

Critics' choice

Visual arts Jackie Wullschlager

Martin Puryear

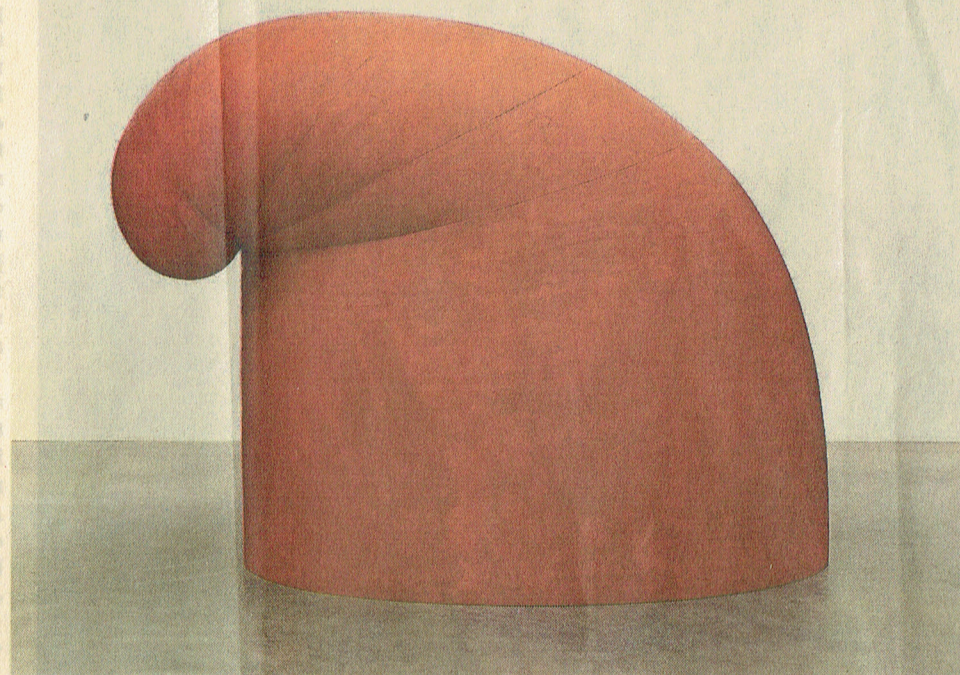
Parasol Unit, London

What looks like a glorious field of golden corn envelops you as you enter this dynamic exhibition. "Night Watch" consists of hundreds of tall, slender, dried willow whips appearing to bend and sway in the wind, a metaphor for the obsessive mental wanderings of an insomniac.

Behind stands a life-size closed wooden cart: peer through and a giant reflective glass eye meets your own, implicating you as the vehicle's prisoner-traveller. This is "The Load", which suggests both captivity and the burden of self – Picasso's mythical creature carting his belongings "Minotaur Moving His House" is the art source.

Martin Puryear is a truly original voice in contemporary sculpture: fresh, free from stylist conformity, intent on craft skills. His beautifully finished pieces, mostly in wood, reference carpentry, basketweaving – as in the comic outsize meshed "Brunhilde" – and are both formally and texturally satisfying in lively contrasts of soft/hard, thick/thin, smooth/rough, coiling/squat.

Each work is different, but there is a conceptual undertow, with themes of freedom and constraints threading through everything here.



"Big Phrygian" is a huge painted red cedarwood cap, folded and drooping, as worn by freed Greco-Roman slaves and French revolutionaries. "Phrygian Spirit", a looping wall-based yellow cedar abstraction, curls as lightly as paper. The painted pine hoop "Cerulean" indicates

infinite skies, while the metal hinges of "Shackled" recall the bonds of slavery, and the fallen question mark of "Question" perhaps alludes to freedom of the mind.

An African-American sculptor with a distinguished reputation in the US – MoMA held a retrospective in

2007 – Puryear emerged out of Minimalism in the 1970s, with surrealist influences also clear, but his warm, humane art, rooted in objects and experience, remains distinctive, and a joy to discover in this first UK show. Final fortnight. parasol-unit.org, to December 6

'Big Phrygian' (2010-14) by Martin Puryear

Surrealism in Egypt

Tate Liverpool

First shown in Paris, Madrid and Düsseldorf, Tate Liverpool's exhibition excavates the forgotten story of Art et Liberté, the radical collective of surrealist painters, photographers, film-makers and writers that flourished in wartime British-run Cairo from 1938-48, and was significant for its challenge to colonial rule, the strong presence of women artists and an independent attitude to French surrealism. tate.org.uk, to March 18

Everything We Do Is Music

Drawing Room, London

The Metropolitan Museum's Shanay Jhaveri curates this imaginative exploration of how Indian classical music has inspired art from Indian miniatures to today's animations, video art and abstract painting. Artists include Nasreen Mohamedi, Dayanita Singh, Francesco Clemente, Lee Mullican and many lesser-known names. drawingroom.org.uk November 30-March 4

Bernard Dunstan

Duncan Miller Fine Arts, London

Memorial exhibition of the British post-Impressionist who died aged 97 in August. Impervious to fashion, Dunstan remained committed to light-filled intimiste painting from life: nudes, figures in interiors and especially scenes from Venice all seem informal and spontaneous, though as the artist said, "there is a lot of geometry hidden away under the casual appearance". duncanmiller.com to December 21

Phillip King: Colour on Fire & Ceramics

Thomas Dane Gallery, London

New works by the 83-year-old sculptor include "Colour Me Pink", a large geometric form of precariously balancing shapes in bright blues and pinks perforated with cylindrical holes. It is shown with a complementary group of statuesque unglazed ceramic vessels, each sliced through to reveal its volume. thomasdanegallery.com November 29-February 3

Rose Wylie: Quack Quack

Serpentine Sackler Gallery, London

Rose Wylie, also 83, waited most of a lifetime for recognition, but in the past decade her work has met the spirit of an image-drenched age. Large, idiosyncratic, faux-naïf, they are collage-like canvases, with loosely applied paint, lively, doodled cartoonish figuration and incongruously mixed sources ranging from art history to Quentin Tarantino to an olive oil label. This is her first solo show in a London public gallery. serpentinegalleries.org November 30-February 11

Jasper Johns: 'Something Resembling Truth'

Royal Academy, London

Marvellous to come face to face, in this first Johns retrospective in the UK for 40 years, with the painterly, direct yet conceptually complex "Flag" and "Target" paintings from the late 1950s and early 1960s. Later work is congested, self-referential and abstruse. Last weeks. royalacademy.org.uk to December 10