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## **Art lost out on the fringes**

NICK HACKWORTH

RICHARD ARTSCHWAGER . Serpentine Gallery

RICHARD Artschwager, an American artist who has been around since the Sixties, is mainly known for being less well known than he should be. While contemporaries such as Roy Lichtenstein, Jasper Johns and Malcolm Morley have been written into the art history books, Artschwager is currently a footnote. On the evidence of this exhibition, that is what he will remain.

There are two main strands of work: dysfunctional furniture sculptures and bold, mainly monochromatic paintings. Of the two, the furniture pieces are more interesting. Artschwager trained as a scientist and a painter but settled, during the Fifties, for furniture making.

By the Sixties, he had begun making pieces that mocked his commercial furniture by, effectively, being "pictures" of the things they represented. Table with Pink Tablecloth, for example, is a table-shaped lump of wood laminated with different coloured Formica that marks out the pink tablecloth from the brown "wooden" legs and the black negative space underneath.

The original idea was a nice one, but Artschwager has endlessly repeated it, with diminishing returns. His objects have become ever more obscure: weird lecterns, stools and viewing posts that are nothing more than design oddities. The paintings, meanwhile, are just pedestrian, their most distinguishing feature being that they are painted on Celotex, a heavy, compressed paperboard, that, if reversed, gives some nice swirly textures to paint on.

His earlier, realistic, monochromatic style, emulating the aesthetic of washed-out photographic negatives, was better than his more recent faux-naïveté that informs the particularly ugly White Cherokee (Pastoral I), in which a cartoonish white car cuts through a grey hostile environment of Celotex swirls with its yellow headlights.

*Until 10 February. Tel: 020 7402 6075.*