



Bathers at Asnières by Seurat, and Howard Hodgkin's version, Seurat's Bathers 1998-2000, hang together at the National Gallery

Artists have always copied the art of the past to see how it was created, said Laura Cumming in *The Observer*. "At the Prado, for example, you can see what Velazquez made of Caravaggio, or how Picasso fretted over Goya from first to last." The National Gallery, however, has taken this one stage further and issued an invitation to 24 leading contemporary artists to respond to one of the museum's old masters by creating a work of their own.

"The dance-card," said Cumming, "is dazzling. Freud with Chardin, Oldenburg with Vermeer, Twombly with Turner... But it's a chancy enterprise as like to produce outright duds as contemporary masterpieces." The "bravest" works in the show are by Lucian Freud, who has made copies of Chardin's *Young Schoolmistress*. His three copies are "horribly exposed beside the sublime original"; the best that can be said of the exercise is that it "expresses Freud's devoted humility".

Many of the artists just don't have the technical skill to stand comparison with the old masters, said Richard Dorment in *The Daily Telegraph*. Put artists such as Christopher LeBrun,

Exhibition of the week Encounters: New Art from Old

National Gallery. Until 17 September.

Balthus and Hockney beside works of Raphael, Poussin and Ingres "and they look like pygmies". Howard Hodgkin is one of the few painters who rose to the occasion. "He takes Seurat's mechanistic masterpiece

and turns it into something sensual and alive."

The main problem with the show is its contrived concept, said Charles Darwent in *The Independent* on Sunday. "Modern artists do refer to their forebears, but they do by assimilation and allusion rather than by buying wholesale." The artists who fared worse in the show were those who had adhered too closely to the brief. "They come out looking camp – Anthony Caro's *Duccio Variations* being a woeful case in point."

Nonetheless, most critics agreed that there were many good reasons for seeing the show. Cy Twombly's *Three Studies from The Temeraire* is one of them. He "captures the fairy-tale quality in Turner's art", said Dorment, "and his loose, weeping paint dribbling down over a white ground evokes something of the way forms dissolve in light under Turner's hand".

Where to buy...

The Week reviews an exhibition in a private gallery

Sarah Stitt

at Long & Ryle

Sarah Stitt, who trained at St Martin's and City and Guilds, specialises in urban landscapes. These are painted in bright postimpressionist colours, crisply defined in a manner close to photo-realism. A decade ago, this would have confined her work to the Summer Exhibition of the Royal Academy; now it looks very much in tune with the times, a sort of post-modernist riposte to Tate Modern.

Stitt's canvas – as suggested by the show's subtitle, *From California to Kensal Rise* – stretches from West Coast America to London. She captures the pearly light of Santa Monica and Laguna Beach, turning such prosaic subjects as an ice-cream



LA Ice Cream Parlour (£2,000)

parlour or a railway station into romantic, dreamlike landscapes. Even more remarkable is the incandescent light she sheds on more familiar subjects such as Portobello Road and Battersea Power Station. All her works are oil on canvas, and range from £400 to £3,000.

Long and Ryle,
4 John Islip Street, London SW1
(020-7834 1434).
Until 30 June.

Hirst's shark loses its bite

Damien Hirst's pickled shark has been rejected by the organisers of a French exhibition because they claim it is rotting, reports *The Daily Telegraph*. The work (below), which comprises a tiger shark suspended in a tank of formaldehyde, belongs to Charles Saatchi who paid £48,000 for it in 1992. However, it is not bearing up well – according to one insider, its dorsal fin has snapped off. "The shark is not in its first flush of youth. It's in a pretty bad way. We believe wall filler may have been used to patch it up."

This isn't the first time the shark has been subject to scrutiny. Oliver Crinnen, the curator of fish at the National History Museum, had also examined it.

The problem, he said, is that no formaldehyde fixing agent was injected into the internal organs when the work was created. "As a result, the inside decayed and caused one side of the shark to cave in."

