

Special Focus:
REVIEWS MARATHON, LONDON

DRAWINGS BY PAUL DAVIS

At ArtReview we're constantly pursued by galleries who want us to cover their latest shows. Sure, we know - your show is always the best in town. But to cover even a tenth of what we think is good would mean printing the magazine on microfiche! So to make it up to all those galleries (and building on our New York reviews marathon in February), we sent out our top critics to cover 103 shows in the space of a week in May. When we told our gallery friends what we were doing, they complained that covering every show in town would make the review of their's less special. As the late Johnny Cash once said, "You can't hardly win, can you?"

ATUL BHALLA within/without,
Aicon Gallery

With photographs of India's public drinking-water taps, drinking stations and water vessels lining the gallery walls, and six clear-glass water-filled tanks lounging about its centre, this show doesn't need a press release to tell you what it's about. While the photographs document a certain primitive relation to water (in terms of the fact that the taps, drinking stations and vessels are in various states of decrepitude and disrepair, and that they suggest that many people don't have private access to clean water), the tanks, containing various sunken bits of plumbing, sanitary wear and branded-type bottles sculpted out of sand and cement, appear to represent something more modern (the commodification and

industrialisation of water, combined with an excess of the stuff). This dialectic operates as much on the level of art, too: the photographs offering what appears to be a communicative, documentary and encyclopedic study of water; the tanks offering a more abstracted, Hirst-like (or Westernised) commodity art. As a whole, it's a powerful statement, although the fact that the tanks have words like 'beauty' etched into them (a cryptic reference, I later learn, to an episode from the *Mahabharata* involving a prince bargaining with a demon for a drink of water) seems to add a somewhat unnecessary layer of complication. Still, if you can ignore that (as I managed to by not reading the press release while I was in the gallery), it's a powerful social, political and artistic statement.