

The Arts

Satirical guerrilla in our midst

EXHIBITION

Grayson Perry: Guerrilla Tactics
Barbican

Nick Hackworth

IN his first major UK retrospective, Grayson Perry, the art world's favourite transvestite, exhibits a range of his amusing and occasionally touching pots, textile pieces and photographic works. Since the late Eighties, Perry, who hails proudly from Chelmsford, Essex, has been employing, as he puts it, "guerrilla tactics" within the art world — using the low status aesthetics and forms of various craft disciplines to create fashionable, and to some extent, subversive contemporary art.

His pots are his best-known work. At first glance they look like perfectly normal, colourful ceramics that come in various shapes and sizes from simple, humble pieces to large, bulging, regal-looking affairs with ornate tops and thick, shiny, golden glazes. On closer inspection they are revealed to be crowded with satirical images and snippets

of text that play among ornate patterns. A kind of post-modern Hogarth, Perry focuses on the sins of suburbia rather than the vices of the underclass. So we see the private perversions and pretensions of the middle classes, who appear as absurd and cartoonish figures, played out across the surface of the pieces.

The prevalent social satire, however, also flows over into both the more overtly political and the more touchingly personal. Images of childhood, mainly culled from Perry's own, also crop up on the pots and, married with the depicted erections that pepper his pieces, give the work a strong psychoanalytical flavour. Particularly endearing is Alan Measles, Perry's real-life childhood teddy-bear, who features prominently, not least due to the erection he is wont to sport. The Gulf War Dinner Service, meanwhile, is a hilarious series of plates with an anti-American Imperialism theme.

Also on show are photographic and video works featuring Claire, Perry's female alter ego. In *The Mother of all Battles*, Claire poses proudly with her Kalashnikov and her Central-



Battle dress: Grayson Perry's alter ego Claire strikes a warlike pose in *The Mother of all Battles*

European style dress carefully embroidered with images of violence. Elsewhere, especially in the video *Bungalow Depression*, Claire is more of a typical, English suburban housewife, dusting, filing her fingernails

and generally going insane. Despite the hilarity and self-mockery apparent in Perry's transvestite escapades, they seem, like all his work, to be serious beneath the sarcastic surface. He makes amusing,

saleable work but also gets to poke fun at the people who buy it and protest against that which he does not like in this world.

● *Until 3 November.*
Information: 020 7638 8891.

Superb Schubert from Samoan singer

CLASSICAL

**Jonathan Lemalu/
Michael Hampton**
Wigmore Hall

Barry Millington

AS his meteoric career gathers pace, the phenomenon that is Jonathan Lemalu continues to astound. Only five months ago he was inexplicably denied the outright first prize of the Kathleen Ferrier Awards, but the controversy seems to have done him no harm. He has engagements at the Royal Opera, ENO, Glyndebourne and equally prestigious places abroad. And here he was selling out a Monday lunchtime recital at the Wigmore Hall. No mean achievement, and all done not by a multi-million-pound promotion campaign but largely by word of mouth.

The New Zealand-born Samoan bass-baritone deserves every success. Rarely does a singer, who has only just graduated, seem so self-possessed, so finished an artist.

Admittedly, Schubert's *Schwanengesang* plays to his strengths: his rich, sable tone and formidable presence inhabit the sombre emotional world of these Heine and Rellstab settings so convincingly that criticism is otiose. His qualities come into their own in the bleak, powerful songs like *Die Stadt* and *Der Atlas*: in the latter, his lowered head before the final tremendous phrase suggested the effort of lifting the world onto his shoulders. Lemalu elects for lower transpositions than conventional baritones do, and *Kriegers Ahnung* and *Aufenthalt* were other songs that enabled him to exploit his deep bass register.

With the fluent pianist Michael Hampton, he showed that he has a lighter side, too. The rippling accompaniment of *Liebesbotschaft* supported an exquisitely nuanced, gloriously animated vocal line, while the final *Die Taubenpost* also caught perfectly the song's exhilarating, open-air quality.

Rounded out by an appealing account of the popular *Ständchen* and a suitably spectral one of *Der Doppelgänger*, this was a *Schwanengesang* worthy to be rated with the best, which is how we have already come to think of the extraordinary Jonathan Lemalu.

Samba's royal couple bring carnival spirit to concert hall

JAZZ

**Flora Purim/
Airtó Moreira**
Barbican

Jack Massarik

THE royal couple of jazz samba dedicated this concert to one of their oldest friends, Milton Nascimento. They gave it their best shot, and their admiration for a fellow Brazilian superstar was never in doubt, but the tough, power-packed music they produced was a long way from the lilting ambience of Nascimento's songs.

Perhaps it was wrong to expect anything else, given Airtó's pulsating brilliance as a percussionist, Flora's natural ebullience as a singer and the remarkable empathy they share after 25 non-stop years of touring together. With the help of keyboarder Marcos Silva and long-serving sidemen Gary Brown (five-string Fender bass) and Gary Meek (tenor, soprano saxes and flute), they treated their concert-hall audience to a

typically exciting nightclub set. With Meek and Silva both in exultant form, the quintet sounded like a band twice its size and Airtó alone becomes a one-man carnival when in the right mood. Clubbers knew what to expect when, after an hour, he left the drum kit and moved centre stage, armed only with a tambourine and a whistle. In the next, magical, 15 minutes, he produced spectacular drumming effects with both his voice and body, effectively converting the

cavities behind his chest and cheeks into percussion accessories.

Flora's best moments came on *Cravo E Canela*, a typically Brazilian melody full of subtle modulations, and *Amanha (Tomorrow)*, the catchy Nascimento song that gave the late Sarah Vaughan her biggest international hit some years ago. Softened up by this and an agreeable opening set from *Nóis*, the London-based group led by ex-pat Brazilian singer Monica Vasconcelos, half the audience were gyrating in the aisles before the finish.

The only sour note was the annoying date clash with another big Brazilian music event, the Sakamoto-Morelenbaum concert at the Royal Festival Hall. Was this really so unavoidable?



One-man carnival drummer Airtó Moreira

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