

ARTS' News

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Summer 2003

Business Arts / Conservatory Gallery 6 Hills Avenue Cambridge CB1 7XA 01223 211311 www.businessarts.co.uk
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OUT OF AFRICA

5th June - 13th July

Paintings **Beverley Gibbs**
Sculpture **Esther Joseph**
Baskets **Sinja Streuper**

Private View Wednesday 4th June 7 - 9 p.m.

Further opening times:
Thursdays to Saturdays, Sundays 6th/13th July 11 - 5 p.m.
or by appointment

HERE AND NOW ...

NORTHERN ATMOSPHERICS at the Conservatory Gallery until 26th April, a Review

A very atmospheric exhibition, as the title implies. Brooding skies, bleak moorlands, misty mountains; shafts of light breaking through and curving dry stone walls receding into the distance. **Geoff Marsters** shows works in his familiar medium of pastel but since his move to Cumbria has found fresh inspiration and impetus not only in the dramatic scenery but also in using oils as a medium. His palette is still mainly blues and purples, but it is now enlivened by yellows, greens and ochres. and the subject matter less impressionistic and more definite. **Mac Gregory** has long captured the loneliness and enormity of Yorkshire moors, and the peculiar beauty of bleakness. Working mainly in oils with a purply-pink palette, with both very large paintings and some very small ones, he also has two oil and ink paintings, *Hilly Road* and *Break in the Clouds* which are particularly appealing. **Laurence Broderick's** *Otters* in many poses, jumping, leaping, twisting and curling, in bronze are perennially popular, but his *Turtle* in green Ledmore marble attracted a lot of interest. During the exhibition Geoff gave an illuminating and entertaining talk in the gallery in aid of The Sick Children's Trust.

OUT AND ABOUT ...

JOHN PIPER IN DULWICH,
review by Robin Stemp

A National broadsheet - I forget which one - held a competition, recently, for the



At Work, oil by Beverley Gibbs

most apt description of Englishness in 50 words or under. I lost the details, but the idea of a shorthand for 'Englishness' has stayed in my mind. Englishness is all around us, but what, exactly is it? Ask around and you will get football hooligans and bowler hats - not on the same person, necessarily - and all the usual clichés such as the fey, teddy bear wielding, species of old fogey, overdosing on the *Pre-Raphaelites* and **Evelyn Waugh**. But the essential distillation of Englishness is elusive. Aggression is there and a growing aversion to the national Nanny's increasing influence. (Am I alone in wanting to light up on No Smoking Day even though I am a non-smoker)? So, what is this quality? Going some way towards a definition is *John Piper in the 1930's: Abstraction on the Beach* at Dulwich Picture Gallery, Gallery Road, London SE21 (020 - 86935254). The subtitle of the show, *Abstraction on the Beach*, is utterly seductive and the work fulfils this promise. The abstracts are well mannered, forms in singing colours - he is, above all, a colourist of a purity not always seen away



Mother and Child, African Spring stone by Esther Joseph

from the Scottish Colourists, and run in tandem with the better known collages and mixed media scenes of lighthouses, beaches and the sea. Piper's seas are gorgeous creations, splashing waves over lines of shingle and sand and, being movable, the use of collage gives the subject movement. There is something seemingly artless (the art concealing the art, of course) in the luscious, yet restrained use of mixed media - a very English tradition; nothing too exuberant please, no going over the top, all things in moderation. And yet, the very restraint is not constricting, but heartening. At the end of the decade he found his voice in the brilliantly lit architectural subjects with which he made his name. His designs for the theatre and for stained glass have the same qualities of controlled explosion. In 1940, he became an Official War Artist and the show ends with a subdued bang. *The Control Room at South West Regional Headquarters, Bristol*, shows us a map of the city, marked out in numbers only, the glare from the bare and ugly lights blanking out any features in this desolate room. A jug and glass stand in isolation, the one hint that humanity still lingers on. *The Phoney War* is seen as a piece of arrested motion, the colours and shapes are similar to the jubilant beach scenes, but are now static. It seems churlish and ungrateful to criticise an artist for doing too much but, in the later decades an inevitable repetition takes over - working to commission is a double edged activity. His stream of churches and country houses, city streets and beaches, was prodigious and this could be the problem with viewing him as a major international artist. Art criticism is nothing if not snobbish. But if **Ben Nicholson** can be raised to international status, why not Piper? His early work was as innovative as the better regarded Continentals, his sense of space and form as exciting as the *Abstract*

Expressionists - also better known - but what he actually is is not easy to define. A definition of Englishness in under fifty words might be 'John Piper.'

For those who cannot or will not make the journey to South London, the book of the show is essential reading. *John Piper in the Thirties: Abstraction on the Beach* is published by Merrell at £29.95 (why not call it £30?) ISBN 100 85894 223-3. The show runs until June 22.

MUSINGS ...

PETER BLAKE

by Anthony Day

My gallery-going is largely confined to Ely these days where there is much to enjoy the year through and plenty to dispute.



On a chilly April day while sheltering from a shower in the Old Fire Engine House I stole a preview of an exquisitely blended exhibition of pottery by **Sonia Lewis** and pictures by **Peter Cavacuiti** which primed me appropriately to enter the hygienic perfection of the Babylon Gallery and its latest exhibition by **Peter Blake**.

However, I was lured more easily into Waterside Antiques, a treasure-house of relics, by-gones and pictures from which I have found my bargains - only to be steered out quickly by one of my own paintings heavy with antiquity. They are never what you want them to be.

On then to the pristine interior and its inevitably choice presentation. Peter Blake stood for the British Pop Art movement of the 1960s while working like one living in an Aladdin's cave of delights, but he was bound to be overtaken by sharper satirical minds in the movement, **Peter Phillips** in particular. Yet Blake has continued to advance in reputation and status while Phillips has slipped away unnoticed, scorned by the Royal Academy who make a habit of rescuing artists out of vogue, such as **Paolozzi, Alan Jones** and **Joe Tilson** from Blake's era.

The disappointing aspect of bringing famous artists to the remoter provinces is that they are seldom but represented by prints, and Blake's are prints of prints. He has appropriated the images of commercial artists, photographers and designer of ephemera and reassembled them under his own name. Is this art or simply classroom crafts made easy? Is it a diversion that has led him off course? However, it is a long time since I saw anything by Blake that is not in this relaxed vein.

Each assemblage is based on a letter of the alphabet, which he found easy until he came to the 'Q' for which he succumbed to truer creativity and did an abstract design entitled *Quarters*. Admittedly it was an entertaining exhibition, as would have been one of cigarette cards or collections of posters evoking times past. Blake, I feel, has long been off course as an obsessive magpie with a collage fixation taking him away from stronger creativity.

My first enjoyable encounter with his art (as with many another's) was in the *Daily Express Young Artists' Exhibition* in London in 1955. His painting *Boy with New Ties* was a forerunner of many such images of childhood and youth, dedicatedly nostalgic and irresistibly charming. The best of his assemblages, surely, was his reconstructed novelty shop

exhibition at the Royal Academy Summer Exhibition, purchased from there for the Tate Gallery. Subsequently Blake was the unlikely founder of *The Brotherhood of Ruralists*, a group of townies attempting an outdatedly idyllic view of the countryside, Pre-Raphaelites reborn, you might say, from which Blake was soon to divorce himself. His remarkable advancement since then has been largely through the Royal Academy where he is something of a consultant sage, taking him to a CBE and last year to a Knighthood. While one can always puzzle over the distribution of honours, I do wonder here why other artists at least equal to Blake have received no support at all. It is time, surely (unless I have missed it) for a full Blake retrospective exhibition where I would hope to correct some of my impressions.

my little tin by Mark Handley

*i*t was not mine really i found it on the river bank glossy and blue as a new laid egg with a small hole in one end and something had drunk the contents while the gravy coloured river hastened towards the city and I threw in the tin which floated beautifully hole uppermost and began to follow me discreetly at walking pace past disdainful swans pretending not to be paddling hard to keep their position and their dignity as my little tin went with the flow negotiating eddies round fallen branches gracefully while I clambered over slippery stiles forced hedges threaded barbed wire and forded ditches deeper than wellingtons to keep up with my little friend until dusk began to fall and shattered willow trunks reared up their prehistoric heads silently bellowing as the mire sucked them down and overhead the whistle of homing ducks wings trying to keep up with their necks roused not the dark unwound moorhens below balanced over the water asleep on slender twigs as my little tin bobbed past glinting in the moonlight until we came to a place so beset with brambles that our ways had to part yet I was sure we would meet again below the mill race and saunter together by candle lit port decantered halls treble echoing chapels and lavendered gardens with trim lawns silvered by the moon but I waited in vain by the water rolling like newsprint over the weir where the great mill once stood for somewhere in the dark tunnel of boughs my little tin was lost crowded perhaps with less loved flotsam in some backwater or stuck in the whirlpool of a wide meander and now settled into that selfsame trolley from which he came so full of promise now caressed by siren tresses of green weed and magnifying the godlike eye of a pike in his shining circumference.



COLLECTIONS ...

AUDLEY END HOUSE, Saffron Walden, Essex

*O*n the site of a Benedictine monastery (Walden Abbey), the 17th century country mansion was granted to **Sir Thomas Audley** in 1538 by **Henry VIII** and converted to a domestic house



The Grip, Spring stone by Esther Joseph

known as Audley Inn.

His grandson **Thomas Howard** (the first Earl of Suffolk), demolished this house and built a much grander one, primarily for entertaining **King James I**, with the layout 'processing' accordingly so the King and Queen could each have their own suite of rooms. A strange combination of the ornate, slightly austere and pretentious, Audley End is now only one third of its original size.

Over the next century the house was gradually demolished until it was reduced to the present size. In 1762 **Sir John Griffin** arranged for **Robert Adam** to design new reception rooms on the ground floor which he did in the style of the 18th century with a formal grandeur. Robert Adam solved the problem of the Great Drawing Room having an undesirably low ceiling by making the furniture unusually small and lowering the chair rail. His small-scale design for the Ladies' Little Drawing Room, based on the style of ancient Rome, made it difficult for ladies wearing evening gowns to move between the columns.

The Great Hall is of particular interest with a wooden Jacobean screen, an unusual stone screen and a 16th century Flemish carving. Four of the upstairs rooms were converted as Reception Rooms by **Richard, third Lord Braybrooke**, to replace the former rooms downstairs. There is a collection of stuffed birds and animals in the lower Gallery, once the site of the original abbey cloister, which children especially might like. There are also two large cases of shells and fossils collected by the **Fourth Lord Braybrooke**. **Lady Braybrooke's** typically cluttered late Victorian Sitting Room is full of memorabilia. There is a quaint and atmospheric Gothic Chapel and large attractive grounds to explore. Children again will love the (long) journey of the miniature train ride amongst the teddy bear trail.

THE BOWES MUSEUM, Barnard Castle, Co. Durham

*T*he Bowes Museum originated from a private foundation created between 1862 and 1875 by **John and Josephine Bowes**. It is unique in that it has the appearance of a French country house set in large grounds. It houses collections of European fine and decorative arts of the period 1400-1875 unrivalled in the North of England and outstanding in Britain. There is particular emphasis on the arts of France, including items from the Bowes' home in

Paris, and also Spanish paintings with good collections of Italian and Northern European paintings, English furniture and European ceramics and textiles. There are also collections of archaeological material from County Durham, social history from Teesdale, clocks and watches, glass, metal work, silver, wood carving, musical instruments, photographs, sculpture, stained glass and toys.

A renowned exhibit is the Silver Swan, a splendid musical automated life-size model of a swan, a clockwork mechanism covered in silver plumage above a music box. It rests on what appears to be a 'stream' (made of twisted glass rods) interspersed with silver fish. When the mechanism is wound up, the glass rods rotate (to give the appearance of moving water), the music begins and the swan twists its head to the left and right to preen its back. It then 'sees' a fish in the water below, bends down to catch it, and swallows the fish as the music stops, when it resumes its upright position. The whole performance lasts about 40 seconds and is quite spectacular. The trick is that the 'captured fish' is concealed lengthways on a pivot in the swan's beak, to which position it returns. In real life of course, swans do not eat fish, but that in no way spoils the magic of the display.

Originally owned by the London jeweller and showman **James Cox** in his collection of clockwork automata which he exhibited in his private museum, the swan was described in a Parliamentary Act of 1773 enabling Cox to dispose of his pieces by lottery.



GARDENS ...

From our Garden Correspondent **Philippa K. Croft**:

GARDENS IN ANCIENT HISTORY

Pictorial records of walled gardens in the Nile valley exist from around 1400 BC. As a retreat from the heat and shelter from the cool wind the Egyptian garden was a private oasis, with shady palms, vine pergolas and fruit trees such as figs, olives, apples, pears and pomegranates, usually symmetrically arranged around a rectangular pool. These gardens appear to have combined pleasure with utility, and were not just the privilege of the nobility. Geometrically formal, they were comparatively small and inward looking, and in many respects provide the model for the average domestic garden which would not seem out of place today.

In contrast to these enclosures, large groves and hunting parks were created further into Asia by the Assyrians and Persians. Referred to as *paradeisoi*, they gave rise to the concept of the paradise garden. Unfortunately, no trace remains of **Nebuchadnezzar**'s famous Hanging Gardens of Babylon, built around 600 BC and described as a large series of brick terraces planted with vines and trees.

Such gardens as there were in ancient Greece seem to have been associated with buildings, serving the same purpose as public rooms or meeting places. Courtyards became the most important part of the living space, adorned with statues and terracotta pots, with perhaps a few trees and flowers to attract bees. Ancient Greek writers proclaimed their love of plants and the natural landscape, but there is no evidence for gardens in Greece being planted for their own sake, as works of art.

Roman gardens tended to follow the Greek example, initially being mainly small and utilitarian, but becoming more impressive and ornamental as the Roman Empire flourished. The typical villa developed round a central garden court (atrium) with a covered walkway (peristyle), the direct antecedent of the monastic cloister. The walls of the arcade were often painted with garden scenes. A well or small tank of still water may have been included, with perhaps a fig tree or vine for added shade. This 'outdoor room' became the focal point of domestic activities.

Gradually gardens became more sophisticated and architectural. Colonnades, pergolas, pools and fountains were popular, with statues, urns and clipped hedges and shrubs. This training of bushes developed into the art of topiary, a fashion that has recurred at various times in garden design history.

Excavation of a Roman site at Fishbourne in Sussex has revealed a garden layout, which seems to have contained many of these typical elements. The younger **Pliny** described his own country garden with its sheltered areas for sitting, similar in style to the **Emperor Hadrian**'s garden at Tivoli, parts of which still exist.



African baskets supplied by Sija Streuper

PERSIAN AND ISLAMIC GARDENS

In the hot, arid climate of the Middle East, gardens became a retreat from the barren plains and were enclosed by high walls to provide tranquillity and shade. The essential constituent was water. Persian gardens featured a central square pool or fountain, with water flowing down carved chutes and running into narrow channels that divided the garden into a four-fold pattern, aiding irrigation.



Playful Otter III, bronze by Laurence Broderick

With flowers such as irises, hyacinths, roses and jasmine, the Persian garden had a cool, sweetly scented atmosphere, and was used for sitting, eating and even sleeping, on carpets laid on the ground. Traditional designs of Persian carpets depict the formal garden layout with the cruciform shape of the water canal and areas of planting around it.

Following the Arabian conquests from 637 A.D the Persian garden became the source of the Islamic garden, designed to evoke paradise as described in the Koran, with the formal water canal representing the four rivers of life. This model was readily adopted in countries with similar climatic conditions, as Islam spread throughout Arabia, central Asia and the southern Mediterranean countries during the seventh and eighth centuries A.D. This vast area linked by a common religion and language encouraged the flow of trade and culture. The Moors invaded Spain in 710 A.D and their descendants created gardens there also, the best examples of which still exist at the Alhambra and the Generalife in Granada. These comprise a series of enclosed courtyards, with an ordered arrangement of rectangular patios, pools and channels, trees and flowers. Flower beds were originally lower than the paving so that when in bloom the flower-heads would have been level with the path and given the impression of a flowering pattern as on a carpet.

The Moorish kingdom of Granada survived until 1492, but further east, following the 13th century invasions of the Mongol hordes under the great **Ghengis Khan**, new empires became established. **Kublai Khan**, his grandson, built the renowned summer gardens at Xanadu in China, vividly described by **Marco Polo**. **Tamerlane** made palaces and gardens with canals and pools at Bokhara and Samarkand. From 1508, **Barbur**, the first Moghul conqueror of India, established gardens at Kabul, growing orange trees, pomegranates and sugar cane around a water reservoir, surrounded with 'lawns' of clover. Such gardens often had tiled or marble balconies, kiosks or pavilions placed above the water to provide viewing places.

LET US FRAME YOU !!!

ART ON A PLATE ...

by Katharine Macpherson DA

Risotto is one of my favourite comfort foods. Humble, homely and happy to use up whatever ingredients you have to hand (leftover chicken and peas - delicious!) while equally capable of dressing up well for a special occasion (hot smoked salmon with lemon, fennel and extra wine - gorgeous!).

Yet it can stir up surprisingly strong opinions. I have had friends complain to me of restaurants where it was too soft and sloppy ('like baby food') and others where it was too dry and firm ('like packet savoury rice').

The problem is that this is a dish which demands almost constant attention, so it can be tempting to cut corners. Treat it with tender loving care, however, and success is assured.

MUSHROOM RISOTTO WITH SMOKED PANCETTA

Serves 4

30g butter

1 tbsp olive oil

1 onion, finely chopped

250g carnaroli rice

250g mushrooms,

sliced (I used a

mix of button,

oyster and shitake)

8 rashers of smoked pancetta (available from Sainsbury's)

150ml dry white wine

1 litre stock (vegetable, chicken or ham)

chopped fresh parsley

freshly grated Parmesan

(optional) few drops truffle oil

* Fry the pancetta in olive oil till crisp, then put aside to drain on kitchen towel. Fry the mushrooms in the same fat, with a little extra butter if required, till just cooked then also reserve.

* Melt around 20g butter and gently fry the chopped onion till soft but not coloured. Add the rice and continue cooking for five minutes, stirring regularly.

* Add the wine and allow it to be absorbed. Keep stirring.

* Add the cooked mushrooms and start gradually adding the hot stock, a ladleful at a time, stirring constantly until each ladleful is absorbed before adding the next. The mixture should just simmer gently - this is a slow process (it can take half an hour or more) but necessary to achieve the right degree of creaminess without mush!

* When all the stock has been used up, taste a grain of rice. If cooked through, but with a touch of firmness, it is ready. If still too hard, add a little more hot water or stock and carry on cooking until the desired consistency is obtained.

* Stir in any remaining butter together with the chopped fresh parsley and season to taste. Serve with fresh Parmesan grated on top and crisp pieces of pancetta crumbled over that. Finish with a sprinkling of truffle oil, if wished.

Our wine correspondent Paul Bowes of Bacchanalia and Jug & Firkin recommends Wakefield Riesling 2001, Australian, £6.49, and says it is 'Ripe with a luscious limeyness, not too heavy but with a lovely lingering fresh finish - a grand complement to the above!'





Recreation, oil by Beverley Gibbs



Baskets brought from Africa by Sinja Streuper

THE FRY ART GALLERY

20 April - 31 August:

Bawden and Ravilious as Designers - A special exhibition and illustrated catalogue to celebrate the centenary of the birth of these two artists

6 September - 26 October:

The Olive Cook Bequest and drawings for sale by Edwin Smith

8 - 9 November: *Annual Sale by invited artists*

Castle Street, Saffron Walden, Essex CB10 1BD
Telephone 01799 513779
www.fryartgallery.org

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Hagar, African Spring stone by Esther Joseph

COMING SHORTLY

Don't forget that in between specific exhibitions the gallery is still open every Saturday and the first Sunday of each month, or by appointment, throughout the year, apart from the month of August.

Also, if you do not see what you are looking for, please ask - we will probably have it in our storeroom.

25th September to 25th October:

Paintings, batiks and etchings by **Jan Davies** and **Jill Walden**; Pots by **Stephen Murfitt**

30th October to 22nd November:

Pamela Hughes - A Retrospective - watercolours, wood engravings, wood cuts

27th November to 20th December:

Cambridge Drawing Society

ART CLASSES

here in the gallery and garden continue on Thursday mornings until 26th June (half term 29th May)

Cost £8 per session attended
Tel. 01223 211311

Pamela Marshall Barrell

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