

GAGOSIAN

 INDEPENDENT

## Michael Andrews, Gagosian Gallery, London, review: He was one of the most emotionally substantial and intellectually adventurous English painters of the post-war era

Michael Glover



*Michael Andrews 'The Colony Room I', 1962, oil on board*

You've barely heard of this English painter who died in 1995, have you? Why? Various reasons. He died relatively young. He produced very little – usually two paintings a year, and most of these works went into private collections. He eschewed publicity. He was not a print-maker. Why would a dealer bother to show him if there weren't a goodly flow of works to grease the palm? Of the sixty-four paintings in this show – about a quarter of his total output – only twelve of them are in the public domain.

And yet Michael Andrews was one of the most emotionally substantial and intellectually adventurous English painters of the post-war era. And this breathtaking show is the first substantial retrospective in fifteen years. Andrews was a painter who felt on his pulses the shiftingness of reality, and the best of his works, though grounded in realism, never end there. He was a painter who thought hard, but never wore that ceaseless intellectual curiosity on his sleeve. Andrews was a very laboriously pernickety painter, but the results feel quite otherwise. They have a joyous lift, an immanence and, above all, a curiously unbounded angle of view.



*Michael Andrews 'Thames Painting: The Estuary', 1994 – 1995 Oil and mixed media on canvas*

The show groups the works into three categories, and there are key paintings in each one. They take us to places we think we may know: the Thames Estuary or Ayres Rock, for example. When we stand in front of Andrews' view of the estuary, that point where water abuts land, we experience a strange feeling of vertigo. What exactly is the painting's vantage point? High, certainly, almost sea-gull high perhaps. We teeter there, looking down, across, and side to side, never quite getting a grip. The painting itself looks as if it has been conjured into being from the mucky stuff of the estuary itself: gritty, slick, shiftily sliding. We almost find ourselves tumbling headlong into the notion that this is an abstract painting. But no. Tiny figures on the shoreline – fishermen with their bowing rods – pinion it to the real.

Ayres Rock, the way its blunt, ochreous shimmer erupts out of the landscape behind a foreground of feather-light and insubstantial renderings of trees and grasses that seem barely painted at all (more airily wisped in than three-dimensionally realised) is pure immanence in its unearthliness.

With Andrews, nothing is quite bounded by what we think we may be seeing.