

Cliff Eyland  
 Anna Leonowens Gallery  
 Halifax  
 January 3 to 20

A little painting of a duck, a black silhouette, framed in a slide mount, represents the current state of Cliff Eyland's musing on the organisation of knowledge. Along with the other miniatures in the show, themselves fragments and quotations from works of the past seven years, it is ordered into a complex, symmetrical assemblage, measuring 3' x 5'. Presenting his work thus represents the current stage in a sequence of transpositions of modes of reproduction and the systems which order them, through which Eyland has been working his way during these years. It is called *Library Art Gallery* with works that were designed for the systems of one context being transposed into the quite unsystematic context of the other.

To date the library, its walls, shelves and filing systems, has been both content and context for Eyland. In the ordering system of the contemporary library, in marked contrast to the anarchy of the contemporary art gallery, he detects an attenuation of the Renaissance aspiration towards a classical order. Nevertheless this order is merely the result of the mass assumption that it exists. In fact, books are arranged according to an assortment of arbitrary schema, further extended by the conventionalised representations which constitute the entries on the 3' x 5' file cards. One of Eyland's library works cut the plates in Arneson's *History of Art* down to 3' x 5', then punched and inserted them into the card index in the correct places. Not only were Eyland's cards more like the original referents than the typed cards, but also, in order to make such a correction, they had to participate in the system — a neat bit of appropriation. This procedure is mimicked in the order Eyland has given to his *Library Art Gallery*. He transposes the given logic of the library to the gallery wall: 3' x 5' becomes

3' x 5', with many reproductive modes and much information compressed within those boundaries. The symmetrical arrangement, which allows for both horizontal and vertical reading, makes reference itself to salon hanging, historically the last time that galleries made use of a discernible system. The difference is that in the salon, prime eye level positions were reserved for the most important works, with significance decreasing towards the peripheries of the wall. Eyland has dispensed with these differentials in arriving at an arrangement which, he somewhat ruefully admits, accords with his ideas about the visual resolution of an image.

Such ideas have of course been a dominant, if unsystematic, and often unfashionable, system of organising things in art galleries. Another determinant here has been Eyland's enduring interest in the Cubists' systematic approach to the mysteries of the relationships between things.

Having worked ones way thus far through these systems and references to systems, in an exhibition that is a single image, what is it that one sees? The duck is one of many small works, in many media, some very detailed, some merely details, others reductions, all within the 3' x 5' format or framed by that other ubiquitous compressing agent, the slide mount. There are tiny landscapes, huge brushstrokes truncated, references to the techniques of commercial art, black paintings, references (verbal and visual) to the half-tone dot running throughout the image, which appear courtesy of Miro and Kandinsky in reproduction as well as Eyland. The overall symmetry is complemented by such structural opposites as day and night, mountain and sea, King and Queen, pen and pencil, original and copy, cool and hot, figure and ground. The content of some of the elements refers to the process of which they are a part. The miniature collages of royal cards refer to their own hierarchichal system and to that other evanescent structure of small pictorial elements, the house of cards. Visually, the result of the *Library Art Gallery* strategy has the charm and yields the satisfaction that comes from peering at any miniatures, working out an acrostic, trying to decipher the pattern in the carpet, suggesting that this is not the compression of the bit and byte so much as a visualisation of the words of Foucault. It is as if Eyland, in his incredulity at the order of things, wanting to show up its oddities, had reified some fragments of orders — structures made perceptible in order that they should be deconstructed.

Charlotte Townsend-Gault