STYLE | TRAVEL | BOOKS | ARTS | TELEVISION

Life&Arts

FTWeekend

Ariane de Rothschild
On money, history and family tussles

LUNCH WITH THE FT PAGE 3

Financial alchemy
Mervyn King on how to prevent the next crisis

BOOKS ESSAY PAGE 10

High flyers
Seaplanes are making a surprise comeback

TRAVEL PAGE 8

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Critics' choice

Life&Arts

Visual Arts Jackie Wullschlager

Nikolai Astrup: Painting Norway
Dulwich Picture Gallery, London
First exhibition outside his native country for the near-mystic painter, a lesser-known contemporary of Munch. Astrup's subjects are the forests, lakes and mountains around Jolster, where he grew up in a parsonage and later bought a farmstead. Transformed in paintings of luscious colour and rhythmic energy into mythical landscapes, stylistically between symbolism and Modernist flattened simplification.
dulwichpicturegallery.org.uk 020 8693 5254, to May 15

Painting the Modern Garden: Monet to Matisse
Royal Academy, London
Painter-gardeners Pissarro, Caillebotte, Henri Le Sidaner; "avant-gardeners" Matisse, Kandinsky, Klee; scene-40 Monets including the immersive "Agapanthus" triptych, reunited for the first time in Europe since leaving the Giverny studio: this is a glorious, optimistic, visually and intellectually absorbing show. Revitalising art, social and horticultural history to place the garden as motif for experiment with form and colour.
royalacademy.org.uk 020 7300 8000, to April 26

Beyond Beauty: Transforming the Body in Ancient Egypt
Two Temple Place, London
A fabulous juxtaposition within the neo-Gothic splendour of Lord Astor's former home, the importance of appearance and identity in life and death in ancient Egypt is documented through glamorous painted coffins, funerary masks, figurines, delicate jewellery, mirrors, hairpins — all under-sea treasures gathered from regional museums.
twotempleplace.org 020 7836 3315, to April 24

Marie Spartali Stillman
Watts Gallery, Guildford
Marie Spartali, born in Victorian London to an emigré Greek family, was model and muse to Rossetti, Burne-Jones and Julia Margaret Cameron, but was determined to paint. She trained with Ford Madox Brown, married American journalist William Stillman, developed an assured yet delicate manner and became a Pre-Raphaelite painter of landscapes — including a lovely record of William Morris's Kelmscott Manor — portraits and illustrations to Dante and Boccaccio. This is her first UK show.
wattsgallery.org.uk 01483 810235, to June 5

Lines of Thought
Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge

Bodleian Treasures: 26 Pairs
Weston Library, Oxford
Can displays of ink books be sexy? Oxford and Cambridge, homes to the UK's oldest libraries — predating even the Vatican's — have royal, papal, Ancient Greek, eclectic collections: a papyrus roll of Sappho's poems at the Bodleian; 1,000-year-old Icelandic sagas bone-bleached vellum "read" to divine everything from weather to war, at Cambridge's UL; rare examples of the Gutenberg Bible, the first book printed using moveable type, in both libraries. With very different approaches, these and other treasures ancient and modern are repositioned in two shows to sing the history of thought in fresh ways.

Cambridge's show is the more circuitous tracing six centuries of revolutionary ideas of gravity, anatomy, evolution. It celebrates the 600th anniversary of the UL, founded as a padlocked chest of leather-bound tomes, now boasting eight million volumes and 125 miles of open shelves. Highlights include Newton's annotated copy of his *Principia Mathematica* with its handwritten changes; Darwin's "primate tree" sketches — the initial expression of his theory that humans are a branch of the primate family — and Stephen Hawking's draft of *A Brief History of Time*.

Oxford, by contrast, playfully arranges its items in unexpected pairs. Some explore literary connections. Wilfred Owen's manuscript "Poems of Decorum (1)" alongside 18th-century botanical illustrations of poppies, others are dramatic contrasts: from the women's suffrage movement and a 1217 engrossment of Magna Carta; computer games for toddlers while the big *Audubon Book*, the most expensive volume sold at auction, is displayed with a ninth-century psalm manuscript in gold ink on purple vellum to question the economics of taste and what constitutes historical value.
cam.ac.uk 01223 333000; March 11-September 30
bodleian.ox.ac.uk 01865 277165, to September 2017

Chillida: Rhythm-Time-Silence
Ordovas, London
Late works made from Corten steel and granite elaborate Chillida's life-long concerns about the boundaries between matter and space: "Elogio del vacío VI"; "Peine del viento XIX", derived from the iconic Wind Comb series of giant steel forceps extending from the cliffs of San Sebastián; the carved "Lo profundo es el aire XVIII", (Deep is the Air), responding to a poem by the artist's friend Jorge Guillén.
ordovasart.com, 020 7287 5013, February 9-April 23