

## The Arts

# Bright young things lost in a sea of mediocrity

NEW Contemporaries, staged annually since 1949, showcases the work of, supposedly, the best artists to have graduated from art school within the previous year.

Inclusion is much sought after by graduates: the exhibition can help launch careers and the previous participants include Frank Auerbach, RB Kitaj, Howard Hodgkin, David Hockney, Damien Hirst and Gillian Wearing.

This year, 33 artists working across the full spectrum of media, from painting to sculpture, video and performance art, have been selected for the exhibition that debuted at the recent Liverpool Biennale.

Despite its variety, the work on display mostly conforms to a particular type: "low-fi" in aesthetic, jokey in intent and generally happy to wallow in self-conscious mediocrity. The saving grace for much of this work is the fact that it at

### EXHIBITION

**Bloomberg New Contemporaries**  
Barbican

**Nick Hackworth**

least exhibits some degree of humour.

Typical of the array of uninspiring objects on display are Rob Grose's replica trainers made out of parcel tape and Helen Barron's series of silly masks made out of fabric, works that exude a strong sense of being unnecessary. Proof of the better qualities latent in the Blue Peter cardboard-and-sticky-tape style is to be found in the work of Kieran Brown, whose massive and absurd installation, comprising a cardboard igloo, water-filled paddling pool and wooden hut, dominates the end of the gallery and elicits amusement.

Inevitably, the work of those who avoided the

slacker aesthetic looks good in such company. Charlotte Brisland contributes three reasonable paintings that have a touch of Peter Doig about them. Hiraki Sawa's eight-minute video piece, *Dwelling*, is oddly compelling, depicting a myriad of tiny aeroplanes flying through a domestic environment.

Also good is Nathaniel Rackowe's *Untitled (Light Piece 1)*, an intelligent and elegant sculpture consisting of a long, transparent, rectangular shaft, down which travels a motorised section housing three neon strip lights. Its complex relationship with its environment and pleasing modernist-cum-minimalist aesthetic means it does a good job of highlighting the lack of ambition that cripples the work surrounding it.

● *Until 12 January.*  
*Tel: 020 7628 2326.*



Swing-alikes: Mark Adams (Dean Martin), Stephen Triffitt (Sinatra) and George Long (Sammy Davis Jr)

# Come fly with Sinatra and co

THE patina of legend lies extra heavy on the Rat Pack at the moment. *Swing When You're Winning*, Robbie Williams's tribute album to the era, did great business, as did Steven Soderbergh's remake of the Frank-Dean-Sammy classic film *Ocean's Eleven*. The theatre has muscled in on the boom too: Sammy, the tribute to Davis Jr, has just finished at the Theatre Royal Stratford East and now, hot on its tap-dancing heels, comes *Live From Las Vegas*, in London for just a few nights after a punishing touring schedule.

"There's one thing I know for certain," said an American tourist in the seat next to me, "and that's that the songs are fabulous. What they do with them, though, is another matter." The answer, in Mitch Sebastian's triumphant production, is easy: they bring them to vibrant life. The actors playing Sinatra, Martin and Davis Jr are joined on stage by three backing singers and a storming 15-piece big band, to recreate the era-defining shows that the trio gave

### THEATRE

**The Rat Pack**  
Peacock Theatre

**Fiona Mountford**

at The Sands nightclub in 1960.

The casting director must have had sleepless nights over this piece, for not only were three sound-alikes required, but look-alikes too. Stephen Triffitt is unsettlingly perfect as Sinatra: when he takes to the stage and launches into *The Lady is a Tramp*, it is as though Ol' Blue Eyes himself has returned from celestial retirement for one final farewell gig. George Long scores slightly better for the looks rather than the voice of SDJ, whereas Mark Adams's Deano has all the right notes, even if the physique could do with fewer Jack Daniels on the rocks.

In the first half, all three singers are given time to revel in their showpiece numbers. That's

Amore, Mr Bojangles and a stream of other classics slip by in the pink/orange glow, lubricated liberally by visits to the makeshift cocktail cabinet on top of the piano. But it's after the interval that the joint really starts jumping, as the musketeers indulge in the banter and communal horseplay for which they were famed, forever starting a number and being interrupted.

Adams's Martin plays up gloriously to his public persona of the jovial drunk. "Do I look blurred to you?" he inquires of the audience at one point. Triffitt captures Sinatra's unshakeable suaveness and also, crucially, the unsettling undercurrents in the racial remarks that he addresses to "Smoky". Two-and-a-half hours of vintage entertainment are guaranteed. To borrow the pack's own phrase, ring-a-ding-ding.

● *Until 30 November. Box office: 020 7863 8222.*

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