

# Art

MONTHLY

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Hell in the Pacific  
Is there a new orientalism abroad?

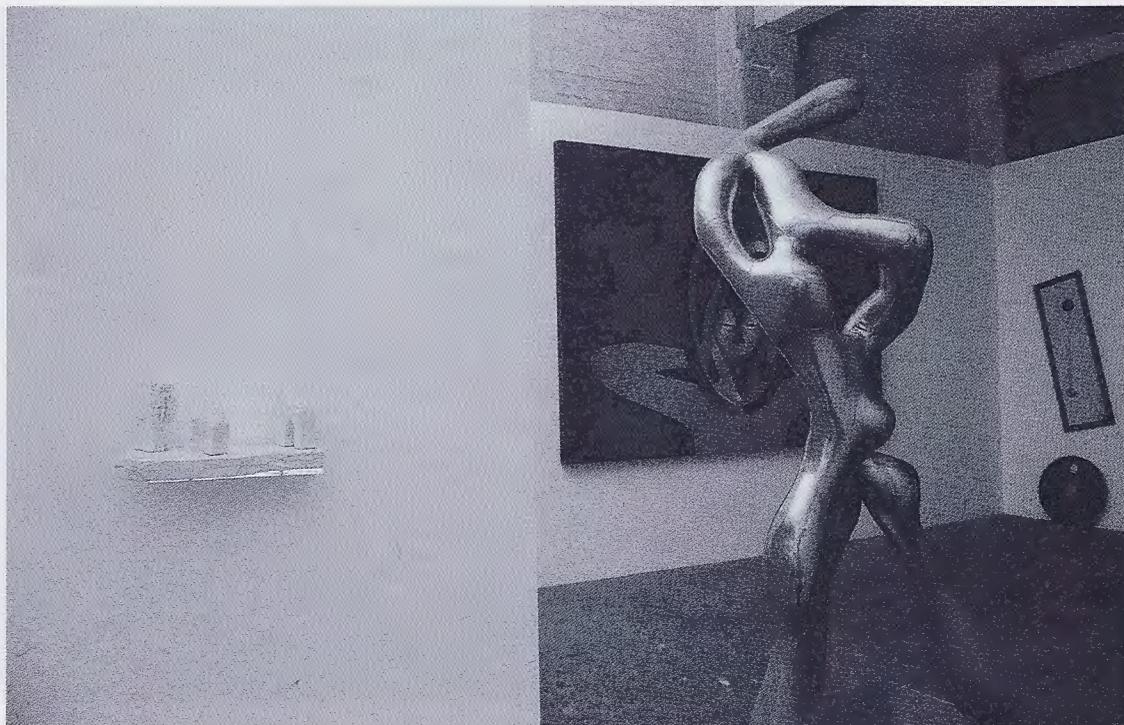
Abracadabra  
And that's magic! Or is it?

The Road to Argentina  
Via Buenos Aires

East is East  
The International Open



foreground  
**Steven Gontarski**  
*One Hypoxic*  
 l to r  
**Peter Kapos**  
*Ruins of Ancient Buildings*  
**Enrico David**  
*Untitled (Mask)*  
**Carl Plackman**  
*Orpheus*  
 all 1999



public relations advisor. And so I applaud it. Even if one detects the persistent, fairly indiscreet ambition for the artists to be seen, to be sold, they've successfully invented an occasion for the work to be viewed at its best, without compromise, and that may never happen again – especially for the lucky ones who make it. ■

**Gilda Williams** is a writer and Commissioning Editor for contemporary art at Phaidon Press.

## ■ The Blood Show

**Five Years** London July 29 to September 5

In Guillermo del Toro's vampire movie *Cronos*, the central character, gripped by a desperate thirst, cleans up after the victim of a nosebleed by licking his spilled vital fluid off a toilet floor. It is a profoundly unsettling moment, playing on anxiety about AIDS in the context of a supernatural horror which is not removed to a romantic past, but set inescapably in the present. It is an image which is dirtier than the most sordid pornography, and as

such is not easily forgotten. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said for Peter Lloyd Lewis' mini-survey of the representation of blood in current art, an exhibition which appears curiously restrained given the Grand Guignol excesses suggested by its title. Shown against pale pink walls, all of the work included makes some reference to painting, and the visual similarity of the Abstract Expressionist drip to a drop of blood is a coincidence which does not go unexamined. However, none of the contributors seems able to transcend the internal discourses of their chosen media as fully and artlessly as del Toro. As a test of the assumptions that picturing or implying the presence of blood contributes moral weight to an image, 'The Blood Show' is successful only in suggesting the opposite.

But perhaps this is to take the whole project too seriously. True, the catalogue opens with a straight-laced biological primer, but most of the artists seem more pre-occupied by low comedy than high science. Liz Arnold and David Burrows both take Halloween as their starting point, mining the curious borderline between cute and spooky. Arnold's watercolour *Redheads* shows a coven of four identically dressed female figures gazing out of a

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THE QUEEN'S  
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THE LONDON INSTITUTE

to r  
**Liz Arnold**  
*Redheads* 1999  
**David Burrows**  
*It boy disaster* 1999  
**Kathe Burkhart**  
*Slit* 1992



window at a bush of luminous orange pumpkins. Each pumpkin has a pair of eyes with long lashes, all of which are closed in sleep. The handling is light and uncomplicated and the artist's allusion to children's book illustration is made more effectively on paper than on canvas. However, the composition, which positions the viewer as a fifth member of the mysterious group, suggests that this painting is not as innocent as it first appears; there is a subtle menace present here. Believable narrative is perpetually undermined by eccentric fantasy in a faux-surrealist alternative world which Arnold has made her own. Subtlety is not the name of David Burrows' game, but an artist who makes severed heads out of bubblegum would seem unlikely to be worried by such an observation. *It boy disaster* is a diptych of large colour photographs depicting an interior space coated with cut-out splatters of vinyl gore. On the floor a pill bottle lies discarded and in front of our eyes a pair of glasses hover, distorting part of the view. The cartoon-like artificiality of this violent *mise-en-scène* effectively defuses its full horror, but whether or not this really clears a space for us to consider our own mortality is highly debatable. Once having gone over the top, the real task is to get beyond the initial reaction, which in this

case is mild amusement. *It boy disaster's* staginess is so absolute that all such attempts are denied.

Markus Muntean & Adi Rosenblum also rely on theatrical illusion, but where Burrows is content to rummage through the props trunk at his local amateur dramatic society, the slickness of this Austrian team's contribution places them closer to Hollywood special effects engineers. *Untitled* is a photograph of two conventionally attractive young women reclining in long grass. One of them has a hand to her chin and gazes pensively up and out of the frame. The other lies flat with bare feet and outstretched arms in crucifixion pose. Both are covered with long cuts, their limbs and faces apparently slashed at random with a knife. It isn't hard to imagine this sort of thing as the gimmick for a fashion shoot, and as such it does its job well. The extension of trash glamour into mutilation chic is entirely logical. However, while their knowingly questionable sex and death equation goes some way towards testing our boundaries of taste, Muntean & Rosenblum get squeamish at the last minute. These cuts are just a bit too clean.

Peter Lloyd Lewis' *Untitled – Couture* suffers from a comparably misplaced neatness. A jacket is pierced by three meat hooks, each of which also impales a small white canvas. The points at which they meet are marked



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**Mark Harris**  
*Sixty-eight, Sixty-nine*  
 1999

by dribbles of crimson ink. The tools and techniques of the painter are thus compared to the characteristics and capabilities of the human body. Fine, except that the whole construction looks, despite the crudity of its individual elements, so designed that its appearance fails to keep pace with its intellectual and emotional ambition. There are different ways of writing in blood, and this comes closest to amateur calligraphy.

Kathe Burkhart and Mark Harris also make reference to the body, and do so with a similar heavy-handedness. Burkhart's 1992 acrylic *Slit*, from her series of Liz Taylor portraits, shows the star in profile and swathed in bandages, with ugly black stitches running around her heavily made-up eyes and mouth. Are we witnessing the results of cosmetic surgery or an assault? The answer is uncertain, but the issue at hand is never in any doubt. Harris' cut paper net of vein-like painterly trickle is finished off with a row of exaggerated droplet shapes, just in case we didn't get the connection.

Henry Rogers' *197 reasons why* shows a great mass of red balloons floating across the sky. A small, square photograph intelligently placed in an alcove and near the window, it looks the most modest of images until one realises what it depicts. The graininess of the enlargement contributes to a deliberate confusion of scale, and the resultant ambiguity allows the particles of colour to be read as cells or brushmarks. The connection is not a rigid one, but this flexibility works in the artist's favour. *197 reasons why* is easily the most coolly abstracted work in the exhibition, but Rogers' quiet aesthetic holds its own amidst the schlock. ■

**Michael Wilson** is an artist.

## ■ Mark Harris / Carmel Buckley

**The Economist Building** London July 23 to September 12

## ■ Carmel Buckley

**Shillam + Smith 3** London July 30 to September 10

The Economist building has come to be synonymous with a Modernism deemed to eschew the decorative in favour of geometry and function. There is nothing intrinsically wrong with these latter attributes, but the contemporary tendency is to celebrate those instances where the modernist ethos of 'form follows function' is seen to be contaminated by the decorative.<sup>1</sup> However, the current exhibition at the Economist building, consisting of selected collaborative pieces and individual works by husband and wife artists Mark Harris and Carmel Buckley unsettles the false dichotomies that underpin such celebrations.

Initially, it is tempting to say that Mark Harris' installation, *Sixty-eight, Sixty-nine*, 1999, which decorates three corner windows of the Economist building, boldly subverts the building's uniformity. Its large-scale, two-ply, painted paper cutouts in the shape of drips resembling but also dissembling, abstract expressionist gestures, contrast sharply with the grid-like structure and industrial materials of the building itself. Excess meets economy. The fact that the layer of drips facing the interior is overlaid with equally cut-into inkjet prints of Ungaro fashion from a 1960s magazine adds to the persuasive quality of this view. However, the way *Sixty-eight, Sixty-nine* combines retro and craft elements with the traditions of modernist painting is quite literal and all



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