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MAGAZINE OF THE YEAR

THE WEEK

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ALL YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT EVERYTHING THAT MATTERS

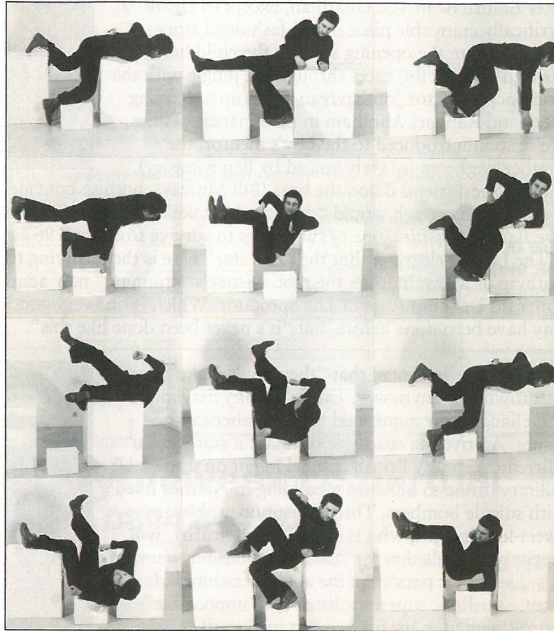
www.theweek.co.uk

Exhibition of the week **Conceptual Art in Britain, 1964-79**

Tate Britain, London SW1 (020-7887 8888, tate.org.uk). Until 29 August

Since its heyday in the 1960s and 1970s, conceptual art has proved an “irresistible target” for sceptics, said Matt Rumm in *The Spectator*. Because it privileges the ideas behind a work of art over the finished product, conceptual art lacks the “demonstrable application of skill” involved in painting, drawing and sculpture. Its critics deem it “pretentious, po-faced and devoid of the visual éclat that is surely the entry-level qualification for great art”. Certainly, conceptualism has inspired a lot of “fanciful rubbish”, but at its best it can be “mesmerically arresting. Beautiful, even.” Now, a new show at Tate Britain sets out to prove that conceptual art was a “liberating intellectual framework” that allowed its practitioners to explore ideas beyond the constraints of traditional art forms. The exhibition covers the period from Harold Wilson’s entry to office in 1964 to Margaret Thatcher’s 1979 election victory, a pivotal time in British history when artists began to think differently about the very nature of what art could be.

The show begins with Roelof Louw’s *Soul City*, a pyramid of thousands of oranges which changes its “molecular structure” as visitors help themselves to the fruit, said Mark Hudson in *The*



Bruce McLean's *Pose Work for Plinths 3* (1971)

are “primly filed” in vitrines, giving no sense of how shocking they were at the time. A few exhibits, including Mary Kelly’s “marvellous” *Post-Partum Document* and Susan Hiller’s seaside postcards, reflect the “spirit of liberty” the era offered. Elsewhere, though, it feels like a “mausoleum” of “antiseptic” archive material. There was “plenty of joy” in British conceptual art. You would never guess it from this “excruciatingly dull” exhibition.

Daily Telegraph. “I mention this in particular as it provides just about the only note of colour in the entire exhibition.” Everything else is in “stark monochrome”, and stultifyingly “text-heavy”. Keith Arnatt’s *I Have Decided to Go to the Tate Gallery Next Friday* sets the tone: a photo of the artist walking up the entry steps to Tate Britain “is accompanied by two panels of philosophical speculation on the meaning of the work’s title”. Overall, the show suffers from a “sense of the insistent, one-note cleverness” typified by Victor Burgin’s “horribly pious” *Lei-feng*, in which an image advertising sherry is set against a Maoist parable about the eponymous model worker.

The show is “disastrously” earnest, said Laura Cumming in *The Observer*. “The first generation of conceptual art in Britain was radical, pivotal and profoundly rebellious.” But here, artists such as Gilbert and George

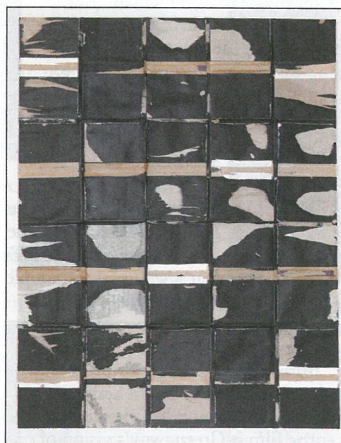
Where to buy...

The Week reviews an exhibition in a private gallery

Samuel Levi Jones

at *The Arts Club*

Where the arts are concerned, books have taken on a strange significance since the Second World War. Think of Ray Bradbury’s dystopian novel *Fahrenheit 451*, or the artist Rachel Whiteread’s Holocaust memorial in Vienna, in which she cast rows of library shelves in concrete to create an imposing sculpture. In both cases, the book is a symbol of intellectual freedom, and the act of destroying one is tantamount to a totalitarian gesture. For this show, curated by Wedel Art, the US artist Levi Jones has torn the covers from dozens of encyclopaedias and legal texts, and stitched them together, turning them into imposing abstract works. The subtext to his work, hinted at by his titles, is the ongoing struggle faced by African Americans in parts of the US – a



Get Back, Get Back (2016):
63.5in x 50.25in

reminder that even in the West, people still encounter oppression on a daily basis. It’s far from cheerful, but it’s certainly bracing. Prices range from \$15,000 to \$26,000.

40 Dover Street, London W1 (020-7499 8581). Until 10 September.

The Caravaggio in the attic

Judith Beheading Holofernes, now in the Palazzo Barberini in Rome, is one of Caravaggio’s masterpieces, said Artnet.



The Milan-born artist is supposed to have painted a second version of the biblical scene – which has been missing since the early 17th century. Now a 400-year-old canvas depicting the decapitation, in Caravaggio’s style, has been found in the attic of a house near Toulouse – stumbled upon in April 2014 when the owners went to fix a leak in the ceiling. The large, well-preserved painting (pictured) has been fully restored over the past two years, and has now been publicly identified as a Caravaggio worth some £100m by a leading expert. Other experts, though, beg to differ, said Jonathan Jones in *The Guardian*. Attribution is difficult because “his potent style inspired many imitators”: these “Caravaggisti” spread his “powerful aesthetic” through Europe. I tend to agree with the naysayers: the Caravaggio in the attic doesn’t have the master’s touch.

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