

ART

Preview

Prices
splashedSARAH KENT ON
MICHAEL LANDY AND
KEITH COVENTRY

'CLOSING DOWN SALE' screams a dayglo orange banner draped across the top of the gallery window. 'STOP LOOK AT THESE PRICES' yells a board on the pavement. Across the windows is splashed 'RECESSION SMASHER, EVERYTHING MUST GO'. On the door a sign declares 'LAST DAY'. At a time when galleries are closing regularly and a walk down Cork Street feels like the end of an era, it takes bravery to frolic with Fate.

Like many dealers, Karsten Schubert has hung on by his fingernails, through the recession. But after many tense months and a recent renegotiation of his lease at reasonable terms, he is smiling again.

Commerce has also been Michael Landy's main subject. He filled Building One with greengrocers' stalls covered in fake grass; at the Serpentine he exhibited a street trader's barrow. Now the gallery is filled with supermarket trollies stuffed with jumble — old television sets and gramophones, filthy cuddly toys, lampshades, umbrellas, a battered plastic tricycle and suitcases — the kind of junk you wouldn't shift even in a charity shop.

Everything is peppered with bright notices reading 'MONSTER SALE, 50% OFF' and 'SILLY PRICES' while a tape mimics the voice of a wide-boy: 'Do yourself a favour; step inside and have a look round; we are so cheap here today; we are saving you pounds; crazy, crazy, crazy; bargains, bargains, bargains.' And like Pavlov's dogs, the

punters wander in, rummage for a while (how foul would the goods have to be to deter their knee-jerk curiosity?) and ask the price of the TV set, before being told that this is an exhibition, for sale as job lots only — by the trolley load.

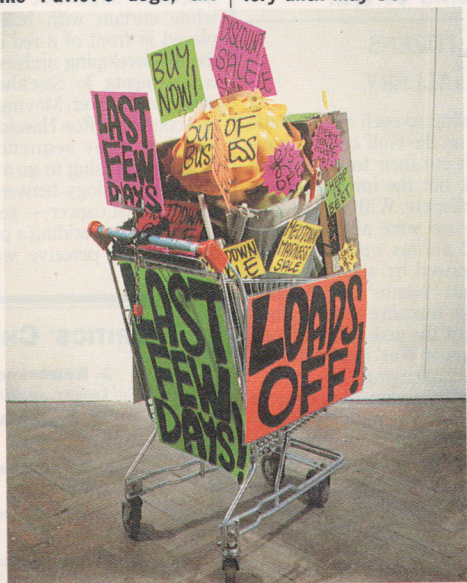
None of these objects is desirable — they could all be had from a trowl round the capital's skips. Their value is not an issue — they have none, except perhaps to a social historian — so the installation focuses on the mechanisms used to attract shoppers. Desire, and the means used to engender it, is a strange phenomenon.

But what bearing does this have on the function of galleries or the valuation of artworks? The value of artworks is entirely a matter of opinion: we have recently seen the price of a 'Rembrandt' plummet by millions when its attribution was changed. This is where Landy's exhibition is weakest. Its gaze is outward to the supermarket rather than inward to the art market. He avoids trampling on raw nerves or invading the sacrosanct corners of an aesthete's soul by refusing to address the issue of the gallery as smart shop and the artwork as expensive commodity.

Downstairs Keith Coventry shows a series of paintings titled 'Ivory Towers', which look like Mondrians and Maleviches. Everything about this work is right: the scale, the heavy working of the white paint, the colour of the floating squares and rectangles and the grubby white box frames that announce the paintings' ages. But this is much more interesting than straight post-modern plagiarism. The pieces are titled 'Ashmole Estate', 'Thorlands Estate', 'North Peckham Estate', 'Acorn Estate' and 'Rye Hill Estate', which, according to the police, are the five most dangerous council estates in London. And the compositions, copied from the estate boards, are based, in each case, on the architect's layout.

'Ivory Towers' is an indictment, then, of the Utopianism that inspired the modern movement and informed the international style in architecture and, ultimately, led to the post-war development of these terrible ghettos. Sharp, witty, concise: nice one.

Michael Landy and Keith Coventry are showing at the Karsten Schubert gallery until May 30.

Andrew Stahl and
Jonathan Waller

FLOWERS EAST

Like Clemente, Andrew Stahl has found his vocabulary through extensive travels in the East — Vietnam, Burma, Thailand — and has created his own idiosyncratic system of symbols to express his relationship with those cultures. Working from drawings, watercolours and photographs collected on these journeys, he synthesises this plethora of visual stimuli into a series of personal hieroglyphs: elephants, temple pagodas, helicopters and jets, which act as 'mind-wanderings'. These motley fragments invoke tranquil Buddhist traditions while also reminding us of the region's war-torn history. Extremes of scale — the tiny symbols float next to huge, disconnected limbs, a mouth or a breast-fountain — seem to have been suggested by the insignificance felt by the artist on encountering monumental statues of the Buddha, so massive that you can never see the whole. For Stahl the body has become well-spring, life-



View of Saigon from the Golden Mount' (detail).

force and cosmos.

In contrast, Jonathan Waller paints the apparently ordinary, infusing it with oblique social comment. His paint is lush, his scenes semi-rural, the weather always fair: lovers lie in long summer grass, joggers jog, cows graze. Yet there is always a sense of imminent threat, of foreboding. The colours are slightly excessive, as if tinged by disease or pollution. In the gently flowing stream where a girl in shorts lazily paddles, a huge trout devours a smaller fish. As in 'Twin Peaks', suburban contentment is not always what it seems. Sue Hubbard



'Water and Wood' (detail).

Mick Moon

WADDINGTON'S

Moon's paintings are full of his love of India. Indian jars and bottles float in a kind of abstract garden: flowers, calligraphy and murky textured bits. There are lots of greens, oranges and reds. Shapes are collaged on, screenprints and woodcuts are incorporated, much of the rough surface is the result of transfer printing.

Perhaps Moon intends his constantly shifting shapes to be like music. But they are not well defined: they eat each other. And the colours, which he may

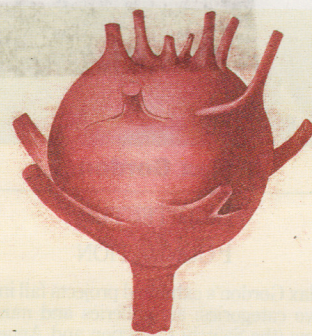
think beautiful, are muddy. What's most missed is a control of tone: each section is like the next; as in bad collages. The titles suggest synaesthesia, transformation and things which exist for the sake of other things: 'Behind the Curtain', 'Candle Holder', 'Spice Pot', 'About the Mirror', 'Melting Pot', 'Marriage'. And you expect something beneath the imagery — a meaning — but the search for it doesn't produce much beyond vague metaphors and autobiography: a 'rich tapestry' view of life. It's true they have love and integrity, though that's out of fashion. But at the end of the day, it's just high-class nonsense. David Lillington

Colin Johnstone

REBECCA HOSSACK AT
ST JAMES'S

The paintings look ill. They have the fascinating pallor of the sick — pale and blotchy, jaundiced, variegated. There are tiny white eruptions, lesions, stains. Sometimes a thin veil of white cosmetically disguises a part of the surface, or a scrap of tape staunches some hidden wound.

These small paintings stare back, like faces; but instead of physiognomies, there are anatomical drawings of vertebrae, scratchy pencil X-rays of feet and dissected eyeballs. These are juxtaposed with enigmatic words, carefully detailed and accurately coloured gourds, Brazil nuts, figs, beans and onions. A series of reproductions of drawings of fungi by Beatrix Potter, has been overlain with coloured, cut-away diagrams of a penis, vagina, anus and bladder. Creepy.



Colin Johnstone's work has an uncomfortably obsessive and overly delicate feel. The analogies between plant life and human organs seems too close: words are like cancers, a fruit is a tumour. It's a bit like hanging around a doctor's waiting room to savour the patients. Decadently recommended. Adrian Searle