

Life & Arts



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Visual arts Jackie Wullschlager

Kenneth Clark: Looking for Civilisation

Tate Britain, London

Period reconstructions evoke English taste during the art historian's Edwardian youth – Landseer, Beardsley, Japanese prints – and during the 1930s-40s, when he collected and jumbled displays of Renaissance and impressionist paintings, Coptic textiles and German silver in his grand homes as a “rearguard action” against modernism. Paradoxes – how an elitist conservative democratised art; why a patron with brilliant insight into the past failed to understand art in his own time – make this idiosyncratic show thought-provoking if nostalgic. tate.org.uk, 020 7887 8888 runs to August 10

Celia Paul

Victoria Miro, London

Celia Paul's still, meditative self-portraits and portraits, mostly of her four sisters, in gentle, free brushmarks and a dominant white-grey tonality, are often compared with Gwen John's; sharing the latter's melancholy, rigorous figurative approach and delicate touch. But I find them more interesting, as the real strength of Paul's project becomes apparent

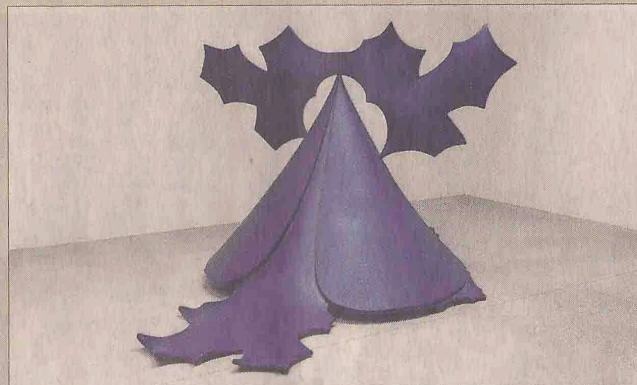
Phillip King

Thomas Dane Gallery, London

The twirling pink column “Tra-la-la” (1963), the orange, open-beak triangular form “And the Birds Began to Sing” (1964), the swirling purple cloak of “Genghis Khan” (1963): Phillip King is the great colourist of British postwar sculpture, bringing wit, flexibility and openness while maintaining a strongly formalist basis.

This condensed survey, focused on the 1960s-70s but including recent and new works, celebrates King's 80th birthday. It begins with his earliest wood and plaster experiments, utilising what he believed to be sculpture's most primal act: standing two objects on end leaning against one another to create a triangle or apex. Unpainted, these stark white pieces represent sculpture stripped down to simple forms – an exploration of geometry that determined the rest of his oeuvre.

Visiting Documenta in 1960, King reacted against a European art “dominated by a postwar feeling which seemed very distorted and contorted. It was somehow terribly like scratching your own wounds, an international style showing the same neuroses.” He favoured, instead, American optimism, large scale and “less involved” styles. In the sugar-pink inverted slit cone “Rosebud” (1962), a highlight here, he



‘Genghis Khan’ (1963)

pioneered the use of PVC plastic to create a smooth surface and allegorical form – sexual as well as pastoral – with a formal reference back to Cézanne. “Blue Blaze” (1967), a multi-part timber arrangement, drenches the viewer in royal blue and has echoes of classical architecture, Lego blocks and surrealism. “Sure Place” (1976-77), a hut-like structure or hide-out, is wrought in domestic building materials and engages with brutalist architecture.

Immediately accessible and engaging, eccentric, pluralistic in his

references to the external world, from memories of his Tunisian childhood to English gardens, and in his use of materials, King's work defies sculptural conventions of weightiness and solidity. His expansive approach has wide influence – his students included Richard Long and Michael Craig-Martin – but he is also in deep debate with tradition: modernism, minimalism and his experiences as assistant to Henry Moore and Anthony Caro. thomasdane.com, 020 7925 2505 from Wednesday to July 26

Chillida on Miró

Ordovas, London

A first exhibition exploring the relationship between the two Spanish artists. The pair, who were born a generation apart, met in Paris in the 1940s and the show displays their correspondence – much unpublished – testifying to a deep friendship across decades, as well as a range of sculptures by both, and Miró's major painting “Femme dans la nuit”. ordovasart.com 020 7287 5013 runs to July 26

Cézanne and the Modern

Ashmolean, Oxford

One of the best, most personal small American collections, gathered by Henry Pearlman in the 1940s-70s, visits Europe for the first time. The stellar, rare group of Cézanne watercolours alone make the show worth visiting. Pearlman also loved Chaim Soutine, represented in depth – whirling Ceret landscapes, portraits, a shrill still life of a hanging turkey – and explored impressionism and modernism through a singular focus on unusual works by Van Gogh, Toulouse-Lautrec, Gauguin, Modigliani. Final fortnight. www.ashmolean.org 01865 278002 runs to June 22

with time: the concentrated though understated emotional energy of chronicling a family and its subtle shifts over many years and the sense of Paul's evolving quest to break down what Rowan Williams called “the polarity between self-

contemplation and the contemplation of the other”. This psychological intensity, more than formal influences, is her debt to her mentor and former lover Lucian Freud. victoria-miro.com 020 7336 8109 from Thursday to August 2

Alexander Calder: Gouaches

Gagosian Gallery, London

Boulders, sunsets, solar systems, cacti and spiralling vortices atop pyramids: the exuberant arabesque line that Calder translated into his mobiles

is shown here to be similarly the starting point for brilliant-hued gouaches in ochre, yellow and vermilion, depicting enigmatic forms abstracted from nature. gagosian.com 020 7493 3020 from Tuesday to July 26