

Best Laid Plans



The Drawing Room Galleries East

The plan becomes the project rather than the means of execution in this elegant little international group show on the use of drawing in human schemes. Most of the works here, though derived from largely familiar political and corporate material sources, take one into farther-flung fictional and imaginative territories. And while being somewhat in the dark is an expected part of re-engaging with the influential frameworks for ideas that plans provide, certain modes of display here can leave one feeling left out at the doorstep of the project mission.

This exhibition is one element of a larger investigation into the potential of drawing as a planning tool, incorporating a symposium, performances and workshops in a variety of other locations. This central grouping of necessarily oblique reworkings of graphic and model-making conventions illicit the sense of iceberg tips. Janice Kerbel's stripped out Ordnance Survey-style map might describe the perfunctory organisational beginnings of post-apocalyptic survival but is in fact a photogravure etching of a town designed for ghosts. Slovenian architect Marjetica Potrč, on the other hand, makes flip-chart philosophy out of the history of a sinking Venice in a series of schematic pen drawings ('Venice Case Study', pictured above).

I can understand why militant US research collective Ultrared have chosen to present their curriculum for the sound of radical action now, based on the audio experiments of late British composer Cornelius Cardew, in grey dossiers on an old-fashioned desk. The instructional mood the props create, between school exam and cabinet war room, is pitch perfect. But this, as with Paul Rooney's brilliant story of a religious evangelist's world takeover with toy tanks, is not a straightforward project to quickly pamphlet-flick-through.

Rebecca Geldard



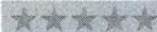
EXHIBITION OF THE WEEK

Francesca Woodman

Recently, *Time Out* covered the emergence of commercial 'super-galleries', capable of mounting museum-style exhibitions. Well, this retrospective of Francesca Woodman arguably goes one better, in that it actually is a museum show, having previously toured various European institutions. As such, it reflects the extraordinary growth in the American photographer's reputation, both commercially and critically, in the past quarter-century since she died, as a relative

unknown, at just 22 years old.

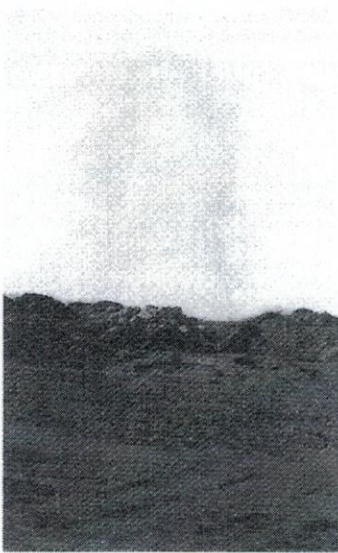
Certainly, Woodman's images nowadays are among the most recognisable in photography, with



Victoria Miro Galleries North

their small, square format, typically in moody monochrome (though there are a couple of late colour experiments here too) and their stage-like, interior backdrops (though, again, there's one

Huma Bhabha



Huma Bhabha, the *bête noire* of Saatchi's first 'USA Today' show a few years back, has a way with acridly poetic and indelible imagery that one might think virtually extinguished from contemporary art. It's in full effect in the Pakistani-born artist's first London solo show, first of all in a trio of archaic-looking statues. Two of them look female (on the third, the jury's out); all are carved from cork, violently scored and burnt. One has a hooked chin and is almost laughing, its torso decorated with an inscrutable pink-and-blue design; another has breasts like folded wings and an eroded face. Referencing frontal sculptures of antiquity, they seem excavated from some long-gone civilisation and seemingly play on a fear of ambiguous otherness.

Elsewhere, alongside ten drawings that are mostly studies in shifty malevolence, Bhabha decentres

remarkable series set amid the rugged, romantic outdoors). What characterises her oeuvre above all else, however, is the relentless focus on her own body as subject matter – or rather, to put it more philosophically, on the relationship between her body as both subject and object, observer and observed. The idea is right there in her earliest self-portrait, as a precocious, lank-haired 13 year old, the shutter-release cable stretching umbilically between her and the camera itself. This notion is expanded in her later use of various props, where she poses with mirrors, sheets of glass, or museum display cabinets.

The best way of thinking about Woodman's images, then, is as philosophical enactments about the nature and representation of bodies – bodies in general, women's in particular, hers – often naked. Not that her work ever seems dry or academic, rather, it comes across as theatrically charged, darkly witty, still pertinent. Sometimes, her vision of the body as object, as corporeal matter, is so abject and self-alienating, it's disconcerting: her arms morbidly entangled in fly-paper, for example, or her legs tightly strapped with tape, flesh bulging like the Michelin Man's. Other works veer to the opposite extreme: the body as mere image, hidden and camouflaged among wallpaper, or, in her famous long-exposure shots, reduced to an ephemeral blur, so that it's tempting to read them as a prelude to her final act of self-erasure, her own suicide. Yet to do so would only diminish their reach and inventiveness. Ultimately, seeing so many works together like this – the majority of extant pieces, though it might have been better to display them chronologically – makes you realise what an astonishingly original artist she really was. Gabriel Coxhead



Stephen Friedman Galleries West

polystyrene and clay, the other just a pair of timber legs. One thinks, given the title, of everything from specific threats (eg landmines) to widescreen notions of human suffering, and recognises that this is Bhabha's gift: to leave space aplenty for uneasy reverie, and to make the dreaming mandatory. **Martin Herbert**