

The Arts

Bringing out the hippy in us all

EXHIBITION
Richard Long
 Haunch of Venison
Nick Hackworth

OF ALL the subjects that have traditionally exercised the eyes and minds of artists, it is nature that gets the shortest shrift in contemporary art. Richard Long — though in formal terms, very much a child of Sixties conceptualism — is somewhat old-fashioned. For more than 35 years Long, who won the Turner Prize in 1988, has been making art by walking in wilderness across the world and recording and evoking his journeys in photographs and terse wall texts, sculptures and simple paintings. Together these works articulate a world view in which nature is an elemental force with which man has an instinctive emotional connection. Unsurprisingly, for one who graduated from art school just in time for the Summer of Love, Long's vision owes much to hippy sensibilities, but also lays claim to the tradition of Romanticism (hippies are, after all, low-

grade Romantics) and the far older cultural forms encompassed by animism. Obviously such an attitude is markedly at odds with the amused cynicism of much contemporary work. It is a difference that serves to give his work a distinguished air, but also generates an interesting level of risk, for his creations function only if you are willing to tune into his wavelength. The fact that the work does succeed says much for Long's ability to utilise and manipulate still-powerful, collectively held perceptions and clichés about our world. In this exhibition, one wall text celebrates an eight-day walk in Galicia, another a walk in Brittany, both Celtic areas, while the photographs record his activities in India. All these locations are still redolent, despite mass-tourism and the general availability of Celtic bagpipe music, of the exotic and preternatural power. Similarly, the two sculptural pieces here invoke ancient, symbolic stone works. Cornwall Slate Lines consists of two almost parallel lines of slate blocks that snake in gentle undulations from one corner



Communing with nature: Fishermen's Plates, one of Richard Long's photographs from India

of the gallery towards another. In the gallery upstairs, the curves of an elliptical formation made from flint and chalk happily complement the circular wall-painting, whose form is the I-Ching hexagram for mountain, made with mud from the River Avon.

Strangely, these forms, like the wall texts, achieve a level of interest that exceeds their simplicity. They are among the few art objects that truly deserve to be called poetic, since they function on the same lines as poetry, generating aesthetic power from their constituent

elements, while simultaneously deriving meaning, though imprecise, from the language from which they borrow. They also imply that most of us have a little hippy in our hearts. ● *Until 30 August. Information: 020 7495 5050.*

Dancing dangerously with clichés

THEATRE
A Young Lady from Rwanda
 Finborough
Rachel Halliburton

SIMON comes from a world of liberal platitudes and north London-style angst, no doubt routinely washed down with Chablis — a world that has ill-prepared him for the arrival of Juliette, a Tutsi refugee from Rwanda, who has witnessed the murder of her family. Bright, beautiful and sophisticated, Juliette initially has little time for this well-meaning intellectual loser, who lives in a twilight zone of dithering and diffidence, and seems of no use to her ambitions to publish a book. Sonja Linden's affecting, if flawed, play is based on her work at the Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture — bringing a witty, well-informed perspective to a story about one woman's struggle for dignity and recognition. At the medical foundation, one central aim is to transform those it deals with from victims into survivors — and certainly Doreene Blackstock's Juliette has the kind of pride and acidic astuteness that attracts open-eyed sympathy rather than blind pity. The simple design comprises an institutional table and two functional wooden chairs for Simon's office, a raised platform for Juliette's miserably Spartan flat, and a series of poetically understated — and not always necessary — filmed projections. Andrew Hawkins plays Simon, whose supervision of Juliette's writing at the refugee centre becomes a rite of passage that dances dangerously with cliché, as he falls for her and suddenly loses his long-standing writer's block. Superb acting and, eventually, the script steer this towards a satisfyingly subtle conclusion. Linden has the right touch, but, like Juliette, needs to embrace greater emotional complexity. ● *Until 12 July. Box office: 020 7373 3842.*

Touched by a frontier dream

THEATRE
The Ballad of Little Jo
 Bridewell
Fiona Mountford

FROM Viola in Twelfth Night to Hilary Swank in Boys Don't Cry, women dressed as men have always made for intriguing drama. It is no different in this powerful American musical, adapted from Maggie Greenwald's 1993 film of the same name, itself based on a true story. In 1868, at the age of 17, respectable young Boston lady Josephine Monaghan has had an illegitimate child, left home to make

her fortune, been robbed, serially raped, scarred herself, cut off her hair, pretended to be a man and got a job as a silver miner in Nowheresville, Idaho. We learn all this in the breathless opening scenes of Mike Reid and Sarah Schlesinger's work and, ghastly as Jo's lot is, it is hard to sympathise overmuch with a character who has not settled before us. That all changes when the excellent Anna Francolini unleashes torrents of raw anguish in Everything That Touched Her, and from then on, it is total emotional immersion in a story which its authors commendably refuse to wrap in the musical genre's

customary sugar-coating. The era of the great American frontier dream is well evoked, with a thoughtful portrayal of the rise and fall in the fortunes of this tiny mining community. The music and lyrics err on the side of Sondheim, sophisticated rather than instantly hummable — and a good couple of the 22 songs could easily be pushed down a deep mineshaft — but are beautifully delivered by a well-tuned cast in Carol Metcalfe's sensitive production. A musical experience about as far from Toyah's Calamitous Jane as it is possible to get. ● *Until 26 July. Box office: 020 7936 3456.*

Ocean thrills of whale epic

THEATRE
The Watery Part of the World
 BAC
Fiona Mountford

IN Macbeth, "sound and fury" are part of "a tale told by an idiot — signifying nothing". Such is definitively not the case at the BAC. The Sound & Fury in residence at the moment is a company dedicated to exploring the aural possibilities of theatre. They present a scintillating recreation of a tale originally told by Herman Melville, and here

adapted for the stage by director Mark Espiner. Adapted for the ears might be a fairer description, as The Watery Part Of The World — a phrase from the opening paragraph of Moby Dick — takes place in total darkness, a blackout so intense it makes your eyes sting. A thrilling world of noise opens up, as the surround-sound commences and five actors traverse the auditorium, constantly surprising us with the provenance of their voices. So beguiling, in fact, are the lapping of water and crashing of waves, that one's attention begins to slide away from the words into an altogether more primal state. Those not fully au fait with

their whaling narratives will have to swim extra hard to keep up. For Espiner's main focus is the true story of The Essex, a Nantucket whaler that came to grief in 1820. These events, along with personal experience aboard the Acushnet, formed the basis for Melville's epic, and the excerpts offered here have a disjointed quality to them. But what comes over (very) loud and clear is the sense of the magnificence of the ocean; it's a furiously resounding treat. ● *Until 12 July. Box office: 020 7223 2223.*

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