

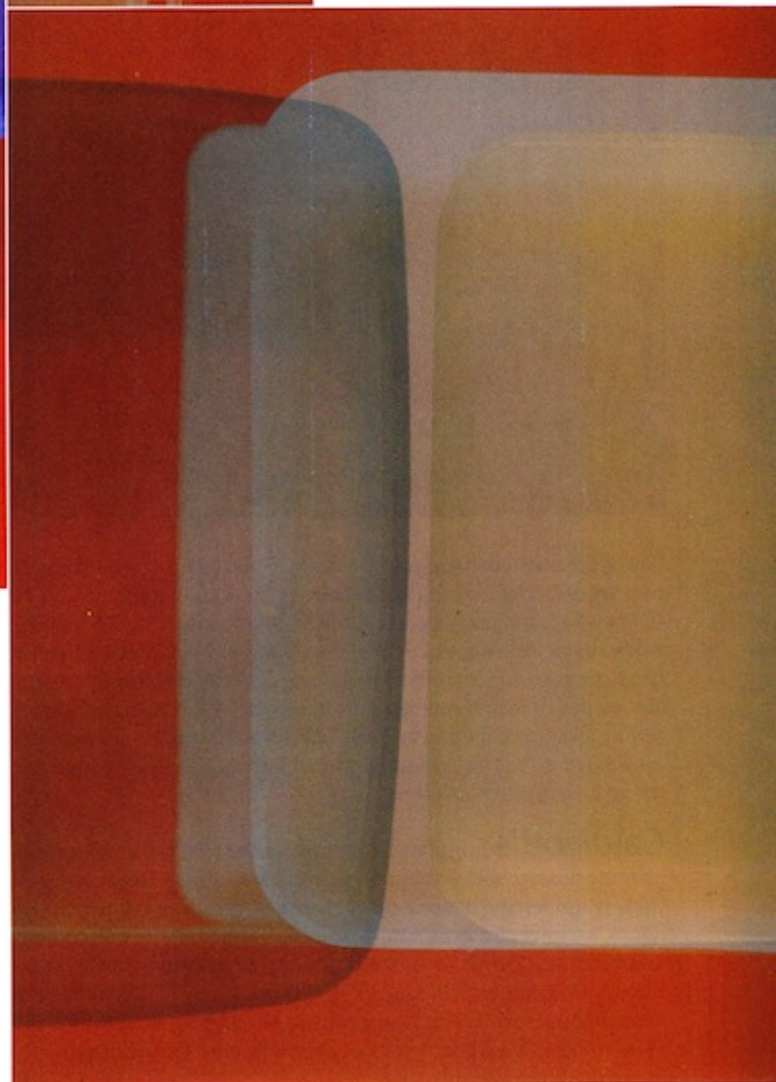
SEAL CHANGE: plastic surgery. Caldicott's cast-off cutlery and crockery could fill a housewife's dream kitchen

ROSE-TINTED RECEPTACLES Translucent tumblers and plastic plates may not be your idea of art, but **Jonathan Bell** is spellbound as artist Richard Caldicott transforms them into softly glowing abstractions

It was perhaps inevitable that Richard Caldicott – born in 1962 to a painter and a poet – would lead a creative life. After studying fine art at Middlesex, he headed for London's Royal College of Art, where he used collage, photography and colour photocopying to create a rich visual mix of texture and images. On leaving, he freelanced as an illustrator – collaborating with designer Vaughan Oliver on album covers for seminal record label 4AD, among others – but gradually his interest in photography was pushed to the fore, so he purged his portfolio and dropped his agent.

Caldicott's photography has an air of painterly mystery, combining the playfulness of pop art with the passion of abstract expressionism, mixing together the mundane, everyday domestic object with an overly artistic aesthetic, creating sumptuous untitled compositions with more than a suggestion of Mark Rothko or Ellsworth Kelly. 'I'm more interested in getting a painterly surface, and I've always been more interested in painting than photography,' explains Caldicott quietly, preferring to let the viewer bring his or her own interpretations to the forms he creates.

What might appear at first sight to be a simple target of concentric coloured circles is in fact an overhead view of plastic beakers, while totemic stacks of picnic crockery have an enviable symmetry than even



the most meticulous housemaid would find hard to match. Caldicott clearly has an eye for a stylish beaker, frequenting thrift shops and car boot sales worldwide. OK, so Tupperware is not an obvious artistic inspiration. But confronted by Caldicott's glowing photos, you wonder why the art world has been so slow to realise the fantastic plastic's rightful role as objet d'art.

His initial forays into plastic passion mixed hard edges with familiar forms, but his latest work takes the everyday object into the realms of the fantastical. His subjects are selected by colour, shape and form. 'It's all about getting closer to the object,' he says, and the tantalising snippets he presents are both puzzles and patterns.

Caldicott gently blurs the coloured card, 'floating' his models on a sea of pure red. An enlargement of humble ice-cream tubs and plastic



SEEING RED: shine on. Caldicott transforms the everyday into the luminous with coloured paper and two lights

bowls, drenched in background colour, slightly bent and buffed with use, transforms them into a translucent cellular structure. Even Caldicott admits that it is sometimes 'a bit of a shock' to see how his work turns out. Recent experiments have involved combining transparencies to create otherworldly overlaid images of forms bleeding and seeping into one another. This interest in abstraction has marked a move away from the pop images Caldicott was becoming increasingly associated with, and presented a new challenge to those constantly trying to demystify his pieces.

Caldicott's prints are Cibachromes, the result of a high-quality printing process using colour negatives. He shuns any form of digital trickery, preferring to use a simple set-up – 'just coloured paper, two lights, a tripod and a camera' – in the first-floor studio of his south London home. With the second floor given over to his wife, artist Fieroza Dörsen, and the attic filled with art, his two children 'have to sleep in the garden'. He is happy to hand his printing work to a studio, as he revels in the instant nature of photography: the craftsmanship lies in the composition.

Following many years of interest from photography-loving Germans and a successful show at the Hamiltons Gallery, Caldicott's star is in the ascendant. Confronted by his elegant images, the softly diaphanous plastic box is transformed into a heroic form. Surprising then that each year, some 105 million happy housewives attend the stiff suburban swap-meet that is the Tupperware party. One has to marvel at the lucky lumps of polychromatic polymers which make it into Caldicott's colour-saturated compositions. Still life has never been so vibrant. ✨

Richard Caldicott's work is on display at the Foire Internationale d'Art Contemporain, Pavillon du Parc, Porte de Versailles, Paris, from 15-20 September, on the Hamiltons and Dorothee De Pauw stands. Tel: 33.1 41 90 47 80. Prints are available from Hamiltons. Tel: 44.171 499 9493

