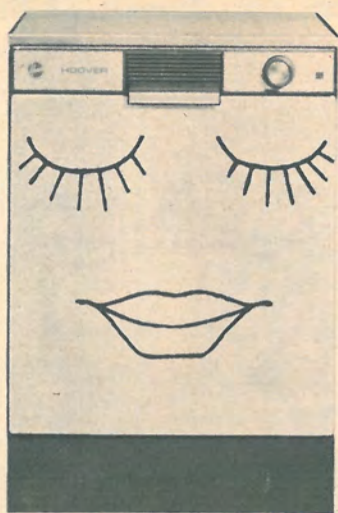


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Hoover Auto-Jet and Sun – the team that really gets things clean

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TIGER FLOWER

continued from page 24. / Your first thoughts on seeing pictures of hers are: Japanese, perhaps Persian (she owns a few examples of Fourth and Fifth century Persian calligraphy), Braque, Sutherland, Dali, Picasso, Chagall. This, too, she refutes.

Her derivations, in fact, simply go back to, and are for ever influenced by, that one word of Dominic Gnoli – "create!" It is imagination, she rightly realizes, not observation, that is the mainspring of art.

Art is also distortion, and she distorts like mad. In the jammy jargon so fondly employed by many art critics her paintings at one of her American one-man shows, of which she has already had 11, were described as "Surreal notions saved from cuteness by sharp gothic gaiety." To my dying day I shall ponder on what that means and so, I am sure, will she.

For myself I see her work as a kind of floating poetry. It has the wings of innocence. It is as if, in creating a picture, she opens the door of her imagination as if it were some bird-endowed, flower-blessed, tiger-ridden Noah's Ark and lets forth a magic flying population of creatures to enrich forests, make deserts flower and gather together in half-crazy dream sequences in which strange birds, giant blossoms, binocular-eyed butterflies and barren thorns are further ingredients in the already kaleidoscopic pattern. Naive it may sometimes look; but just as art is not truth so it is not worked out by means of slide-rules.

Naive – it is not at all surprising, therefore, that a great part of her excursions about the world has been taken up by a search for those painters known as *Les Naifs*. Of these she has collected relatively few of the older and more established ones. In America, Yugoslavia, Yorkshire, South America, France, Brazil, and elsewhere, she has, however, discovered a host of unknowns whose innocence and fantasy, so much in key with her own, "prove the joyous gaiety of their work".

Painters are rarely articulate (they don't need to be—they put "on canvas what they feel unequal to putting into words"), but if the miner and farmer she discovered in France, the disillusioned illiterate she found in Rio, the joiner-by-trade she unearthed in Yugoslavia, could express what they felt, they would probably say that their "work is without complication, unhampered by tradition, untroubled by 'school', spontaneous and from the heart". Their work, like hers, springs from a private vision. It is, as I say, a sort of floating poetry: done, in her own words, "with a child-like hand".

Tiger Flower, by Robert Vavra and Fleur Cowles, is published by Collins on October 14, price 25s.