

A brief history of time and self

THOUGH at one time in the Nineties he was regarded as a Young British Artist, Christopher Bucklow has always stood apart from that group by dint of the intellectual breadth and curiosity in his work. In his latest exhibition, *I Will Save Your Life*, Bucklow is showing his work alongside a series of etchings by William Blake.

The comparison we are invited to make is that Bucklow's art, like Blake's, is the product of a systematic investigation of the self and that the individual works are part of an ongoing project.

The major pieces, many inspired by his recent residency at the British Museum — during which he underwent psychoanalysis — are dense and fantastical charcoal and pastel drawings, the surfaces of which are occasionally violated by slits in the canvas. Representational

EXHIBITION

Christopher Bucklow & William Blake/*I Will Save Your Life*

Rifleman, W1

Nick Hackworth

and symbolic meanings fill the work.

In *The Birth of Jehovah*, a large charcoal drawing on a purple background, personifications of aspects of the artist's psyche struggle with each other. In other pieces, such as *From This Time On*, a different aesthetic takes over, with Bucklow smearing and dripping the paint over his figurative forms, recalling the surfaces of American abstract expressionism.

At the heart of the show is an odd

drawing-cum-diary, *All I Have Left of You is Me*, in which concentric circles, each representing a year, emanate from the calculated moment of Bucklow's conception. In the appropriate places, he has written in significant events and dreams, some of which have inspired the paintings and drawings here.

Interestingly, though tangentially, the chart reveals that Bucklow's dreams cluster in certain months, a previously unknown phenomenon that is now being taken up by researchers investigating dreams. Such an accidental by-product, the stimulus of further investigation, is a fitting tribute to a body of work that strives so unusually to unify aesthetic and intellectual quality.

● Until 2 August.

Information: 020 7439 0000.



Battle of wills: Peter Bowles (left) seems to play the devil to Edward Fox's Faust

The art of deception

AN insufferable hour of aimless chatter in a 1930s Italian garden has to be endured before Simon Gray's *The Old Masters* begins to come to its intriguing dramatic point.

The situation is saved by Peter Bowles's arrival as the most famous art dealer in the world, Joseph Duveen. All affable grandeur in a striped suit and black hat, Mr Bowles stands, arms outstretched, in the midst of the study belonging to the big art authority, Edward Fox's inscrutable Bernard Berenson.

"Let us embrace," Bowles coos in a voice that caresses words to the point of virtual indecency. Fox ignores him, sitting at his desk in a sulky, stoney-faced silence.

The scene is set for a male power-battle, with reputation and loads of money seductively at stake. Or is it? The fascination of *The Old Masters* has to do with the fact that the audience has to gather and guess just what each of the two famous men are after. Motives and meanings are shrouded in doubt.

A first, inept version of *The Old Masters* was published under the title of *The Pig Trade* and wisely never produced, though Gray has retained its central argument.

In dealing with a close encounter between real-life people, Berenson and Duveen, not to mention Berenson's wife Mary (Barbara Jefford) and his secretary/lover Nicky, the author does not say whether his play is based on

THEATRE

The Old Masters

Comedy

Nicholas de Jongh

fact or his own fiction. Nevertheless the contest between the two men, is conducted with serpentine guile.

This tremendously acted production by Harold Pinter, who has now directed nine of Gray's plays, finely tunes a tense bartering contest in which Duveen seems — and note the verb — to play the devil to Berenson's Faust.

The art expert, who for years has provided attributions for the dealer, is being offered a new, lucrative financial contract on condition that he agrees to desist from publishing his view that Giorgione's *The Adoration of the Shepherds* was really painted by Titian.

Fox's Berenson, speaking in that strangled, upper-class drawl of a voice made famous by the 1960s Prime Minister, Harold Macmillan, passes from hauteur to snarling fury, in face of the riveting Bowles's silken menace and disdain.

But Barbara Jefford, terrific as Berenson's dying wife, and Sally Dexter's Nicky are final witnesses to the play's sharp warning about human deviousness.

● Until 28 August.

Information: 0870 060 6637.

"GUT-TWISTINGLY TERRIFYING"

— Kevin O'Sullivan, THE MIRROR



GREG KINNEAR

AND

ROBERT DE NIRO

REBECCA ROMIJN-STAMOS

When a miracle becomes a nightmare... evil is born.

GODSEND¹⁵

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