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Reviews

Alicia Paz

★★★★★
Unit 2 East End

Contemporary culture's attitude towards identity sees it as arbitrary and interchangeable; something put on and taken off, bought and sold. It's based on an idea of freedom, but runs the risk of commercialisation and artificiality. Feminine identity often gets the brunt of this tension. So does painterly expression. For the Mexican painter Alicia Paz, it's what drives her disarmingly entertaining comic-style paintings of women as monsters.

Paz's older works transplant female faces from fashion mags onto goofy creatures culled from a defunct science fiction; a crab-clawed robot or rubbery, indefinable amphibians. Their new bodies are an oddly good fit – from groomed products of the culture industry, they've become exuberant, self-determining nomads.

Paz adorns her hybrids with jewels and daubs them with gestural, 'expressionist' brushstrokes, as if investing her subjects with a willful desire for authenticity they might lack. In her 'tree' paintings, the female faces blossom from branches composed from variegated illustrational styles; in another, the tree itself seems to grow out of cartoonish formations of gloopy abstract paint.

Paz's paintings reflect on how even the macho ideal of expressionist painting



'South of the River', collage and paint

becomes a reproducible cliché. It's not a new idea, but she reclaims it as a playful weapon against the equally empty stereotypes of mass culture. Painting emerges as a kind of playful, primitive monster, analogous to Paz's proto-feminine protagonists. In her latest landscape, Paz's creation looks out from an Edenic landscape of cartoon Orientalism. She-it seems happy there; the self may be a synthetic, constructed thing, but Paz's paintings suggest that once it takes shape, it takes on an unstoppable life of its own. *JJ Charlesworth*

Tim Stoner

★★★★★
Alison Jacques West End

Another week and another gleaming emporium of contemporary art opens for business. You can't move for new, moved or improved spaces these days and the upgraded Alison Jacques Gallery in Fitzrovia fulfils all three criteria by being far superior to her previous Georgian house on Clifford Street. Tim Stoner's new work is improved, but only up to a point. It is a big, round point that unites these heavily populated scenes, from the full moon of 'Luna' and the spotlights of 'Kickers' to the rings formed by synchronised swimmers or yoga practitioners in smaller gouaches. Symbolically, these circles represent close-knit human groups who not only dance,

move or stretch together but also grow, pray and die in unison.

Stoner's high-stepping can-can girls and splayed gymnasts capture athletic grace but the more sinister gatherings of conforming kids in 'Growth' and admiring women of 'Entourage' almost convince one of the hypnotic power brought about by engineered social harmony.

However, Stoner's admirable subject matter never engages full attention simply because his style is so seductive. His fizzy coloured washes, which resemble the split-colour process that makes flat images look 3D, have not altered much since he won the inaugural (now defunct) Beck's Futures prize in 2001. Except now there's more to focus on in the background, more reasons to linger and join the crowd. *Ossian Ward*



'Luna', oil on linen

Juliette Blightman

★★★★★
Whitechapel Project Space East End

Not much happens during the three minutes of Juliette Blightman's film, 'The Chips are Down' – just a soundless, static shot of a sunlit, domestic interior. The intention is a meditation on time and place, and filmic narrative. Yet for all its formalism, it's also extremely atmospheric: shot in 16mm, badly scratched, and played on an old, rattly projector, the film gives the impression of belonging to a past era, and lends a sense of mystery and melancholy to the faded, '70s décor of beige settees and mustard drapes.

The only movement in the scene – apart from the occasional car passing outside – is provided by the television playing in the corner of the room, its screen half-obscured by sunshine. It's just about possible to discern that staple of daytime re-runs, an episode of 'Agatha Christie's Poirot' – itself a period piece.

Despite appearances, though, Blightman's film isn't in real-time. The clue is the strobing effect on the television: periodically, the strobing increases



'The Chips are Down', film still

in speed, before abruptly cutting to a completely different image – a result of the fact that Blightman filmed it on a wind-up camera which inevitably kept on slowing down and stopping. When, in the final few moments, Poirot ends and a new programme begins – a more recent production, in crisper resolution – the film suddenly and dramatically turns away, focussing instead on the other side of the room, as if disgusted by this obscene intrusion of contemporaneity, refusing any further revelation of its own artifice. *Gabriel Coxhead*

In the studio

Cathy De Monchaux



drawings of horses, plus some notes I write and stick on the wall for myself, with messages like 'focus and stop fucking about'. In the back, where my assistants are working I have pinned up some objects I found when I moved studios, like a twist of suede that looks like a figure, a curl of rind from something, a dried seahorse. They relate to past works I've made which are all sold or in collections so they're almost like reminders or memories of them.

On the bookshelves?

I have a coffee table with some horse-related books on it, such as 'The Horse in Art'. I drew a lot of horses as a child. There's also 'The Living Dead' about the Palermo Crypt where the bodies dry rather than decompose. It's gruesome but the bodies can look quite beautiful.

Solitary or social?

I have assistants, who are great, but I prefer it when they're in a separate room so we can both get on with what we're doing. There are a lot of propmakers in the nearby studios and we're all quite sociable – I've just put a picnic table up outside.

Pets or pests?

I have two green-eyed cats, Stripey and Spotty, who are brothers and part Bengal wild cats. There are also mice here that freak me out. I think maybe they know that I have a deadline, so that's when the cats come into the studio.

Couldn't work without?

My health and my hands – so probably my osteopath (I've had trouble with my thumbs), my acupuncturist and my therapist.

Time out?

I can't spend every day in the studio, sometimes I just need to go out and be in the world, so I'll wander around town and more than likely end up in Selfridges.

Interview: Helen Sumpter
Cathy De Monchaux's new work is showing at Fred from May 17-Jul 1 (see East End Listings).

Cathy De Monchaux's seductive and sexually charged metal, fur and leather sculptures earned her a Turner Prize nomination in 1998. She is preparing for her first significant London show in five years, featuring figurative tableaux of model soldiers on horseback, made in response to current world conflicts.

What's going on in the studio at the moment?

I've just moved into a new studio in Camberwell. A few years ago I got to the point where I felt that I couldn't keep making the same work, so it's exciting to be in a new space, producing something different.

Nine to five, or open all hours?

I have a seven-year-old son, so I have a routine which fits around him. When a deadline's really near I have slept in my studio, which is why I put in a shower here.

On the speakers?

I don't do iPods, because you miss what's happening around you. I listen to CDs in the studio – most of it quite 1980s – but it could be anything from Joan Armatrading to Sigur Rós, Damien Rice, David Bowie or Van Morrison.

On the walls?

There's not a lot because I haven't been here long, but I'm making framed wall pieces and it helps to be able to see them from a distance. There are diagrammatic