemed.