Bob Law at Lisson Gallery, 1975
By John A Walker

At first sight Bob Law's works are so different from John Hoyland's that it hardly seems possible they could be part of the same enterprise— painting. Even so there are similarities. Law's exhibition consisted of six unframed, squarish canvases, all identical in format all painted white (apparently), all containing a single image: a narrow line in pencil and biro hugging the edges of the canvases (about one inch from the edges) to form borders.
Bob Law's paintings are extremely refined products. His art is one of nuances. A man in a hurry will get nothing from them: they require prolonged scrutiny. Painting is often considered to be a non-temporal art form but these works demonstrate how crucial time is to the experience of painting.

A previous set of paintings by Bob Law are known as "the black series" even though their blackness was not pure: it contained admixtures of different colours. Similarly his present six works (part of a larger set entitled Castle) will probably be remembered as "the white series" even though they are not purely white: Law has added minute quantities of different hues to the white liquitex, so that after studying them for some time, one becomes aware of slight differences of colour from painting to painting. But these differences occur at the very threshold of perception, so that one cannot specify the colours used with any degree of exactitude. Ideally these paintings should have been displayed under even daylight, because the perception of the works was hindered by the colour variations in the illumination provided by the Lisson Gallery's neon lights.

There is a curious ambivalence in Bob Law's attitude to colour, and it is similar to that of Ad Reinhardt's: the choice of black and white (in physical terms non-colours) appears to indicate a total renunciation of colour. But colour is permitted to enter his paintings by the back door, as it were; its presence is clearly essential yet like a word on the tip of the tongue, it constantly eludes our consciousness. White light, we know, contains all the colours but they are hidden within it. In common with the aesthetic of the American Minimalists it is what is excluded from Law's paintings, rather than what is included in them, which endows them with much of their significance. Similarly his choice of white as the dominant hue, a decision which might seem an arbitrary one, gains a logical dimension in relation to the diachronic development of his art, i.e. in opposition to the preceding "black" series. White can tend either towards blue or towards yellow, towards coolness or towards warmth. Law's paintings had a milky quality suggesting warmth, a sensation undoubtedly heightened by the contrast between them and the clinical, opaque, white emulsions of the Lisson's walls.