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The Catalan who loves flowers

Henrietta Howard writes about the paintings of José Escofet, featured in an exhibition at the Coe Kerr Gallery, New York, organized in association with Stephanie Hoppen

VIEWING CONTEMPORARY paintings of flowers and fruit which are instantly recognizable as the objects they are alleged to be, and which are equally recognizable as the work of a particular artist, is a comparatively rare encounter for a gallery-goer.

Yet such paintings are the enviable achievement of José Maria Es-

cofet Sabate, born in the Catalan province of Barcelona in 1930. After a traditional training, he moved on to experiment with abstraction, then, in his thirties, acquired a more rational view of the environment

and became a figurative artist of note amongst his contemporaries.

By the 'seventies, José Escofet had become profoundly interested in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Chinese and Indian painting,

and the simplicity and innocence which initially impressed him have proved a lasting influence.

He moved to England in 1979 and became increasingly preoccupied with flower painting. Having explored many techniques and media, he has turned more and more to gouache, and evolved a style which

1 Ornamental cabbage, 25 x 18". 2 Dusky blue fresh figs, 18 x 25".
3 Saucers of polyanthus and azalea, 18 x 25". 4 Lemon tree, 32 x 24".





has become quite irresistible to enthusiasts of his work.

He owes much of his success to the immediate reaction of Stephanie Hoppen, owner of the delightful showroom in Walton Street, Chelsea, which specializes in old paintings and decorative prints.

Alma Escofet showed Stephanie examples of her husband's work, and the response was instant and enthusiastic: 'I had long wanted to show a gallery full of flowers growing in all manner of pots - of clay, granite, ceramic and the rest,' says Stephanie Hoppen, 'and there were

the paintings before me.'

She has since been instrumental in showing his work in Britain and in America. *José Escofet: Recent Works*, an enchanting assembly of the artist's paintings over the past two years, is at the Coe Kerr Gallery, New York, this month □

1 Geraniums in Italian clay pot, 32 x 24". **2** Pale pink cyclamen in trough, 24 x 32". **3** A basket of polyanthus, 18 x 25". **4** Polyanthus in pot, 19½ x 15¾". **5** English William pears in mason's ironware bowl, 15¾ x 19½". **6** Three clay pots with narcissi, 32 x 24".



The works pictured here are gouache on paper, 1988-9, and are included in the exhibition, *José Escofet: Recent Works*, at the Coe Kerr Gallery, 49 East 82nd Street, New York, NY10028, USA, from October 25 to November 11.

