

## The Arts

# Flattery from the man who made Britart

MICHAEL Craig-Martin's influence on contemporary British art has been considerable. He produced several important conceptual works but more significantly, as the head of the art school at Goldsmiths College for much of the Eighties and Nineties, he taught and helped promote the likes of Gary Hume, Damien Hirst, Fiona Rae, Ian Davenport and other "art stars" of that era. And indeed both the blank aesthetic of his own work and his willingness to engage artistically with the stuff of everyday life are characteristics echoed in the work of his former students.

The nine works on show are large, two-dimensional sculptures that function like drawings. Highly stylised representations of everyday objects such as trousers, bicycles and ladders are fashioned in

## EXHIBITION

Michael Craig-Martin

Waddington Galleries

Nick Hackworth

thin steel. These outline shapes are mounted on the walls in front of brightly painted strips of aluminium to create the finished pieces.

Private Dancer, the first piece you see as you enter the gallery, looks much like its title sounds and is wonderful in its awfulness. The form of a pair of Walkman headphones is completed by two strips of painted metal, one in mauve, the other in mint green. Less offensive in its colouring is French Trousers, where the outline of a pair of trousers hangs down from a coat hanger, along with two metal rectangles painted blue and red.

Other more complex pieces combine these modern pictograms with

canvases, some entirely monochrome, hung within aluminium frames. But the aesthetic universe that these works inhabit is one of uniform simplicity and flatness where differentiation and hierarchy are unknown. He affords the same status, for example, to a man in a suit as he does to, say, a coat hanger.

In Craig-Martin's case, this flat-world aesthetic is the product of his personal artistic journey, through a conceptualism that was born from his respect for minimalism and that transmuted into the kind of intellectualised pop-art represented by this work. But as a child of the Sixties, Craig-Martin was luckier than his famous ex-students who, as children of the Eighties, one suspects, saw this bland and object-filled vision of the world as perhaps the most honest depiction of it.

● Until 9 November.  
Information: 020 7851 2200.



Flat tyres: Bicycle, 1986, is typical of Craig-Martin's stylised treatment of mundane objects

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## Side project serves up seasonal treat

SIDE projects tend to have a slapdash, school-holidays air about them, much to their inevitable detriment. The collaboration between Portishead singer Beth Gibbons and erstwhile Talk Talk bassist Paul Webb (moronically re-christened Rustin' Man), promised much the same, and their decision to play live, despite their Out of Season album being over a week away from release, reeked of hubris or bovine planning.

But no. Defenestrating the worst aspects of their parent bands — Portishead's hob-nailed beats and Talk Talk's interminable noodling — they have conspired in enchanting fashion to produce an oddly rustic sound that harkens to Nick Drake's melancholy and

## POP

Beth Gibbons/Rustin' Man

Shepherd's Bush Empire

Jon Aizlewood



Beth Gibbons: endearing eccentric

June Tabor's vocal purity. Dressed as if she had spent the afternoon painting and decorating, Gibbons was a most unusual performer. With her unhealthy posture, willingness to allow gaps between songs to descend into awkward silences and absence of any notion of rhythm, she appeared lost. But when she sang, everything made sense.

She gave every impression of being both genuinely shy ("Er, I hope it was OK," was her mumbled parting shot) and endearingly eccentric.

During the 45-minute set's climax, the ominous but chorus-heavy Out of Season itself, the band allowed themselves a rock interlude. Gibbons launched herself into the audience, cadged a cigarette and strolled to the

bar to observe her colleagues.

Her voice exudes otherworldly beauty. Led gently by melodica, piano and accordion, the opening Mysteries allowed Gibbons to brood in a way she rarely can with Portishead, establishing the album's age-old metaphor of using seasonal change to plumb the Stygian depths of human despair.

Between songs, as Gibbons smiled gauchely, the six musicians scampered between instruments, giving the songs variety and greater depth, particularly in the magnificent, brooding Tom the Builder. The crowd's hushed reverence in the face of unfamiliar material spoke more eloquently than Gibbons ever could.

## Young Cuban makes the best of bossa

THE recently Grammy-nominated singer/songwriter Yusa is described in the US as the "Cuban Tracey Chapman". For this debut gig, she performed solo, standing tall and stomping inside a pair of billowing bell-bottoms. She launched with a rush of knotty guitar chords and the softly crooned bossa-type melody of La Fábula from her eponymous new album: comparisons with Chapman were redundant. Sure, they share an African ancestry and a vocal style descended from the Joni Mitchell school of melody, but Yusa is also an original. Her carefully discordant guitar and languorous,

## WORLD

Yusa

Momo's, W1

Sue Steward

often differently discordant vocals, are closer to Brazilian bossa nova than Cuban son. Their sophisticated melodies reinforce bitter-sweet, often abstract lyrics, and create an exhilarating tension.

After lulling the room, she introduced the frenzied Chiquichaca and her friend Domingo on vocals. She sat on and ferociously drummed a box — in traditional rumba style, as the two voices traded fast jazz-rap scats. While some songs might have benefited from the band's presence, on ballads like the gorgeously pure La número 2, and A las doce (At midnight), where she played and sang to her Afro-Cuban deity Yemaya, looking heavenwards, a mellow acoustic guitar was enough. Forget comparisons — Yusa already has her own voice; catch it at Ronnie Scott's this Sunday.