

SOLO EXHIBITION

John Riddy: Photographs

Frith Street Gallery, London

until 21 December

This exhibition of around 35 black-and-white prints (including confident new diptychs) is John Riddy's second solo show at the Frith Street Gallery this year, and one of the few exhibitions of its kind to find a venue. In a recent interview with Martin Caiger-Smith, in this magazine (Feb/March 1996), Riddy described his pictures as reticent. It would be more accurate to call them disinterested in the traditional sense.

Stylistically, Riddy is the heir of both Atget and Walker Evans, who were likewise compelled to document enigmatic cultural places that seemed inscribed with elusive narratives.

Temperamentally, however, Riddy is closer to poetic modernists such as the sixties English photographer of genteel interiors, Edwin Smith. He eschews Evans's cool irony. Riddy is a rare and curious figure in the present landscape in which so many other young fine art photographers are retreating from realism and beauty (for lack of a better word) and taking refuge in irony, self-reflexiveness or nihilism. It is equally interesting to situate him within temporary fine art practice where his dedicated, austere purism contrasts quaintly with the trend for transgression, untrammelled appropriation, attention-seeking, and visual one-liners of the young Brits. His subject matter comprises interior and exterior views of architecture.

Riddy is concerned with the fundamental enigma of photography - that the more palpably 'of itself' anything appears to be in an image, the more abstract it has become. His work is a ringing endorsement of the formalist aesthetic with its faith in the power of photography to transcend its function as document. John Riddy is that rare being: a completely plausible and unselfconscious contemporary artist.

David Brittain