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critic's choice

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Life & Arts

Visual Arts Jackie Wullschlager

Flora, Fauna and Other Forms of Life

Michael Werner Gallery, London
Michael Werner, a gallerist since 1963, has engaged with most major names from postwar Europe and the US. His London programme is refined, eclectic, and serious although light of touch, an approach exemplified in his summer show, inaugurated this weekend, it considers interpretations of naturalistic imagery, balancing depiction and invention through abstraction, metamorphosis, hybridism, the grotesque. Artists include de Kooning, Klee, Beys, Schwitters, Art, Pollo, Baszlit and Dolg, michaelwerner.com, 020 7496 6855, to September 17

The Pineapple Show
Trent Contemporary, London
From the Boy's Quarters Project Space in Port Harcourt, Nigeria, filmmaker Zina Sansi Wines carries this challenge to western art's associations of the pineapple with exoticism, wealth and power. In drawings, sculpture,

video, sound, photography and performance pieces, artists from Africa, North and South America evoke the pineapple as symbol of romantic love, inspiration for African hairstyles, cosmic castity and starting point for dialogues about the black female body and the labour of fruit production. zinaandwines.com, 020 7631 3806 July 9-August 12

Armen Eloyan: Garden

Timothy Taylor Gallery, London
The Armenian artist's funny, melancholy, ambiguous figures and forms from everyday life appear here for the first time in bronze sculpture as well as in paintings of cartoonish energy: a man dressed as a wolf; comic characters, cigarettes, dismembered body parts in "A while ago the elephant ordered the ants to make him a burger". Eloyan is in dialogue with Dalouff, Guttus, Paul McCarthy and mass media imagery mined from Disney, newspaper, fairy tales. timothytaylorgallery.com 020 7469 3544, to September 1

Carlo Carrà: Metaphysical Spaces

Sean Claffier, London
Between his glory years as an anarchist and futurist in the 1910s and his embrace of fascism in the 1930s, Carlo Carrà produced strange poetic works, edgy yet tranquil, under the banner "La Scuola Metafisica". These metaphysical paintings of dreamy views, eerie empty arcades and isolated landscapes with lanky features – a lambswool bending pine tree in "Il Pino sul Mare", a facade with broken windows like gaping eyes "Casa abbandonata" – have not been shown together for half a century, and some have never been seen in the UK. This exhibition of rare, mostly privately owned paintings, launched this weekend, is most welcome.

Dominant are alienated anxious figures curved out of futurist's dynamic geometric forms but infused with stillness and solemnity. The splendid long-necked "Penelope" emerges as a tower of stacked triangles and cylinders from a

claustrophobic chequerboard corridor. Green, sympathetic representations of young boys are doll-like yet naturalistic: the artist's son in white sailor suit before a green square and brown one in "Belle figure", the motionless tennis player, enclosed in a grey room like an architectural element in "Il figlio del costruttore". A tilting stone head sculpted alongside a stone bottle, "Gentilissimo ubriaco", is a marvelously sober, poignant depiction of a drunk as a still life.

These frozen figures, austere, compact, their muted colours suffused with crystalline light, were created during the first world war, when Carrà sought a return to order via study of the early Renaissance masters Giotto and Uccello. He was at this time a vividly experimental artist, pulled back to archaism, forward to abstraction, urgently seeking, he said, "the right balance between art and tradition, nature and art, an equilibrium that had been denied by futurism". metaphis.com 020 7457 4492, to August 20



'Carlo Carrà: Gentilissimo ubriaco' (1916)
Private Collection

Damián Ortega

The Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh
The Mexican conceptualist moulds clay into waves, icebergs and rivers to muse on man's attempts to shape landscape, while a major new sculpture, suggestive of archaeological finds, proposes a journey from primitive to sophisticated tools – from flat arrowheads to clay facemasks of mobile phones – that documents our exploitation of the natural world. fruitmarket.co.uk, 0131 225 2383, July 9-October 25

Louise Nevelson
Sean Claffier, London
Abstract expressionist sculpture pushing towards installation art: this is the final chance to see the monumental assemblages, begun in the 1950s with scraps found on the streets of New York, and unified through Nevelson's formal toughness, psychological intensity and dramatic sense of light and shadow. seanclaffier.com 020 3266 7000, to July 16