

# Exhibition of the week

## Aubrey Williams



'Dawn and Evening Star', 1982

★★★★

**October Gallery** Soho to Hampstead

One should be wary of saying an artist has been 'overlooked'; it can be a label as hard to escape from as the unjust obscurity which preceded it. But there are instances where it seems necessary and Aubrey Williams is a case in point. Omitted from every major exhibition of British abstract painting during his lifetime, Williams's current show at the Walker Gallery in Liverpool is his first UK museum solo show. 'Now and Coming Time', at the October Gallery, provides a concurrent opportunity for Londoners to see a

remarkable body of work by this extraordinary painter.

Though he lived and worked in London from the early 1950s onwards, Williams was born in British Guyana, where he worked for a time as an agricultural officer. Seconded to a remote part of the interior, he worked closely with the indigenous Warrau people. This contact with a native South American culture profoundly informed his work, prompting both a serious and reflective study of the great lost civilisations of Mesoamerica – the Maya and Olmec, and also a deep understanding of human

dependency on the natural environment. Mesoamerican motifs can be seen in many of the paintings on display here.

At one time the introduction of figurative elements into otherwise largely abstract compositions may have caused consternation, but now these dramatic, composite images make pertinent sense as testimony to faded empires and collapsed worlds. Mute witnesses dredged from a smouldering past, they float silently within Williams's solarised world of incandescent sunbursts and coral embers, an ever-timely reminder that nothing lasts forever. *Francis Gooding*