

The Arts

Future forms

SINCE the war there have been perhaps three major movements in British sculpture. In the Sixties the New Generation group, mainly taught at St Martin's by Anthony Caro, used industrial materials, bright colours and assertive scale to create a thoroughly abstract sculptural language. In the Eighties the eclectic Lisson school (named after the Lisson Gallery) created pieces that celebrated the inherent qualities of sculptural materials. In the Nineties the young British artists who, though they hardly constituted a coherent sculptural movement, created a series of iconic sculptures including Damien Hirst's shark, Rachel Whiteread's House and Marc Quinn's now sadly melted self-portrait, Self.

Early One Morning sets out to write the next chapter, bringing together five sculptors, Shahin Afrassiabi, Claire Barclay, Jim Lambie, Eve Rothschild and Gary Webb, mostly in their mid-30s, who represent "sculpture now". There are enough similarities within this group and between this group and other contemporary sculptors to suggest that the curators have identified a significant movement that actually exists.

This new sensibility is a reaction to the rather simple nature of the YBA's work and instead seeks to articulate the complexity of the visual world around us. That complexity is manifest in the aesthetic of the eclectic that informs the work — the artistic equivalent of channel-hopping, hopping that is, between materials, forms, sizes and colours. Thus the work here is usually an odd combination of materials and objects, marble or wood with

EXHIBITION

Early One Morning

Whitechapel Gallery, E1

Nick Hackworth

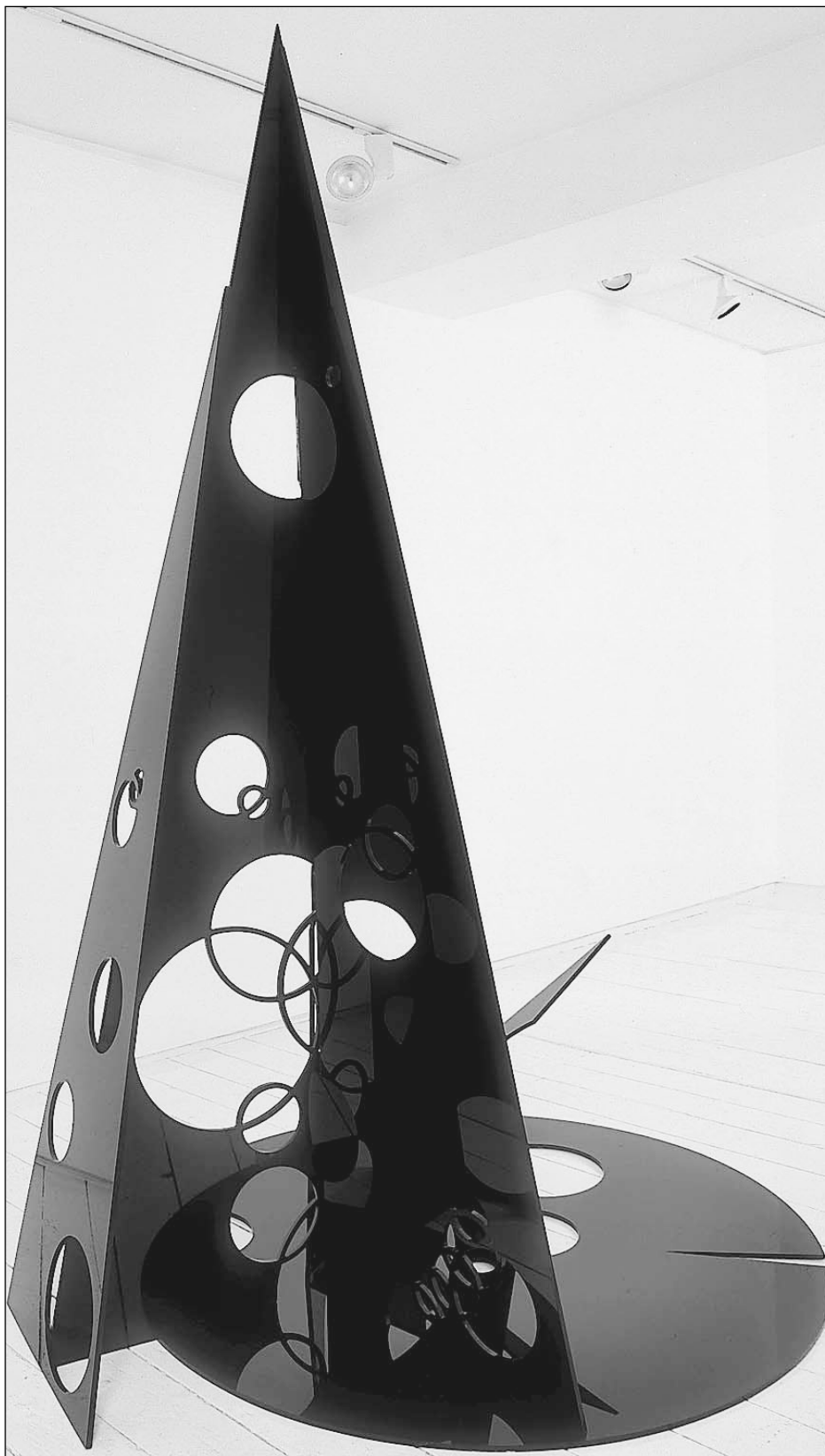
plastic or tissue paper, with the odd everyday item thrown in. As a result, the work, though neither conceptual nor figurative, isn't pure abstraction either.

Gary Webb's Paranoid Mountain, for example, incorporates a bulky, spray-painted C-shaped structure, three, transparent fluorescent Perspex plinths, a figure of a seahorse formed from a thin aluminium strip and a mini-disc player playing the same strange word repeatedly. So here is a complex assemblage of modern stuff, synthetic and shiny, that is neither beautiful nor obviously meaningful but somehow assumes an air of importance. Some of Eva Rothschild's work is more traditional, betraying an interest in form and volume, but this work is deliberately shown alongside lo-fi work, here works made on paper, to conjure the impure aesthetic of eclecticism. That this trend should be regarded as sophisticated and contemporary, carving as it does a style out of the raw material of our image-and-object saturated environments whilst avoiding simplistic value-judgments, is understandable.

But it may be that in doing so it merely throws back at us, barely altered, the incoherence of contemporary experience.

● *Until 8 September.*

Information: 020 7522 7878.



Next wave: Bad Hat by Eva Rothschild conjures the impure aesthetic of eclecticism

Plodding plot gives stars a chance to shine

OPERA

Roberto Devereux

Royal Opera House

Stephen Pettitt

ALL credit to the Royal Opera for giving us this pair of concert performances of Donizetti's 1837 opera Roberto Devereux, a historically fantastical account of Elizabeth I's obsession with the Earl of Essex (Roberto). One can't imagine that the work receives many stagings, even in Italy. This was, indeed, the first time that it had been heard at Covent Garden. Opera Rara is seizing the chance and recording both performances for a CD to be released early next year.

The reason for the rarity is that it's a pretty terrible piece of music drama, with stock-in-trade situations, characterisations and reactions, and a tendency to break into trite, lavishly decorated arias over oom-pah-pah harmonies at moments of greatest potential intensity. But dramatic depth is not the point of this sort of opera. Its purpose is to provide singers the means to show their brilliance and to give audiences a superficial thrill. To that extent, Devereux succeeds.

Spanish tenor José Bros, as Devereux, was the real article, steely-strong in sound, fluid in technique, and with a ringing high C sharp in his armoury. Charismatic Italian soprano Sonia Ganassi, as Sara, Duchess of Nottingham, confirmed her own blossoming reputation, singing with a shining timbre and oodles of charisma. But Italian baritone Roberto Frontali, as Nottingham, rarely saw fit to modulate his remarkable power. (Or perhaps the part really is marked with a triple forte indication throughout.) Although Nelly Miricioiu still has remarkable presence and formidable technique, and retains something of the laser-like quality of Callas's sound, as Elisabetta she seemed over-stretched, lacking the tonal variety and sheer stamina needed to convey adequately the erupting rages of the virgin queen. Maurizio Benini, conducting the excellent ROH Orchestra, left nobody in doubt of his own devout championship of the piece.

There's another chance to hear the work tomorrow night.

Rachel brushes up her Shakespeare

RACHEL YORK can start a trill with the sweetness of a dove and end it with the aggression of a rottweiler — an attribute which marks her out as a superb new lead in the award-laden Kiss Me Kate. The show that drove critics into ecstasies when it opened in London last year continues to justify the £3.3 million needed to bring it from Broadway, with its crackling script, infectiously cantankerous numbers and cheekily subversive references to mid-20th century American military policy.

Cole Porter famously wrote the music for the song-and-dance Taming of the Shrew after a series of flops, and despite the spit-and-fire relationship between the two leads, it produced one of his

THEATRE

Kiss Me Kate

Victoria Palace

Rachel Halliburton

arguably most hauntingly romantic songs — So In Love. In the play-within-a-play format, Petruchio and Kate are played by two egotistical actors, Lilli Vanessi and Fred Graham, who have an equally combative relationship. Most interestingly, the other man in Lilli's life bears a compelling resemblance to General Douglas MacArthur, the man who oversaw the Japanese surrender in the Second World War, and became a key American figure for the 20th century.

It is a stridently political reference for a musical which ultimately trades on its escapist qualities.

Michael Blakemore's production whisks the audience to 1940s America, where every girl sports curls and a pair of tap shoes, and every man knows that a series of impressive dancing moves will sort his love life out for good.

York plays Kate/Lilli in the formidable dominatrix tradition staked out by Bette Midler and Mae West. The chemistry between her and Brent Barrett's Petruchio creates a verbal and physical thunderstorm, which injects a sparky energy into the intelligently crafted book by Sam



Wunderbar: Rachel York as the shrewish Lilli

and Bella Spewack. This is sexual politics with fireworks, and some of the best tunes in London. Rarely has the musical's future seemed so assured.

● *Booking until 1 March, 2003. Box office: 020 7834 1317.*

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