

THOMAS DANE GALLERY

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# London exhibition roundup: a glut of Rauschenberg treats at Tate, the aftermath of Post-Modernism, a De Chirico-inspired group show and Thuring's trompe l'oeil tapestries

by LOUISA BUCK | 12 December 2016



Robert Rauschenberg's *Untitled (Spread)* (1983) (Image: © Robert Rauschenberg Foundation, New York)

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### **Revolt of the Sage, Blain Southern (until 21 January)**

This ambitious, disquietingly atmospheric show takes its title from a 1916 work by Giorgio De Chirico. The picture itself is deliberately absent, but the Italian painter's moody notion of a mysterious metaphysical realm, redolent of loss and longing and in which "the past is the same as the future..." permeates a diverse lineup of leading contemporary artists. These include Goshka Macuga, Christian Marclay and John Stezaker, which here are made to spark-up unexpected conversations with more historical post-war works by Lynn Chadwick, Jannis Kounellis and Sigmar Polke.



Installation view of *Revolt of the Sage* (2016) (Courtesy of the artists and Blain | Southern. Photo: Peter Mallet)

While none of the above—or any of the show's artists—are Surrealist per se, the collective subconscious is given a thorough prodding as, in multifarious ways, images are fragmented, reframed and/or distorted. In Stezaker's haunting collages the face from a vintage photographic portrait is replaced by a landscape, or film stills made to merge into and out of their settings; while Sigmar Polke's prints violently smear found newspaper images. Especially unsettling is Paloma Varga Weisz's carved wooden sculpture of a prone child in a white cotton nightie, inexplicably lying beneath a shelf loaded with scientific glass vessels. Punctuating and presiding over this troubling terrain are the powerfully animated bronze sculptures of Lynn Chadwick, many of which live up to their earlier labeling of "geometry of fear".

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**“...Hounded by external events...”, Maureen Paley (until 29 January)**



Lucy McKenzie's Kim Philby (2011) (© Lucy McKenzie. Courtesy of Michael Bracewell)

An ominously topical title that certainly sums up our current situation, but which actually comes from poet Stephen Spender's description of the anxious domestic and international situation of the 1930s: a time when, in Spender's words again, "the old world seemed incapable of solving its problems and out of the disorder Fascist regimes were rising". A general mood of disquiet hovers throughout this show, which has been scrupulously curated by Michael Bracewell. But much of the work also refers obliquely to the aftermath of Post-Modernism and the cross-generational impact of failed revolutions and ideologies found wanting. Past and present collide in Lucy McKenzie's pencil drawings taken from old photographs of "the Cambridge Five" ring of Soviet spies Guy Burgess, Kim Philby, Donald Maclean and Anthony Blunt. And while the paintings of Serban Savu may ostensibly depict the post-industrial working people of his native Romania going about their daily business, both their surveillance-camera viewpoint and the hulking Soviet architecture that acts as a backdrop also ensure that these glumly atmospheric scenes remain steeped in the legacy of the Communist era.

The shadow of Communism similarly hangs heavy over Andrew Miksys's series of photographs taken in the local village discos of his native Lithuania. These illicit gatherings often take place in bleak disused Soviet-era buildings with today's youth getting down and dirty amidst trashed interiors and what Miksys describes as the "debris of a dead empire". History may repeat itself, but the outcomes are not always predictable.

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**Robert Rauschenberg, Tate Modern (until 2 April)**



Robert Rauschenberg's *Untitled (double Rauschenberg)* (around 1950) (Robert Rauschenberg and Susan Weil's Monoprint Private collection)

What a treat this show is. Six decades of unceasing trailblazing creativity with an abundance of astonishing works brought together that will probably never travel again. The first room alone is crammed with a mind-boggling array of experimentation. In the first few years of the 1950s Robert Rauschenberg had made blueprint body-silhouette photograms with his wife Susan Weil; created an array of Cornell-ish “Personal Boxes” whilst in Italy and North Africa with his then-lover Cy Twombly; produced the blank, uniform roller-painted White Paintings that inspired John Cage; and with Cage rolled out the great Automobile Tire Print of 1953. Then, of course, there is the notorious Erased De Kooning Drawing, which is here on loan from San Francisco’s Museum of Modern Art.

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And all this is before the Dirt Paintings, the Red Paintings and his great, expansive, exuberant Combines, which after all these years still strut their stuff—and flick their ties, spin their suggestively positioned fans and twirl their parasols—with gusto, in what the great man famously described as “the gap between art and life”. It is especially exciting—despite it now being incarcerated in a perspex box—not only to get up close and personal with his iconic stuffed goat Monogram, but also to see from the accompanying sketches how painstakingly he planned it.

Each gallery immerses in a new line of creative enquiry: his live work with Merce Cunningham—ranging from the artist roller skating on stage wearing wings of stretched silk, to his enormous multipart, moveable scrap metal sculpture-cum-prop, wired up to increase its presence with built-in microphone systems. There are the 1960s silkscreen paintings, which seem to flicker like TV screens with images both historical and contemporary, as well as Rauschenberg’s own experiments with technology ranging from a giant 1,000-gallon tank of bubbling flesh-coloured clay to a one-line drawing on a tiny thumbnail-sized ceramic tile destined for the moon. This push-pull between maximal and minimal never ceases. In one of my favourite rooms a parade of his spare, wall-mounted sculptures made from cardboard packaging is faced by a vivid series of hanging fabric pieces made after travelling to the Indian textile city of Ahmedabad. Then from floating silk he moves back into the world of trash, this time with the Gluts, vivid metal sculptures salvaged and refashioned from twisted car parts, street signs and oil drums.

Overall, my only criticism is that this protean output would have benefited from being given the entirety of Tate Modern’s fourth floor galleries (after all, this was granted to Gilbert & George) and, although exhilarated, I was left wanting more, and wanting more space for what there was.

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Caragh Thuring's *The Silent Service* (2016) (Courtesy of the artist and Thomas Dane Gallery, London)

### **Caragh Thuring, Thomas Dane Gallery (until 21 January)**

This most exciting and original young painter goes from strength to strength in a new series of works in which her characteristic layering of imagery is given a whole new dimension by being painted on custom-made canvases made in collaboration with specialist weavers in Suffolk and Belgian tapestry makers. Readings become even richer and more complex in the knowledge that the designs of these tapestry-canvases are themselves based on images taken from Thuring's previous works, and often it can be quite difficult to distinguish between what has been woven and what has been painted.

But although there is much playful riffing on trompe l'oeil and Thuring's choice of subject matter can be highly personal and also often quite arcane—many of the new paintings depict fragments of oil rigs and looming submarines that formed the backdrop to the artist's childhood spent near a Scottish naval base—these paintings are always immediately and intriguingly engaging. Whether it's an architectural fragment that becomes a figure, a woven expanse of brickwork that sprouts painted leaves or a linear personage crouched against the coloured grid of a tartan plaid, their origins may



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be highly specific, but at the same time everything is left generously open to a multitude of potential interpretations and possibilities.

[http://theartnewspaper.com/comment/blogs/Luisa\\_Buck\\_Blog/london-exhibition-picks-a-glut-of-rauschenberg-treats-at-tate-the-aftermath-of-post-modernism-a-de-c/](http://theartnewspaper.com/comment/blogs/Luisa_Buck_Blog/london-exhibition-picks-a-glut-of-rauschenberg-treats-at-tate-the-aftermath-of-post-modernism-a-de-c/)