

## The Arts

# Path through purgatory gives glimpses of heaven

THERE are many ways to get Mahler wrong in performance, but the one currently fashionable in London is to wring anguish from every bar. And there are many ways in which last night's interpretation of his Sixth Symphony was magnificent, but one was the avoidance of such forced, dutiful angst. No one could have accused conductor Mariss Jansons of underplaying the emotion — almost every phrase seemed to be a crescendo, an outreach, an appeal. But although we were going through purgatory, the glimpses of heaven and haven were, however distant, tangible and fully expressed.

The urgent march of the opening movement, so often a grim advance towards

### CLASSICAL

LSO/Jansons

Barbican

Brian Hunt

conflict, was here a panicked retreat. The beauty and peace of the slow movement shone like a vision; the more desperately it was aspired to, the more it became distorted by pain. The finale developed an extraordinary momentum, as if rushing to embrace inevitable tragedy.

That the concert (devoted to this one work) is best described in these metaphysical terms is tribute to the rapport the charismatic Latvian conductor has with the London Symphony Orchestra, who played for him as if their lives depended on it.

And, of course, their technical prowess and alert professionalism was beyond question. But the scherzo hinted at certain limitations: while the string sound was extraordinarily weighty and incisive, the wind playing lacked colour and individuality, the very qualities that used to distinguish British ensembles.

It was, nonetheless, an evening of the finest musicianship. Mahler scholars will want to note that the scherzo was played after the slow movement (not as printed in the programme) and the finale's third hammer blow was omitted. The concert is repeated tonight and will be broadcast on Radio 3 on 5 December without, one hopes, the unstified watch alarm that ruined the closing pages.



The mixture as before: Terrace, 2002, by Patrick Caulfield features his usual vase, plant and yellow background

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LES 28/11

# Still lifes at a standstill

FOUR decades ago Patrick Caulfield, then a student at the Royal College of Art, found himself at the forefront of the Pop Art movement. Then, the shallowness and emptiness of his highly stylised, design-like paintings of domestic objects and environments fitted the zeitgeist, fed as it was upon the flat images produced by the mass media and consumer advertising.

As the 18 works exhibited here show, Caulfield has, in his artistic journey, travelled practically nowhere since then. Produced over a 17-year span (1985-2002), the works do betray a slight evolution from his work of the Sixties. Gone are the thick black lines that delineated objects in his paintings, but the focus on domestic objects marooned helplessly in anonymous environments remains, and what once seemed contemporary and appropriate has long since become morbid and boring.

That Caulfield has developed so little must, in large part, be because he is so famously slow at making work — producing around four to five paintings a

### EXHIBITION

Patrick Caulfield

Waddington Galleries, W1

Nick Hackworth

year. By looking at the works in chronological order it is easy to chart Caulfield's achingly slow progress.

Reception, acrylic on canvas like all the pieces here, was produced in 1988. A large painting, it features an expansive, unvarying background of bright lemon yellow on which floats, in a near a cluster near the centre, a bunch of realistically rendered red and yellow chrysanthemums, a lamp with a black lampshade and a black and white abstract shape.

In Lounge, produced the following year, the same yellow background plays host to similar elements that have undergone only minor change. The lamp has become a small, round Chinese vase that sits beneath the silhouette of a lampshade that is

in turn framed by a red abstract circle. A trail of pink flowers and a few random abstract shapes serve, depressingly, to complete the picture.

Moving on more than 10 years to Terrace, painted this year, remarkably, we find that the satanic trio of yellow background, vase and plant remains unbroken, proving, if nothing else, that virtue should be measured in degrees.

Constancy when applied sparingly is admirable but when laid on too thick becomes a vice. Admittedly, yellow is not the only colour that Caulfield uses, nor are plants and vases the only objects present in his visual universe. Brown and blue make an appearance, as do tables, pipes, and, on one particularly exciting occasion, a lobster. As it is, the presence of the crustacean serves only to taunt the viewer cruelly with intimations of another, fishier, wetter and altogether more exotic world, far, far away from Caulfield's desperate interiors.

● Until 21 December.  
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