

Reviews



A new angle on black dance: from left, Simone Foster, Jemma Donnelly, Raslica Freckleton and Joanne Bernard

# Laughing all the way to the blank

SOPHIE VON HELLERMANN ○  
Saatchi Gallery at Underwood Street, N1  
Nick Hackworth

THE contemporary art world is a fickle beast. It spends most of its time ignoring figurative painters, and then periodically embraces one with a suffocating bear-hug. Sophie von Hellermann, a recent Royal College of Art graduate, who paints in a loose, cartoony, figurative style, is currently the lucky recipient of the art world's close attentions. Consequently she has, over the past few months, had an exhibition schedule to make a Turner Prize winner envious, appearing in student shows, commercial shows and now here in Saatchi's new north-east London outpost.

Why von Hellermann should have been singled out in this manner is unclear. Her large paintings (often measuring 2m by 1m) are inoffensive but also unremarkable. They are light in content and appearance, which gives them a certain superficial but throw-away attractiveness. She paints using thin acrylic washes which allow the lightness of the canvas to shine through, and her palette is of bright colours — deep oranges, pinks and yellows applied with big, expressionist brush strokes.



Mysterious appeal: detail from Sophie von Hellermann's Maxim and Rebecca

Her tableaux include scenes from contemporary life, as well as a number with a more mysterious, timeless feel; in all of them people appear indistinct, unconvincing as real human characters.

When He Came depicts a picnic. Two men in black ties sit either side of an attractive girl lying on her back. Her dress is a large, rectangular salmon-pink blob. A fresh lemon and some dill rest on her stomach. One of the men, fork in hand, is reaching towards her with carnivorous intent. The woman is at once a woman and a piece of salmon, an obvious metaphor for the link between sexual and actual consumption. Despite the horrific events about to unfold in this take on Manet's *Le déjeuner sur l'herbe*, everyone involved looks blank. Rather like the work.

● Until 25 November. Tel: 07951 697891.

# Silly walks and a lascivious groove

THIS annual dance event, now in its third year, aims to provide selected choreographers with an opportunity to explore and develop the aesthetics of black dance in the UK. Exactly what defines black dance in the UK in 2001, however, is an increasingly moot point. In the evening's opening piece, *Is This the Last Time*, choreographer Robert Hylton appears to draw on Martha Graham, Fosse-style Broadway jazz and the Monty Python Ministry of Silly Walks.

Pizza chef-like, he peppers the raggedly sprung rhythms of Billy Biznizz's specially commissioned score with brisés and jetés battus. Hylton himself may be black, but the stepping stones on which he is standing lead back to Versailles and the court of the Sun King. Conscious of this, he defines the idiom in which he

NUBIAN STEPS ★  
Royal Festival Hall  
Luke Jennings

works as Urban Classicism. Hylton's, and the pieces which follow, showcase some strong and attractive dancing. In David Hamilton's *Proud Fi Walk Di Road*, Martin Robinson eases himself into a fecklessly lascivious groove, challenges us to disapprove, and rolls his hips as if he were grinding nutmeg. Later, in Maria Ryan's *Raw Material*, he accesses the opposite end of the emotional spectrum to deploy a coolly distanced irony.

Raw Material and Garry Benjamin's *Unspoken Language* allow us to compare the ensemble's most striking performers:

Katie Pearson and Jemma Donnelly. Pearson is a warrior on stage — a dancer of fine and unsparing articulacy.

Every impulse of every sequence is so clean and urgent that you can taste the wind-chilled steel. Donnelly, by contrast, is a princess, approaching and executing the movements required of her with a fastidiousness that makes it look as if she were being partnered by invisible servants. The two of them make a compelling and subtly gothic duo.

The five Nubian Steps choreographers seem to agree on one thing: that there is no great need for narrative or meaning in their programme. Instead, the performers stoke up on mood and volume and simply dance to the music. This is fair enough, and every item in last night's show was greeted with cheers by a sell-out crowd, but we could have used a slug or two of intellectual content.

# Camping in the dark

ON the first day of autumn, it seemed quite appropriate to start thinking about *The Cardigans*, or at least their singer, Nina Persson, embarking here on a sabbatical from her main band.

A Camp have named themselves, one presumes, because of the circumstances of their inception. Persson began constructing her side project in the Swedish town of Varnland, where she was surrounded by foxes and

A CAMP ★  
Dingwalls, NW1  
Max Bell

forests and slept in bunk beds. She completed it in Woodstock, which is rustic enough.

The atmospheric of the outdoors have rubbed off on A Camp's countrified sound, which hints at pedal steel guitars and bucolic depressions of mood and weather. Nina has the credentials for that Swedish torch and twang.

Frequent Flyer's mournful lament set up the night as Persson's downbeat vocal cut

to the chase. An immediate cover of Paul Westerberg's suicidal Rock 'n' Roll Ghost implied that we weren't here to be jollied along, while a version of Train of Salvation was deemed too maudlin to make A Camp's album.

With a giant and macabre panda bear head as a prop, Persson's stage show didn't exactly invite audience participation. Song For The Leftovers and the recent single, *I Can Buy You*, were even darker than sublime Cardigans songs like *Erase and Rewind* or *Lovefool*.

It appears that A Camp is a strange place to visit, and you wouldn't want to stay there forever. No doubt Persson won't either.

Ratings: ○ adequate ★ good  
★★ very good  
★★★ outstanding X poor

## LAST WEEK'S OPENINGS — WHAT THE CRITICS SAID

FILM	KEY											
	Evening Standard	Daily Mail	The Times	Daily Telegraph	The Guardian	The Independent	Financial Times	Daily Express	Sunday Times	Sunday Telegraph	The Observer	
Battle Royale	Good	OK	Awful	Good	OK	Awful	Good	OK	Awful	Good	OK	
The Fast and the Furious	Good	OK	Awful	Good	OK	Awful	Good	OK	Awful	Good	OK	
Greenfinger	Good	OK	Awful	Good	OK	Awful	Good	OK	Awful	Good	OK	
Shiner	Good	OK	Awful	Good	OK	Awful	Good	OK	Awful	Good	OK	
Pandaemonium	Good	OK	Awful	Good	OK	Awful	Good	OK	Awful	Good	OK	
The Martins	Good	OK	Awful	Good	OK	Awful	Good	OK	Awful	Good	OK	
THEATRE												
Platonov	Good	OK	Awful	Good	OK	Awful	Good	OK	Awful	Good	OK	
Redundant	Good	OK	Awful	Good	OK	Awful	Good	OK	Awful	Good	OK	