

## Visual arts Jackie Wullschlager

### The Petrified Music of Architecture

Sir John Soane's Museum  
London WC2

For the first time in a generation, a chance to see Victorian architect William Goring's exquisitely crafted, stunning models in wood and card of English cathedrals, including Canterbury, Lincoln, Exeter, Chester, Hereford, Peterborough and Westminster Abbey, and European ones such as St Peter's Basilica in Rome. The scale is 60ft to 1in, and some of the intricate and delicate details require a magnifying glass to be fully appreciated. The models were intended for comparative studies by architecture students, and donated to Canterbury Cathedral in 1916.  
[www.soane.org](http://www.soane.org), +44 (0)20 7440 4263, to June 25

### The Cult of Beauty

Victoria and Albert Museum  
London SW7

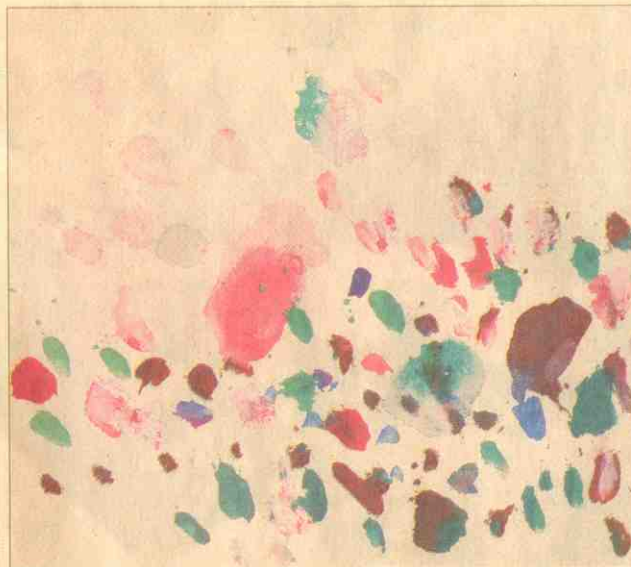
This comprehensive look at the fine and decorative art of the aesthetic movement (1860-1900) is dramatically installed against peacock-green and midnight-blue walls, and is full of extravagance and the sense of doom that is the flipside of this decadent period. There is a filmic recreation of Whistler's celebrated Peacock Room, a reconstruction of

### Beautiful Being – Cy Twombly and Alex Katz

The Pier Arts Centre, Stromness

What an inspired idea to show the two most distinguished faces of American painting together. Alex Katz and Cy Twombly were born within nine months of each other, in 1927 and 1928, and although their sensibility is far apart, the common ground – apart from the fact that each married a beautiful Italian woman, in Twombly's case rooting him in Mediterranean as well as American frames of reference, in Katz's providing his muse and model Ada – is that both trod their own path away from, while absorbing and confronting, American abstraction.

Twombly, represented by a significant watercolour and gouache work, is a painter of expressive mark-making and dense layered surfaces, full of graffiti scrawls as well as lyrical passages. Imbued with a classical sensibility, his works evoke, but do not depict, seasons, places, even historical narratives. Katz on the other hand is a figurative artist who sometimes looks abstract – concentrated light-on-water effects of "Gray Marine", wavering lines on a monochrome surface in "Winter Branches". His cool aesthetic – simplified forms; bold, unmodulated colour; economical execution; detached manner – would have made him a pop



Detail from Cy Twombly's 'Souvenir de L'île des Saintes' (1979)

artist before the term existed, had he not ignored commercial imagery and resolutely stuck to motifs derived from landscape, still life, portraiture. The result has been a lifelong vivid debate with painterly tradition, explored here in a group of small works spanning 50 years. "Pansies" (1967) and "Tulips" (1969) establish his terrain – the boundary between abstract flat surfaces and realism; rigorous, cropped but decorative compositions

owing a debt to Japanese art. Particularly compelling among works at this scale are the intimiste pieces, echoing Vuillard, that turn on contrasts between interior and exterior light: "East Window", where Ada in a red and white blouse is set against a yellow-framed window, giving a close-up view of truncated trees, seems to me a minor masterpiece.  
[www.piersartcentre.com](http://www.piersartcentre.com)  
+44 (0)1856 850209, to June 4

Rossetti's Chelsea bedroom, and an excellent range of paintings, mostly female portraits, from Pre-Raphaelites to chilly neo-classicists. Underlying themes are the psycho-social anxiety of rapidly industrialising Britain, retreating into

idealism and nostalgia.  
[www.vam.ac.uk](http://www.vam.ac.uk), +44 (0)20 7942 2000, to July 17

### Ram Kumar

Aicon Gallery, London W1

The dynamism of Kumar's generation of painters lies in their tension between

the model of Parisian modernism, their inspiration some four decades after it happened, and a search for Indian identity. Kumar, born in Simla in 1924, stands out for his rare engagement with abstraction; landscape is often a

starting point but his delicate surfaces dissolve into blocks and planes of colour, intriguingly recalling mid-century British abstract painter Ivon Hitchens, though Aicon director Niru Ratnam insists: "This is just one of those odd

visual congruencies rather than anything else!"  
[www.aicongallery.com](http://www.aicongallery.com)  
+44 (0)20 7734 7575, to May 7

### Vera Lutter

Gagosian Gallery, London W1

Using an empty suitcase lined with photosensitive paper, transformed into a camera obscura, Vera Lutter photographed the long-undisturbed ancient architecture and pyramids of Egypt. She exhibits the negative image as the final print, emphasising processes of decay and deterioration, in monochrome works of startling austere beauty.  
[www.gagosian.com](http://www.gagosian.com)  
+44 (0)20 7841 9960, from Tuesday to May 21

### Will Maclean

Fleming Collection, London W1

Maclean's understated, precise, metaphorical art consisting of found objects deconstructed and reconstructed within box-like formats, has far-ranging conceptual and narrative reach, turning on exploration, emigration, the life and mythology of the sea – a theme linking him with Scottish artists as diverse as John Bellamy and Ian Hamilton Finlay. This is a retrospective of 40 years' work.  
[www.flemingcollection.com](http://www.flemingcollection.com)  
+44 (0)20 77409 5730, to June 4