



LAURA OWENS
UNTITLED 2006
 ACRYLIC AND OIL ON LINEN, 213 X 244 CM
 © THE ARTIST
 COURTESY SADIE COLES HQ, LONDON

can't read music or present a deliberate harmony. More figurative than earlier works, they ask how to re-engage in unselfconscious play, how to be a wild, naked, red-haired lion-girl who can slay her enemies with her diamond swords. These faux faux-naïve paintings reference, among other things, outsider art, textile design, fairytales and the Bayeux tapestry. Owens uses collaged stars, flowers, berries and balls cut from felt, which act like little memory bombs, exploding with the sensation of a hand's first encounter with scissors.

In one painting (*Untitled*; 2006), a gauche deer leaps through an enchanted landscape of outsize flowers. It almost touches pathos, but not quite. Instead, it emits the kind of nostalgia for something you had and loved as a child and lost, that is found again and found to be ugly, lumpy, worn, crooked and still loved: a hand-embroidered pyjama case; a hessian bag with wooden handles and appliqué daisies that you never carried. Another untitled painting from 2006 shows a young girl of about eight wearing a musketeer's hat and cape and a fake moustache, astride a pantomime horse. A homemade stage is painted on bare linen. The girl looks out through too-pale blue eyes, with such disingenuousness that she sucks you into her world of every possible galloping adventure, each happy ending. It's dressing-up before the facts about gender and danger have to be faced.

Owens strips back the layers of

illusion in painting in order to better capture it, to show how artifice is constructed and how magic begins in the cracks between fantasy and reality, abstraction and representation, and the acquisition and destruction of taste. Play is as simple and temporary as these paintings. I'm reminded of what Tilda Swinton said ten years after Derek Jarman's death about how she missed 'the whiff of the school play' about his films... 'The antidote it offers to the mirror ball of the marketable – the artful without the art, the meaningful void of meaning – is meat and drink to so many of us looking for that dodgy wig, that moment of awkward zing, that loose corner where we might prise up the carpet and uncover the rich slates of something we might recognise as spirit underneath. Something raw and dusty and inarticulate, for heaven's sake.'

It's hard to be charming about innocence. Owens's earnest dreaming of the perfect implausibility of make-believe shows us how.

CHERRY SMYTH

To be fair, the clearly articulated curatorial goal of using the established art-historical categories of landscape, still-life and portraiture as an organizing structure – that it would expand the associations attached to Dunning's work beyond those from the early 1990s version of feminism – is probably necessary when much of that is treated like ancient history by so many already. Even so, the end result left the viewer with only a very vague sense of the development of her work.

One thing that could never be suppressed in Dunning's work is its subversive humour, and the strongest moments of it in this show have not diminished. For example, a series of photographs, including *On a Platter* (1999), take the body-morphing that Dunning has played with from the beginning to the extreme: in this case, a 'blob' that had formed around the midsection of various women in the series (who are sitting or lying on the floor, or sleeping in a bed) emerges from underneath the shirt of a woman who has collected it onto a large platter resting on a table in front of her. The success of this outrageous photograph is sealed in her deadpan face: it's more than a pun to say that it speaks volumes.

It is the manner in which Dunning's work looks inevitable (I'm a little tempted to say 'natural') that provides its staying power. This was confirmed for me by the surprise of the earliest works in the show: *Untitled Landscape I* and *II* (both 1987). Previously unknown to me, they demonstrate in the utter clarity of their ambiguity (the first is a tight close-up of the artist's unshaven leg; the second a man's shaved cheek) that Dunning is a true feminist and a true sceptic in her work, unwilling as she is to deny the possibility of anything whatsoever.

TERRY R. MYERS

LONDON

LAURA OWENS

SADIE COLES HQ
 27 APRIL - 27 MAY

'Don't stir up purple. Leave some mystery/intact and undisturbed' wrote modernist poet Nina Cassian in *On An Old Theme*. After being censored by the Romanian government of her homeland, Cassian began to write children's books where her half-bird, half-women creatures could thrive and the intense physical lightness and invulnerability of her childhood could be cherished. There's a powerful sense in Laura Owens's new drawings and paintings of that same desire to shake off adulthood and return to the unhampered childish joy of picture-making without consequence.

If these works made a sound, it would be a xylophone played by someone who



LONDON

INNER WORLDS OUTSIDE

WHITECHAPEL
 28 APRIL - 25 JUNE

From the inclusion of Daniel Johnston in the 2006 Whitney Biennial to the Nazi exhibition of degenerate art in 1937, which drew parallels between the work of avant-garde artists and psychiatric patients, curators have placed insider and outsider art next to one another

MICHAEL THE CARTOGRAPHER
UNTITLED DATE UNKNOWN
 FELT TIP ON PAPER, 20 X 33 CM
 COURTESY WHITECHAPEL GALLERY, LONDON



LAURA OWENS
UNTITLED 2006
ACRYLIC AND OIL ON LINEN, 213 X 244 CM
© THE ARTIST
COURTESY SADI COLES HG, LONDON

can't read music or present a deliberate harmony. More figurative than earlier works, they ask how to re-engage in unselfconscious play, how to be a wild, naked, red-haired lion-girl who can slay her enemies with her diamond swords. These faux-naïve paintings reference, among other things, outsider art, textile design, fairytales and the Bayeux tapestry. Owens uses collaged stars, flowers, berries and balls cut from felt, which act like little memory bombs, exploding with the sensation of a hand's first encounter with scissors.

In one painting (*Untitled*; 2006), a gauche deer leaps through an enchanted landscape of outsize flowers. It almost touches pathos, but not quite. Instead, it emits the kind of nostalgia for something you had and loved as a child and lost, that is found again and found to be ugly, lumpy, worn, crooked and still loved: a hand-embroidered pyjama case; a hessian bag with wooden handles and appliqué daisies that you never carried. Another untitled painting from 2006 shows a young girl of about eight wearing a musketeer's hat and cape and a fake moustache, astride a pantomime horse. A homemade stage is painted on bare linen. The girl looks out through too-pale blue eyes, with such disingenuousness that she sucks you into her world of every possible galloping adventure, each happy ending. It's dressing-up before the facts about gender and danger have to be faced. Owens strips back the layers of

illusion in painting in order to better capture it, to show how artifice is constructed and how magic begins in the cracks between fantasy and reality, abstraction and representation, and the acquisition and destruction of taste. Play is as simple and temporary as these paintings. I'm reminded of what Tilda Swinton said ten years after Derek Jarman's death about how she missed 'the whiff of the school play' about his films... 'The antidote it offers to the mirror ball of the marketable – the artful without the art, the meaningful devoid of meaning – is meat and drink to so many of us looking for that dodgy wig, that moment of awkward zing, that loose corner where we might prise up the carpet and uncover the rich slates of something we might recognise as spirit underneath. Something raw and dusty and inarticulate, for heaven's sake.'

It's hard to be charming about innocence. Owens's earnest dreaming of the perfect implausibility of make-believe shows us how.

CHERRY SMYTH

LONDON

INNER WORLDS OUTSIDE

WHITECHAPEL
28 APRIL - 25 JUNE

From the inclusion of Daniel Johnston in the 2006 Whitney Biennial to the Nazi exhibition of degenerate art in 1937, which drew parallels between the work of avant-garde artists and psychiatric patients, curators have placed insider and outsider art next to one another

MICHAEL THE CARTOGRAPHER
UNTITLED DATE UNKNOWN
FELT TIP ON PAPER, 20 X 33 CM
COURTESY WHITECHAPEL GALLERY, LONDON



To be fair, the clearly articulated curatorial goal of using the established art-historical categories of landscape, still-life and portraiture as an organizing structure – that it would expand the associations attached to Dunning's work beyond those from the early 1990s version of feminism – is probably necessary when much of that is treated like ancient history by so many already. Even so, the end result left the viewer with only a very vague sense of the development of her work.

One thing that could never be suppressed in Dunning's work is its subversive humour, and the strongest moments of it in this show have not diminished. For example, a series of photographs, including *On a Platter* (1999), take the body-morphing that Dunning has played with from the beginning to the extreme: in this case, a 'blob' that had formed around the midsection of various women in the series (who are sitting or lying on the floor, or sleeping in a bed) emerges from underneath the shirt of a woman who has collected it onto a large platter resting on a table in front of her. The success of this outrageous photograph is sealed in her deadpan face: it's more than a pun to say that it speaks volumes.

It is the manner in which Dunning's work looks inevitable (I'm a little tempted to say 'natural') that provides its staying power. This was confirmed for me by the surprise of the earliest works in the show: *Untitled Landscape I* and *II* (both 1987). Previously unknown to me, they demonstrate in the utter clarity of their ambiguity (the first is a tight close-up of the artist's unshaven leg; the second a man's shaved cheek) that Dunning is a true feminist and a true sceptic in her work, unwilling as she is to deny the possibility of anything whatsoever.

TERRY R. MYERS

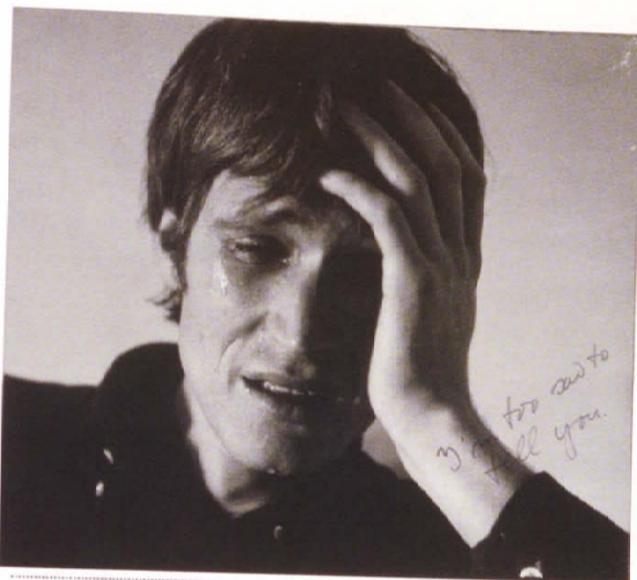
for a variety of reasons. The Nazis were infamously intent on discrediting the status of artists who did not submit to National Socialism's ideology, while the presence of work by Johnston at the Whitney would appear to underscore a curator's embrace of popular culture. The intention of *Inner Worlds Outside* is much less transparent but, considering the set-to in the UK national press between critics and the show's curator Jon Thompson, such a bunk-up remains a contentious remit.

The term 'outsider art' itself is somewhat murky, but generally refers to images and objects made by the mentally ill, criminals, spiritualists and eccentrics. Other qualifications might be a lack of formal art education or a compulsion that is entirely internalized, with no recourse to audience or art market. Thompson's claim is that, in the opening decades of the last century, artists and outsiders were responding to the same conditions of modernity – namely, what Marx identified as alienation between 'man and man, man and object, man and society, man and myth, man and language'. The second, and related, angle that the show endeavours to project is that all human brains are alike.

The aim, then, would appear to be to provide evidence that Joan Miró, Paul Klee, Philip Guston and others are comparable to, say, a schizophrenic or a seer. This suggestion seems simplistic, though, because image-making is a thinking process: it is a reflection of intention, knowledge, cultural context and personal disposition. To select a print of a nude by Egon Schiele and set it next to a drawing of naked women by a man with dementia provokes assumptions based entirely on visual parity, when the image itself is merely a symptom of its making. And, actually, there is a distinct sense that the outsiders represented here more often than not have no sense of their audience, whereas the insiders undeniably do.

Yet this is precisely what makes outsider art so engrossing. There is no way of knowing how these images and objects are arrived at. Often they are so much more intense than their insider counterparts: Henry Darger's multitude of young girls in peril, sometimes in baby-doll dresses, sometimes naked with boys' genitals, come from a much less self-conscious place than, say, Dubuffet's cackling crowd scenes. These expressionistic works are, in turn, outdone by a widespread use of maniacal multiplicity and a compulsion to fill space in the outsider works. Eventually, though, the measured decisions and consequent progression of the bona fide avant-garde prefer more gratifying outcomes. The motives of the outsiders are so internalized and so curiously static that the too-rich brew threatens to choke a little.

SALLY O'REILLY



LONDON

BAS JAN ADER

ALL IS FALLING
CAMDEN ARTS CENTRE
28 APRIL - 2 JULY

BAS JAN ADER
I'M TOO SAD TO TELL YOU '970
BLACK AND WHITE PHOTO, 49 X 59 CM
COURTESY GARDEN ARTS CENTRE, LONDON

It has become one of the great stories of contemporary art: On 9 July 1975 the Dutch artist Bas Jan Ader, as part of a project entitled *In Search of the Miraculous*, set sail from Cape Cod to cross the Atlantic Ocean in a tiny, one-man boat. He was heading for Holland, but never made it. A year later, his boat washed up on the coast of Ireland. His body was never found.

His career tragically cut short, Ader has left behind barely enough work to fill the Camden Arts Centre in this, his first UK retrospective. With just a handful of films and photographs, padded out with assorted ephemera, you can absorb his entire oeuvre in little over half an hour. Not that that should detract from the experience. The exhibition is small but perfectly formed, and, let there be no doubt, Ader was an extraordinary artist. You can return to his work time and time again, and forever gain from it.

He is probably best known for his films of falling: from a tree, from the roof of his house in California, from a bicycle into a canal in Amsterdam. By allowing himself to fall, Ader was subjecting himself to elements beyond his control, to inevitable disaster, and to the tragedy of failure in a potent expression of the existential drama of our age. In each of the films, there is a split second in which the artist creates a critical moment of decision – the point at which one lets go of the thing one has been holding onto (limitation, logic, the material) and falls

was an art with something to say, free to express ideas beyond itself, searching for a world beyond matter, for something miraculous.

Ader was a modern-day Romantic – a tragic solitary hero on a quest for the sublime. His disappearance at sea proved to be a final great gesture in that regard. With his subversive attitude, melancholic humour and ironic charm, his perfect mix of laid-back Californian cool and ambiguous European avant-gardism, Ader is truly rock 'n' roll. (He even looks like a lanky Dutch version of Jim Morrison.) If this show only serves to further mythologize him, then so much the better: the (art) world needs heroes and there is no one who better fits the bill.

WILLIAM TURNER

LONDON

TAL R

MINUS
VICTORIA MIRO GALLERY
13 MAY - 23 JUNE

For many painting fanatics, Tal R's first solo outing with Victoria Miro in 2003 was one of the most anticipated and memorable shows of the year. No doubt aware of the fact that he is now one of the most frequently referenced painters of his generation, the artist has taken some very deliberate steps in this latest show to avoid repeating himself.

The nine large canvases on display are unified by a restricted palette of yellow, red, green, brown, pink, black and white. Each colour is unvaried in tone and often squeezed straight from the tube onto the surface of the painting; appearing, at

TAL R
UNTITLED 2006
WOODCUTS ON PAPER, 60 X 80 CM
COURTESY THE ARTIST, CONTEMPORARY FINE ARTS, BERLIN AND VICTORIA MIRO GALLERY, LONDON

