

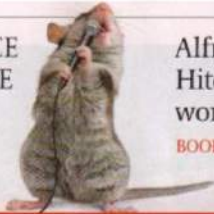
The man who swims in the Antarctic

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THE WEEK

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Exhibition of the week **Ravilious**

Dulwich Picture Gallery, London SE21 (020-8693 5254). Until 31 August

The Dulwich Picture Gallery's Eric Ravilious show is "exhilarating, enthralling and outstandingly beautiful", said Laura Cumming in *The Observer*. Ravilious (1903-42) is probably best known as an illustrator: he drew the iconic players on the cover of the *Wisden Cricketers' Almanack*, and produced mugs for the coronations of Edward VIII and George VI. This exhibition is the first since his death to focus on his painting rather than his design. It traces his career from the early 1930s through to his work as an official war artist – a role cut abruptly short when the aircraft he was travelling in disappeared over the Atlantic. Despite the troubled times in which he worked and his fraught personal circumstances – he had several extramarital affairs – his work is "generally serene and beatific". The paintings here "ask you to pay attention to ordinary beauty, to look at the overlooked once more".

"From the start, we see an artist finding joy in the unexpected," said Nancy Durrant in *The Times*. Ravilious first came to attention when he created a set of murals for Morley College with his friend Edward Bawden. Although they were destroyed in the Blitz, the "exuberant" studies are on display here, depicting



Train Landscape: a "very particular strangeness"

characters from English drama including Marlowe and Ben Jonson. Better still are the "brilliant, blustery landscapes" that characterise his later work. These paintings have a "very particular strangeness". Whether it's his depiction of the Westbury White Horse in *Train Landscape*, framed by the window of a train carriage, or an aerial view of English fields, dominated by the wing of the plane in which he is flying, "landscapes and interiors alike are seen from unexpected angles". It adds up to a "fresh perspective" on an artist "still too often seen on the side of coffee mugs".

Ravilious was "one of the most beguiling of mid-20th century British artists" said Martin Gayford in *The Spectator*. His work is "light in mood, unpretentious in ambition, but also superbly crafted and individual". His paintings are easily as recognisable as the work of "heavyweight" contemporaries like Ben Nicholson or Henry Moore. Ravilious had a particular knack for depicting machinery, as seen in works like *Ship's Screw on a Railway Truck* and *Bomb Defusing Equipment* – the "most unusual" painting in the show. His unmistakable style lends these objects designed for warfare "an almost jaunty air". And though he may be considered a "minor artist" in the grand scheme of things, I must admit to finding his work "irresistible".

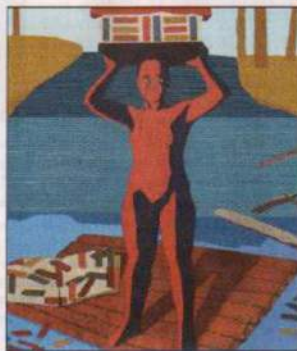
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The Week reviews an exhibition in a private gallery

Mythopoeia

at *Tiwani Contemporary*

From Antiquity to the masterpieces of the Renaissance to Picasso and beyond, mythology has always been a major source of inspiration to artists. The works in this group show draw mostly on familiar myths, taking them outside their conventional settings to unusual and compelling effect. The Angolan artist Alida Rodrigues superimposes her detailed botanical drawings over the heads of Victorian portrait photographs in homage to Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. The effect is as delicate as it is eerie. Kapwani Kiwanga, meanwhile, looks further afield to the voodoo rituals of Haiti and West Africa, splicing their iconography with that of contemporary North America. Best of all is American artist Mequitta Ahuja's colourful Journeyman series. These paintings



Mequitta Ahuja Journeyman 1 (2015) oil on canvas: £17,000

depict figures resembling Sisyphus and the Titan Atlas, drawing equally on Sienese religious painting and Giorgio de Chirico's brand of Surrealism. Even more than anything else here, they are thrillingly odd. Prices from £1,000 to £20,000.

16 Little Portland Street, London W1 (020-7631 3808). Until 9 May.

MacGregor steps down

Neil MacGregor, who announced his resignation last week, "will go down in history as one of the greatest directors the 263-year-old British Museum has ever had", says *The Guardian*.

MacGregor has overseen a "golden period", launching a series of blockbuster exhibitions – on the Persian empire, the Hajj, and Greek art – and raising visitor numbers from 4.6 million in 2002-3 to 6.7 million in 2014-5, while administering a £135m transformation of the Museum. He is also a respected broadcaster, best known for the 2010 show *A History of the World in 100 Objects*. Now aged 68, MacGregor will not take on another full-time role. He had been courted by the German government to run its vast new arts complex in Berlin, the Humboldt-Forum; instead he will act as a consultant to the organisation. "Few people would be surprised" if he were to be announced as the presenter of the BBC's proposed remake of Kenneth Clark's documentary *Civilisation*.

