

Ghosts in the gallery

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IN A media-saturated world there can be few creative tasks more daunting than the making of new photographic works. What is there left to show that has not been seen before?

Exceptional young British photographer Idris Khan has made a virtue of this cultural glut by turning on its head the expectation that contemporary art should be original. Employing a method that first brought him attention while studying at the Royal College of Art, Khan takes high-format photographs of, for example, several postcards of JMW Turner's paintings, and digitally layers them on top of each other to produce strange, dense and highly allusive images.

In this, his first UK solo show, he presents a series of cool, mainly black-and-white works. The effect of layering is to create a kind of spectral photography. In one image, the Victorian figures from Eadweard Muybridge's seminal motion studies hover, one on top of the other, to give a sense of the spirit as it flees its physical form. In another, scores of Beethoven's sonatas are layered to make the musical notation a blur, a synaesthetic cacophony; and the pages of Sigmund Freud's work on 'the uncanny' are superimposed and manipulated so that words are indecipherable and an illustration of the Mona Lisa hangs ghost-like behind the text.

The highlight of the show, however, is Caravaggio's *The Final Years*, a monumental and typically baroque work

EXHIBITION

Idris Khan

Victoria Miro, N1

★★★★☆

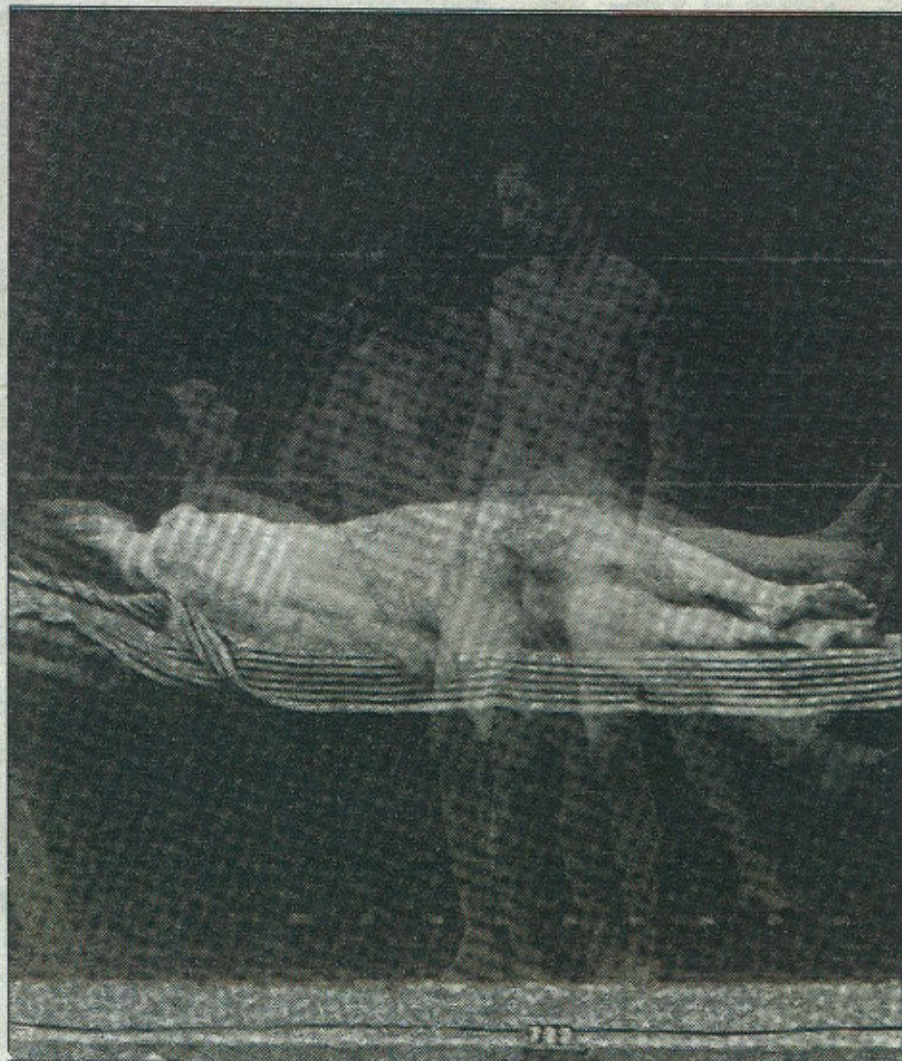
Nick Hackworth

displayed in its own room by the entrance of the gallery. An image of all of Caravaggio's paintings from the last four years of his life, digitally manipulated and superimposed on top of each other, is illustrative of the surprising richness that Khan conjures despite the apparent austerity of his method. The confusion of lines and forms becomes almost apocalyptic, mirroring the violence of Caravaggio's final years.

Out of the gloom of the painter's backgrounds appears a group of heads huddled together in conspiratorial union, a face staring heavenward, in fear or expectation, a dying man falling out from the centre of the picture that Khan has digitally lightened, symbolic, perhaps, of Caravaggio's obsession with redemption. Impressively and cleverly the work does not betray but beautifully harmonises with the dark atmosphere of the paintings — a remarkable feat.

A kind of cultural archaeologist, Khan excavates new meanings and highlights overlooked allusions in a form and manner consistent with the limitations of our age.

● Until 30 September
Information: 020 7336 8109;
www.victoria-miro.com.



Rising Series ... After Eadweard Muybridge, *Human and Animal Locomotion*, 2005