

THE EYE OF THE ARTIST:

Five thousand people queue for an hour to get into a Paris show by young French artist Bernard Buffet. Ten years ago, his austere but striking pictures were selling at ten shillings each. But today, 30-year-old Buffet - seen here beside one of his self-portraits - can earn a thousand pounds for a small picture. Jacques Villon, France's oldest living painter, admires Buffet's "Fishmonger". Buffet, by the way, did the decor for Sagan's ballet "The Broken Date", whose bathroom scene shocked Monte Carlo, and may or may not shock London.

In a London auction room - the world through the eyes of a Royal child. It was drawn on a piece of Windsor Castle newspaper by King George the Fifth when he was eight years old. The Horse Guards, the top-hatted men, the tiraded ladies, have a vigour and effectiveness some adult artists might envy. Many modern painters unquestionably have vigour - you need it, when you paint with a decorator's brush - but the effectiveness isn't always so easy to spot. Here's a London exhibition of contemporary art, from which many people come away no wiser than when they started.

Still, let's be fair. Not everyone would hang these pictures in the drawing room - but many artists like Richard Smith have the gift of evoking a mood - of excitement, of repose, of menace - with their strange abstract creations. All you have to do is to give up the prejudiced idea that a picture should be of something. Then, if you like it, but one - they cost as little as £50.

William Green's another artist who doesn't believe a painting needs a subject - but he goes further. He dispenses with easel, palette, and brushes as well - not to mention colours. A sheet of hardboard, a tin of black bitumen, a few pints of paraffin for a thinner, a pair of plimsolls - and Mr. Green has everything he needs.

Mr. Green exhibited three works, made with this technique, at the London show you saw just now. The price - £125 each.

£125 - there's food for reflection!