

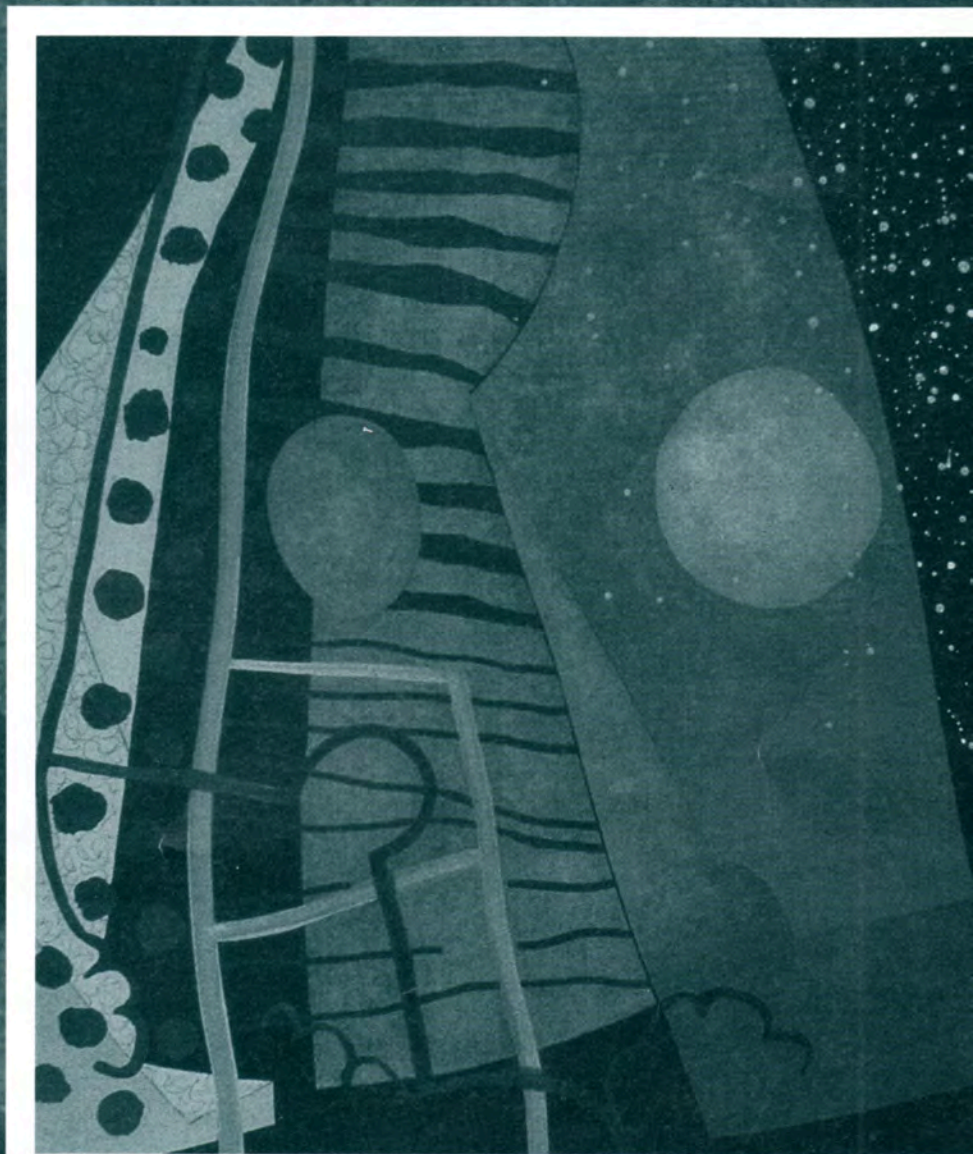
Vodka, a stiff breeze and paranoia

Look at that studio shot.

*Nestling there in the corner,
hoping perhaps that no one
will notice, lies a stratocaster.*

*Geoff Ridgen, a fellow artist,
has it that this man plays
the blues even better than he
paints and, if that is so, what
fearsome blues they must be.*

Clyde Hopkins paints in studios in Depford and Hastings. He has been Head of Painting at Chelsea since the Spring of 1990, and a retrospective of the work he has made during his time at Chelsea opens this month at the Davies Street Gallery. The exhibition includes the painting from which the show derives its title. **Vodka, a Stiff Breeze and Paranoia** was painted in 1992 immediately after time served at an artists' colony in New York State. A man bewitched by titles, especially when they appear to lead somewhere and then may not, Hopkins offers this prosaic red herring by way of explanation 'I was a bit paranoid. I drank too much vodka and a stiff breeze blew through the place most of the time.' He then goes on to explain that **Vodka, a Stiff Breeze and Paranoia** 'can be seen to characterise a period when my work was moving away from the open, painterly configurations of the late eighties to a flatter, more iconic, deadpan body of painting.' He has also spoken about this American moment as a breakthrough, as a brief moment of clarity which led to an uncomplicated phase of picture making.



Clyde Hopkins Egyptian Guitars in Space, 1995

Uncomplicated the pictures are not. The critic Sacha Craddock writing in the catalogue which accompanies this exhibition, says that Hopkins' paintings 'manipulate the gap between recognition and interpretation... while the paintings attract attention they also deflect contemplation. Paintings already capable of leading seem to lead even further now with more wistful titles... **Untitled ('Smoking Related')**, for instance, brings together elements with as much and as little significance as objects in a still life.'

Asked about his working method Clyde Hopkins will tell you that it embodies

'the gormless patience of a model aeroplane maker, apparently artless but demanding attention.'

Demanding attention maybe but twisting and spinning quickly beyond the grasp of easy interpretation. The work is full of false trails, covered tracks, apparent prat falls, witticisms, hints at meaning and memory teasing things. It has intrigued critics for many years, including Bryan Robertson who recently said of the paintings 'They add to one's sense of life very strongly, they expand and contract in one's memory, and they belong to European painting.'