

Exhibition of the week **All Too Human**

Tate Britain, London SW1 (020-7887 8888, [www.tate.org.uk](http://www.tate.org.uk)). Until 27 August

"Stop the presses: Tate Britain has just mounted an exhibition of figurative oil painting from the past 100 years," said Hettie Judah in the *I* newspaper. It's shocking: a whole gallery given over to "actual paintings of recognisable things" – an art form regularly pronounced dead by the experts. *All Too Human: Bacon, Freud and a Century of Painting Life* takes us from Walter Sickert's scenes of London nightlife in the early 20th century, to Lynette Yiadom-Boakye's "evocative, dreamlike" contemporary paintings, by way of great artists such as Stanley Spencer, Paula Rego, Frank Auerbach and standout individual works, such as Euan Uglow's "meticulous" *Georgia* (1973). At its heart is an impressive selection of work by the so-called School of London, a loose group of postwar painters whose number included Francis Bacon, Lucian Freud and R.B. Kitaj. This is a "dazzling" show, packed with the "true heroes of modern British art", said Jonathan Jones in *The Guardian*. Here are "works of art that truly matter, in their humanity, courage, feeling, truth".

At first glance, *All Too Human* looks very promising, said Rachel Campbell-Johnston in *The Times*. The show opens with a marvellous gallery featuring "darkly brooding" Sickerts, "excoriatingly honest" Spencers and a pair of "lusciously



Euan Uglow's "meticulous" *Georgia* (1973)

Painted" works by Chaim Soutine. Yet despite the quality of many of the paintings on show, it sinks rapidly "downhill" thereafter. That's putting it mildly, said Waldemar Januszczak in *The Sunday Times*. This is a "confusing display of boneheaded curation" that can't even decide on a coherent theme. Worse, far too much space is devoted to the likes of the "stiff and mannered" Indian modernist F.N. Souza and the "hugely influential" but rather dry William Coldstream. Rarely have I been so "disappointed" by a blockbuster exhibition.

There are some brilliant works here, said Jackie Wullschlager in *The Financial Times*. Of "outstanding interest" are a number of rarely seen pieces by Bacon. *Study for a Portrait of P.L.* (1962) is "an unsparing depiction of the artist's lover" Peter Lacy, while *Study for Portrait of Lucian Freud* (1964) presents his friend as a vision of "existential anxiety". Freud himself is also well represented with, for instance, a "tense" picture of his first wife, Kitty Garman, posing with a bull terrier. Nevertheless, there are some baffling omissions – where is David Hockney? – and pointless detours into "gender politics": the contemporary section is women-only. This should have been a "landmark" exhibition and, "unmissable" though it is, it feels like a "squandered opportunity".

## Where to buy...

The Week reviews an exhibition in a private gallery

**René Magritte**

at Luxembourg & Dayan

It goes without saying that René Magritte was an unusual artist, but it's hard to overstate quite how peculiar his paintings really are. Looking at his work here, in an exhibition called *The Rule of Metaphor*, which covers paintings from 1927 to 1930, one gets the sense that, while his French surrealist counterparts were mere poseurs surfing a psychoanalytically-informed zeitgeist, Magritte was the real deal: a bona fide oddball with total conviction in his bizarre vision. Today, Magritte's style has been referenced to the point of overfamiliarity, reducing him to the status of a Belgian Salvador Dalí. So it's refreshing to see a display of paintings from his most fruitful era that conforms to expectations of Magritte's output – heads floating loose from bodies and mannequin-like nudes



*Les amants* (1928), oil on canvas, 54cm x 73cm

– and makes you take an entirely fresh look at this extraordinary artist. Not many painters can leave you looking at the world in a different way for days afterwards. Magritte is one of them. Prices on request, but recent auction records should give some guidance.

2 Savile Row, London W1 (020-7734 1266). Until 12 May.

**The African Mona Lisa**

A long-lost portrait of a Nigerian princess described as the "African Mona Lisa" sold at a London auction last week for £1.2m, said *The Guardian*. Ben Enwonwu is seen as the father of Nigerian modernism, and his painting of the Ife princess Adetutu Ademiluyi – affectionately known as Tutu – is regarded as a national icon in his home country. In the wake of the Biafran conflict of the late 1960s, Enwonwu painted a trio of portraits of Tutu in 1973 and 1974 as a symbol of national reconciliation. Reproductions of the works hang on walls all over Nigeria, but all three originals went missing for many years, and were thought lost – until one turned up recently in a flat in London. "It has been a legendary painting for 40 years," said the Nigerian novelist Ben Okri. "Everybody keeps talking about Tutu, saying: where is Tutu?" The work was expected to fetch £300,000, but the £1.2m paid by an anonymous buyer at Bonhams sets a new record for Enwonwu.

