

The Arts

A flight to the Finnish

EXHIBITION

Eija-Liisa Ahtila
Tate Modern

Nick Hackworth

HAPPILY, video artists seem no longer ashamed to make work that is comprehensible. Finnish artist Eija-Liisa Ahtila focuses almost exclusively on human relationships, working often with Finnish actors or members of the public. She relies on decent dialogue between characters and employs a simple and direct visual style that is subservient to the story being told.

It is a formula that saw her gain international recognition during the 1990s, earned her a certain amount of critical acclaim at the Venice Biennale in 1999 and

has now led her to a solo show that will profit from overlapping with the crowd-pleasing Matisse Picasso exhibition, due to open on 11 May. Her video pieces are spread throughout the gallery, broken up by passages of incidental photography, though the series that greets you in the first room, featuring the naked artist adopting various canine poses, has a certain amusement value.

In *If 6 was 9*, split across three screens, five girls, aged between 13 and 15, discuss their sexuality (in Finnish, but there are subtitles) as we watch scenes of typical teenage life unfold. Some might find watching 13-year-old girls discussing "cute cocks" prurient, but the naturalness of the girls' performances manages to sidestep the issue. In *The Present*, five short stories each end with the statement "Give yourself a Present,

Forgive Yourself", which would be agonisingly glib if the stories were not based on interviews with real women who developed psychosis at some point in their lives.

The most compelling passage in Ahtila's work comes in *Consolation Service*, in which the traumatic breakdown of a marriage is depicted in a straightforward short-film treatment. In the midst of the personal drama, a group leave the couple's apartment and head for a restaurant, taking a short cut across an iced-up river. They strike up a morbid conversation about what would happen should the ice crack. Sure enough it does, and in a serene sequence we watch the bodies floating past the screen, the calm movement of their drifting limbs matched by a quiet voice recounting their smooth slip into death.

● *Until 28 July. Tel: 020 7887 8008.*



Forgive yourself: one of the women acting out their stories for Ahtila's *The Present* 2001



Still majestic: Pharoah Sanders

Pharoah still reigns supreme on the sax

JAZZ

Pharoah Sanders
Jazz Café, NW1

Jack Massarik

AS the roll-call of saxophone masters diminishes, one fears for the last survivors. Will we find blown-out icons, surviving only on reputation and rose-tinted memories? Thankfully not in this case. In the land of steely post-Coltrane lyricism, this Pharoah still rules supreme.

Serene in shades and a snappy

green velvet smoking-jacket, 61-year-old Farrell Sanders (his Christian name felicitously misheard and misspelt by an early telephone booker) looked fit and sounded very good last night.

Opening with a Spiritual-like piece from the *Love Supreme* days, he chose an ideal moment to enter over Bill Henderson's sombre piano chords, Jeff Littleton's sturdy bass octaves and John Betsch's distant-thunderly mallet rolls.

The rubato theme pulsed with powerful unstated rhythms as the great man generated his huge, keening tenor-sax tone through a standard house mic

enhanced only by a touch of reverb. His stately phrases oozed gravitas, the harmonic-overtones splitting into the hoarse cries Coltrane envied so much that he invited Sanders into his group.

My Favourite Things, taken at a brisk 6/8 tempo, found Sanders soloing over a single chord for 20 fascinating minutes, delving inside and "outside" the harmony and varying his phrasing from staccato soundbites into smooth, graceful lines and husky, impassioned shrieks. Tremendous.

Betsch, a fine drummer who holds the sticks correctly, wrists loose, left hand in penholder

grip, scored well here with a bass-drum and hi-hat pattern lifted from a classic Max Roach recording, *Speak, Brother, Speak*. But Sanders upstaged it with a complex "percussion" coda of his own, tapping the saxophone pads as if to illustrate LeRoi Jones's famous dictum that in black hands every instrument is a drum.

Over and Over Again, a gem from Coltrane's *Ballads* album, was just beautiful. No question, Sanders is a phenomenon. Through him Trane lives on, both in sound and in spirit.

● *Until Thursday. Box office: 0207 344 0044.*

POP

Gomez
Brixton Academy

Chris Mugan

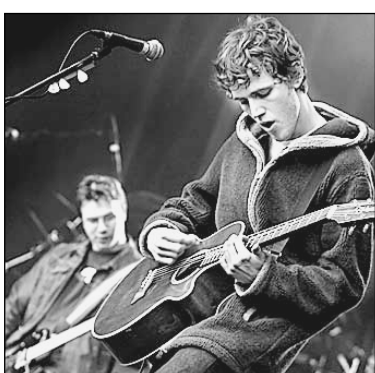
Lots of new tricks but not enough passion

SCRUFFY Gomez looked like they had come straight from a college lecture when they collected the Mercury Music Prize for 1998 debut album *Bring It On*, the sound of Delta blues and southern boogie conjured up in a Southport garage.

After the disappointing follow-up *Liquid Skin*, the band return with a new sound. On *In Our Gun*, they introduce synthesised elements that add colour to a crop of darker, more brooding songs.

Despite the album's often dour atmosphere, its creators ambled on stage fresh-faced and eager, launching into the punchy, brass-inflected funk of album opener *Shot Shot*, the beginning of an hour-and-a-half journey that felt shorter as they blasted their way through 18 songs old and new.

Gomez have slain a tendency to perform extended jams. However, so often the band's three singers lacked the passion to bring their lyrics to life. To compensate, the frontmen bounded back and forth



Energetic: Ian Ball and Ben Ottewell

across the stage, regularly commanding the crowd to participate. Indeed, the audience caught the party mood for old favourites, singing along to *Gonna Get Myself Arrested* and clapping in time to *Here Comes The Breeze*.

Lost in clever tricks and effects, few recent numbers deserved such a response, apart from the beguilingly simple *Sound of Sounds* and the swaggering *Ruff Stuff*. The band made amends by closing with ultimate student anthem *Whippin' Piccadilly*, a song about getting trashed in a union bar. The fans dutifully drowned out Gomez's sleazy brass section, though beyond these die-hards, the world waits to be convinced.

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LAST WEEK'S OPENINGS — WHAT THE CRITICS SAID

KEY ☺ Good ☹ OK ☹ Awful — No review

	Evening Standard	Daily Mail	The Times	Daily Telegraph	The Guardian	The Independent	Financial Times	Daily Express	Sunday Times	Sunday Telegraph	The Observer	Independent on Sunday
FILM												
<i>About a Boy</i>	☺	☺	☹	☹	☺	☺	☺	☺	☺	☺	☺	☺
<i>Italian for Beginners</i>	☺	☺	☺	☺	☺	☺	☺	☺	☺	☺	☺	☺
<i>John Q</i>	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹
<i>Roadkill</i>	☺	☺	☺	☺	☺	☺	☺	☺	☺	☺	☺	☺
THEATRE												
<i>Edward III</i>	☹	☺	☺	☺	☺	—	—	—	—	☺	☺	—
<i>Eastward Ho!</i>	☺	☺	☺	☺	☺	—	—	—	—	☺	☺	—
<i>Antony & Cleopatra</i>	☹	☺	☺	☺	☺	☹	☺	—	☺	—	☺	☺
<i>The Lucky Ones</i>	☺	—	☺	☺	☺	—	☺	—	☺	☺	☺	☺
OPERA												
<i>Il Trovatore</i>	☺	☺	☺	☺	☹	☹	—	—	☹	☺	☺	☺