

FT WEEKEND

Critics' choice

Life&Arts

Visual arts Jackie Wullschlager

Another Kind of Life: Photography on the Margins

Barbican Art Gallery, London
Exploitation, empathy or empowerment? Freak show or forensic examination? Those questions always dogged responses to Diane Arbus's portraits of the marginalised – images which were pioneering in the 1960s but not, it turns out, unique in focusing on those on the fringes.

The Barbican's revelatory exhibition puts Arbus in the global context of a score of photographers who from the 1950s worked among subcultures, countercultures, individuals and communities beyond the mainstream. For a year in 1959, Bruce Davidson followed the subjects of "Brooklyn Gang" for an engaging, beautifully honed series, while his "The Dwarf" features a New Jersey circus performer. Seiji Kurata's starkly lit "Flash Up" depicts brutal gangs in 1970s Tokyo. "Casa Susanna" is a collection of prints of 1950s-60s transvestites in glamorous dresses at a New York safe haven, recently discovered at a Manhattan flea market. Visiting desolate plains in southern Russia, Igor Palmin in "The Enchanted Wanderer" and "The Disquiet" uncovered an obscure group of Soviet hippies in bell-bottoms and flower-power hair bands, living in trailers.



Igor Palmin's 'Untitled XVI, Stavropol Krai, USSR (1977). From the series 'The Enchanted Wanderer'

Many artists developed close, complex relationships with their subjects over years, and to differing extents conspired with them to construct narratives of identity. Taken in a transgender brothel in 1980s Chile, when gender non-conforming people were persecuted

under General Pinochet, Paz Errázuriz's sharply defined, defiant black and white images for "Adams' Apple" form a collaborative work of resistance. Dayanita Singh was friends for three decades with Mona Ahmed, a New Delhi eunuch outcast who lived in a cemetery.

Pieter Hugo in "The Hyena and Other Men" (2005-07) documents Nigerian urban nomads – the latest of half a century of photographers enlarging our vision and tolerance for alternative lives.
barbican.org.uk
February 28-May 27

Murillo: The Self Portraits

National Gallery, London
Trafalgar Square's later "Self Portrait" is united with an earlier one from the Frick Collection – the artist's only known self-depictions – at the core of this small show of portraits by the 17th-century Seville painter best known for his sympathetic evocations of street children. The free display marks the 400th anniversary of Murillo's birth.
nationalgallery.org.uk
February 28-May 21

Victorian Giants: The Birth of Art Photography

National Portrait Gallery, London
The idea of art photography – and questions of its distinction from the documentary – is almost as old as photography itself. The four experimenters here – Oscar Rejlander, Julia Margaret Cameron, Lewis Carroll, Scottish viscountess Clementina Hawarden – tried to emulate painted narratives and portraits; eminent Victorians depicted include Darwin, Tennyson, Carlyle.
npg.org.uk, March 1-May 20

POPI Art in a Changing Britain

Pallant House, Chichester
Pallant is a home of British pop, with superb collections of paintings, sculpture and prints, from which this show is drawn. Social and political change is a main theme in works by Peter Blake ("The Beatles"), Patrick Caulfield, Richard Hamilton ("Swinging London"), Nigel Henderson, Eduardo Paolozzi.
pallant.org.uk, to May 7

Eric Fischl: Presence of an Absence

Skarstedt, London
Of the many splashy neo-expressionist American figurative painters celebrated in the 1980s, Fischl is the one who has lasted best and still has something to say. Loosely painted but with every mark counting, these new evocative domestic interiors and exteriors – the pool is Fischl's trademark – are infused with wealth, boredom, sense of malaise and disconnection.
skarstedt.com
March 1-May 26

Rhythms of Light: Scottish Colourists from the Fleming Collection

Barber Institute, Birmingham
A welcome show south of the border for the early 20th-century Scottish painters who embraced avant-garde French styles. Fine examples trace their development from Manet-like still lifes (John Duncan Ferguson's "Jonquils and Silver", 1905) to bold deco designs such as Francis Cadell's "The White Villa, Cassis" (1924).
barber.org.uk, to May 13

René Magritte (Or: The Rule of Metaphor)

Luxembourg & Dayan, London
Magritte's "Ceci n'est pas un pipe", inscribed on his painting "The Treachery of Images", are among the most famous words included in any work of art. This show surveys Magritte's word-pictures and related canvases – "L'usage de la parole", "Le genre nocturne" – produced in Paris between 1927-30.
luxembourgdayan.com
February 27-May 12

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