

Bruce Nauman's South America . . . suspended from the ceiling, the work suggests torture, fear and pain

The disquieting Americans

The Saatchis have filled a gallery with the work of two artists — a painter and a sculptor. The result, says **Sacha Craddock**, is even greater than the sum of the parts

IT WAS a clever idea to show just Bruce Nauman and Robert Mangold together in the huge white spaces at the Saatchi Collection. Without knowing too much it is easy to recognise the Mangold and therefore deduce that all the rest are by Nauman. Bruce Nauman has been generally admired for years as one of the only artists who genuinely practises a whole variety of things.

Since the 1960s he has moved from metal to video, performance to neon, to show not only that the reasons for making art may be varied but different meanings dictate different methods. His body of work has managed to remain coherent despite his range, but unlike the retrospective at the Whitechapel two years ago this exhibition does not play an educational role. It consists of what the Saatchis own and there are gaps.

Robert Mangold only makes paintings. He uses soft muted colour, irregular shaped canvases, with geometric fragments drawn on top. There is a

large number of his paintings here. Mangold is a Minimalist with a difference. That difference is heightened by being shown alongside Nauman. They have more in common than is at first apparent. The work of both is warm and approachable. Mangold uses a limited language which despite its initial appearance is not arrived at through formal process alone. His titles have a cool Minimalist feel to them; Distorted Triangle/Circle (red). They just describe. But concerned still with the artist's hand in composition, with what a picture actually looks like he flies against what we usually associate with Minimal art.

The Saatchis started collecting in the early Seventies. They bought American art: Donald Judd, Carl Andre and Sol Lewitt, the pure Minimalists. Since then they have branched out and cover most trends and fashions.

Both Mangold and Nauman must have looked part of that movement in the early Seventies. Nauman was making admittedly more mucky sculpture

than his fellow American Minimalists but Mangold was squaring and curving like the best of them. Hindsight tells a different story. Like a 1980s Baronial Hall the Saatchi Gallery has one major area with galleries that run off. One side area houses a Nauman video, repeating sound accompanies a cycle of domestic misunderstanding. The bank of videos goes on and on in cycle, a chair is offered by a man to a woman. She sits down but on the floor, the man has removed the chair. Over and over, the violence reaches a peak to start again.

On the other side another room houses a Nauman neon light piece. Seven Vices and Seven Virtues (1983) are written out in soft colour. The vices flash in sequence over the virtues. Actual words; Gluttony is Gluttony, it breaks over and again on top of Temperance. Pride rides over Prudence. Good and Bad Flash away in a room broken only by a skylight.

Back in the central part a Nauman sculpture sits near a Mangold painting. They are using the same sort of colour. The sculpture of unsmooth fibreglass is huge; hoops lean against each other to make a soft spacial question mark. The Mangold painting is four canvases arranged around nothing. The painting has become frame. The colour both artists use is soft and non violent.

Although Nauman sculpture

is large, takes up a lot of space, it is never monumental. Monumentality comes with statement and Nauman never makes statements, he doesn't answer any questions. All of his work shows an inability to connect. Sometimes this is purely formal, the Tunnel series of the Seventies have pieces laid down in relation to each other but they don't totally connect. Fibreglass and metal ends touch but they are not welded or smoothed together. The same with his Neonpiece, Welcome Shaking Hands. Figures bob up and down in front of each other, penis darting, naked, they reenact a meeting over and over again.

Conceptually, Nauman's has many threads but the strongest is about communication, connection and the making of sense. The spectator has to work for this but Nauman wants understanding without explanation. He is not arrogant, he is faltering; these various forms show a stuttering attempt to communicate without the usual unfinished expressionism one usually associates with self-out in an artist.

Mangold's painting is unsevere because of those broken rules. One room has some of his paintings alone. Canvases that are segments of a whole circle sit in part, perhaps two parts together. The logic behind his particular choice of fragment, indeed each is part of

something in the first place, is difficult to grasp. He has erected the wall of justification only to move the wall at the last minute. The drawing in graphite on top of the colour is soft but straight. Each piece is a different colour and a room-full reveals itself slowly, as the colour becomes more strong. Mangold combines the intuition an artist can't help but have with a set of reasons involving the square or circle. On and on infinitely he can work with these ideas, for they combine some of himself and something from out there.

The same discipline would apply to a still life painter. A different shaped canvas Red Wall (1965) is almost a tall rectangle, but it has small sections removed from top and bottom. The colour is wonderful, closeness to the picture important. Forgetting all of his reasons for the irregular shape, forgetting whatever process he may have been through to get there, is the best way to see it.

Sometimes Nauman may seem explicit. South America is a sculpture suspended from the ceiling. An enormous triangle of steel beams stays up there with a chair hanging upside down in the middle. Torture, fear, and pain; the title helps our perhaps arrogant American-European minds jump to that conclusion. Nauman uses it all, words in neon, titles, space between things become of equal weight in an attempt at expres-

sion. The combination of both artists is fortuitous. While Mangold is not a humorous artist his warmth shows through. Nauman is using humour without irony.

Another Neon piece, Life Death/Knows Doesn't Know, plays up to those kind of questions artists are supposed to address but definitely can't answer. They come from different practices. Some artists stick to the same area through thick and thin believing that at least consistency is a virtue and at least you have tried. Others dart backwards and forwards, in and out, intention becoming the only virtue as method jumps from one area to another.

Neither Nauman nor Mangold hit either of these categories. While Mangold shifts slightly across the area of a twopenny piece Mangold ranges the currencies of the world, credit cards included. They are Americans, which may give them an edge in creative confidence. Neither has had the kind of hard time that results in either doggedness or butterflying. Seriousness is a boring virtue on its own and Mangold avoids that somehow. The lightness of touch combined with his concern for the look of a picture over and above its rationale does him credit. While Nauman hits at the very basic reasons why someone would make art in the first place.



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