

Untitled

Deceptively simple, truly original

Death of a master Patrick Caulfield, whose paintings of mundane objects defied labels, dies at 69

Ed Vulliamy, Saturday October 1, 2005, The Guardian

Patrick Caulfield, among the most enigmatic, melancholic and least classifiable of contemporary artists, has died after a painful battle with cancer. He was 69.

One of Caulfield's closest friends, Howard Hodgkin, said yesterday: "He was, I think, a very sad person, but wonderful company. I was once in discussion with him for a magazine in the garden of his then studio, and he appeared suddenly with a tray. I said, 'What's this?' and he replied: 'It's what every artist needs.' They were cocktails - lethal, of course."

Rejecting the label "pop artist" routinely attached to Caulfield, Mr Hodgkin said: "I always thought of him as a classical artist because of the way he made of his feelings a kind of monument. People didn't recognise the emotional and intellectual range in his work."

David Hockney recalled the young Caulfield, who joined the Royal College of Art a year after him: "He was a unique artist - I mean, it's all idiosyncrasy, really, and Patrick was a marvellous example. He was a quiet person, and I've always loved his work. I'm very, very sad."

Caulfield, who lived in London, rose to prominence in the 1960s as one of the "new generation" of British painters. His works are exhibited in public collections worldwide including the Tate Gallery, the Scottish National Gallery of Art and the National Gallery of Australia. He was joint winner of the Jerwood Painting Prize in 1995 and was nominated for the Turner prize in 1987. In 1996 he was made a CBE and an honorary fellow of the London Institute.

Peter Blake, another former student at the Royal College, recalled: "Patrick and I always worked with the same galleries; we have been stablemates, and he's a painter I have always admired. His heroes were the cubists, and I see him as a latter-day cubist, really, not a pop artist."

Allen Jones, who co-curated last year's Royal Academy summer show, said of Caulfield: "His originality was apparent from the word go. He deployed an

Untitled

intellectual rigour that turned his droll imagery into icons of our time."

Calling Caulfield "one of the most gifted painters of my generation", Bridget Riley paid tribute by focusing on one work: "Of all the beautiful paintings of his it is Dining Recess [1972, Arts Council Collection] that stays most in my mind.

"It is a deceptively simple subject: a dining table with chairs, against a cool grey background, a floating globe lamp floating above it, and in the upper recess of the painting a window. Patrick's pictures appeared deceptively simple, not to say dumb, but the longer you looked the more of their complexity revealed itself."

Sir Nicholas Serota, director of the Tate, described Caulfield as "one of the most original image makers in a talented generation of British artists".