

HD A natural talent in all its glory.
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LP VISUAL ART

Laura Owens: New Work

TD Royal Botanic Garden, Inverleith House, Edinburgh

Until July 30

Since her graduation from the California Institute of the Arts in the early 1990s, Laura Owens has been gleefully hailed as a new hope for contemporary painting. These new works fall into two loose groupings.

First are the two big canvases, each with rooms of their own. Both are exuberant riots of colour, from the palest avocado to looming midnight blues, with great carefree splodges of paint and taught, pacy lines that spiral into little whirlwinds of detail. Then there are the groups of smaller works that draw on a combination of collage and swiftly executed drawing. These combine whimsical little touches - a ladybird plods through cutesy flora - with the same living, breathing wholesomeness of the grand paintings.

This exhibition's greatest success, though, is the setting. The works by Owens were made in part as a response to the botanical teaching diagrams of John Hutton Balfour, and the dialogue between the scientific illustration on show and the art proper extends outward into the Botanical Gardens. This has a curious looping effect, where the real nature on the doorstep of Inverleith House is laid bare by Balfour's firm eye for precise detail, exuberantly celebrated by Owens and finally framed by the gallery windows. It is almost as if the trees shifting in the wind outside bleed into the paintings.

This, then, is a case of believe the hype. The unique presentation of the paintings and drawings makes for essential viewing and highlights the fact that, while Owens is a lauded artist marrying stunning technique with a seemingly symbiotic relationship with her subject, her work is as accessible as a walk through the Gardens.

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