

The Arts

Nature in extremis

EXHIBITION

Thomas Joshua Cooper

Blains, W1

Nick Hackworth

SOMETIMES the true complexity of an artist's practice is only hinted at in the exhibited work. To the casual viewer, the black-and-white photographs of Thomas Joshua Cooper, though beautiful, might appear to be straightforward studies of wild, natural landscapes and seascapes. The images are mostly of sections of the British coastline, made from cliff tops and coastal outcrops of rock, along with a number of images of rivers and forests.

Underscoring the pictures, however, there is both a peculiar technical process and a narrative of high sophistication and ambition. Such qualities befit, perhaps, the work of a man who set up the Photography Fine Art course at Glasgow School of Art, the only photographic course in the country that defines itself as a purely "fine art" course.

The landscape genre is often associated with notions of time, change and memory. Those associations lie at the bottom of Cooper's work too, but are deeper and more precisely articulated than is usual. The moving water in all the images, be it the waves of the sea or a flowing river, is a hazy blur, revealing Cooper's use of time-lapse photography. The length of his exposures vary in time from a few seconds to over an hour. Moreover, the images are made with a camera more than 100 years



Serene studies of land and sea: the Irish Sea, Great Ormes Head, northernmost point of mainland Wales

old and take the archaic physical form of gelatin silver prints.

The work's technical relationship with time is mirrored by its subject matter. The photographs are all made at points of either geographical or historical interest. One series, for example, consists of images made of the locations of the

Cinque Ports, the sites of sea defence built along the Kent coast in the 14th century to guard against the French. Also, most of the geographical extremities of the British Isles, such as its most northerly or westerly points, are recorded here.

The true heart of Cooper's work,

however, beats in a series called Archipelago, situated in the downstairs space at Blains. The seven images are a collective elegy for the Celtic diaspora and tap into a vein of epic romanticism that stretches from the seventh century Welsh poem Y Goddodin, through the Celtic myth cycle The

Mabinogion, to corrupted contemporary New Age sensibilities. But these images, with their dark seas and tall inhuman cliffs, are a world away from New Age clichés, serene studies of land and sea, and of the people that once passed through them.

● Until 3 August. Info: 020 7935 3414.

Nordic invaders with a cool edge

TWO little-known young jazz groups from Norway, both making their UK debuts, attracted a posse (or should that be a blot) of newspaper critics to their Jazzland CD launches yesterday. Publicity-hungry British musicians lurking around Dean Street would have howled in envy at this treatment, but there's good reason for it.

There is significant quality and originality, as well as novelty value, about new bands from Scandinavia. This is particularly true of Norway, where for popularity and participation jazz seems to be overtaking cross-country skiing. Journalists hypothesise about The Oslo Sound, yet last night's opening group, a piano-less trio led by tenorist Håkon Kornstad with Mats Eilertsen and Paal Nilssen-Love on bass and drums, all hailed from up-country Trondheim.

Three neatly dressed and healthy-looking young men with slightly spiky haircuts as their only sign of rebellion, they met on the Special Jazz Studies course at the city's conservatory, a college in danger of

JAZZ

The Oslo Underground

Pizza Express Jazz Club

Jack Massarik

becoming the Berklee of the frozen north. The loose-limbed way they tackled the Ornette Coleman line, Law Years, was impressive.

Kornstad's sound, husky and non-screaming, was more listener-friendly than your usual free-jazz tenorman. Even in moments of anger, the commonest emotion in free-jazz, his bellow was mellow. And behind him, the drum-and-bass patterns were tight and empathetic, Eilertsen bringing a ballad, Arched Shape, to a clever finish with a bass duotone beneath Kornstad's split-reed cadence.

Atomic, an acoustic quintet fronted by trumpeter Magnus Broo and tenorist Fredrik Ljungkvist, had the skilful Haavard Wiik on piano, the resonant Ingebrigt Flaten on bass and the busy Nilssen-Love back on drums. Billed as a "free-to-



Mellow bellow: tenorist Håkon Kornstad leads his musical trio

bop" group, they proved more free than bop. Broo's solos were overfull of extended trills, a free-jazz cliché, and Ljungkvist's staccato barks, a sea-lion's mating call, were equally tiresome.

He sounded much more convincing on post-bop clarinet, and the writing throughout was witty and

impressionistic. Numbers like Reed Leed and Bop About were bright daubs of sound designed for ears familiar with the original forms. Young Norwegians don't play old jazz, but they do recognise the importance of knowing what it used to sound like.

● Tonight only. Box office: 020 7439 8722.

Authentic dash of Russian spirit

YOU don't have to be Russian to understand Tchaikovsky, but it evidently helps.

Conductor Yakov Kreizberg (b Leningrad, 1959) and violinist Vadim Repin (b Novosibirsk, 1971) joined forces to lend an authentic air to the composer's Violin Concerto and Fifth Symphony with the Philharmonia Orchestra.

In the symphony, it was noticeably the dark orchestral colouring that made the difference. Kreizberg was unafraid to let the brass sound with an urgency that bordered on stridency, and he let them rip in the second movement with two chilling climaxes, each the more powerful for the care with which it was prepared.

The oppressive mood returned in the finale with the meticulously calculated martial tread — and again the sombre colouring — of Kreizberg's reading: a funeral march in all but name. But not for long. Later on, the gloomy spirits are lifted with a heroic turn to the major. Kreizberg was careful not to make it sound like a crowd-pleasing sprint for the finishing post, and the Philharmonia did him

CLASSICAL

Repin/Philharmonia/

Kreizberg

Festival Hall

Barry Millington

proud with playing of spirited vigour.

Repin, who hails from the same town in Siberia as Vengerov, has always had to suffer comparisons with that great violinist. Never more so than in the Tchaikovsky Concerto, in which Vengerov also distinguishes himself. Repin is a different kind of artist, however. Where Vengerov injects nervous energy into every phrase, Repin is more relaxed, more subdued even.

His posture is less anguished, his stage presence less electrifying. Nor does Repin have the ability to hold up a phrase to the light and examine it afresh. He nevertheless brought a formidable technique and distinctive nutty-brown tone to the Tchaikovsky, which made up in subtlety what it lacked in flair.

More reviews: Page 46