

EXHIBITION

SIGNS OF A STRUGGLE: PHOTOGRAPHY IN THE WAKE OF POSTMODERNISM

V&A, SW7

★★★★★

SUE STEWARD

AH, Postmodernism! The bane or the joy of the late Seventies, this exhibition celebrates 30 years of photographic change and proves its lasting influences on photography today. It is a fascinating reminder of the calculated deceptions behind these glossy, stylish and often seemingly superficial images. Hockney's mundane Get Well Soon card perfectly represents Postmodernism's basic principles: a photograph of sunflowers adjacent to his own painting of them, links eras and media with the Van Gogh reference.

Cindy Sherman's portrait of an ageing Hollywood star watching from her garden for the paparazzi who caught her on camera is entirely constructed and self-referential – and a perfect, early Postmodern model. Constructing scenarios is central here. Of today's generation, Clare Strand works forensically building sets in dining rooms, streets or gardens where a stained carpet or police crime site is staged, faked – and convincing. Ann Hardy's wrecked, post-party scene is meticulously convincing but taken to extremes: she photographs then destroys the subject/installation, leaving it to be interpreted entirely on surface.

Fakery, pastiche and mimicry permeate Postmodernism. Sarah Pickering's conversion of a cheap statue into a digitally simulated 19th museum piece offers a perfect example. And as this fascinating exhibition reveals, Postmodernist photography is normal.

■ *Until November 27. vam.org.uk, 020 7942 2000.*



The party's over: Untitled IV (balloons) by Anne Hardy