

Nushin Elahi's London Letter

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Invisible: Art about the Unseen 1957 - 2012 at the **Hayward Gallery** (until August 5) could so easily have been a case of the emperor's new clothes. Yes, much of the work looks like a blank piece of paper, but the ideas these artists are grappling with are fascinating. From an early Yves Tanguy film where he exhibited an empty space filled with his artistic "immaterial sensibility" to Lai Chih-Sheng's huge pencil drawing that traces the inner lines of the gallery, they explore the notion of how we respond to what we cannot see. While you may not regard the spell Tom Friedman hired a witch to place above a plinth, even the most cynical viewer experiencing the buzz of the magnetic field around Jeppe Heine's Invisible Labyrinth must be aware of another sensory plane.

Yoko Ono's 'instruction' paintings feature both at the Hayward and in her solo show **Yoko Ono - To the Light** at the **Serpentine Gallery** until 9 September, part of the London 2012 Festival. Designed to showcase her importance as a contemporary artist, it features work both old and new, some more relevant and accessible than others. The parallel screening of *Cut Piece*, her performance at the Carnegie Hall in 1965 and another 40 years later where the audience were invited to cut the garments off an immobile Ono is a provocative work that leaves the young artist clutching at her undergarments, while her older self remains serenely oblivious to the dramas that play out around her. The ghost of John Lennon, of course, hangs over everything that Yoko Ono does, and for many she will always and only be the woman who broke up the Beatles, but there is an air of playfulness about her work that is probably best shown in her film *Smiles*, where she invites people to upload their smiling faces (at #smiles-film). Her dream of a global record of happy snaps started in the Sixties with another film (on show here) of John Lennon smiling. What Ono sans Lennon would have been, one can only imagine.

The Impressionists draw huge crowds and it's not hard to understand why. The lush colours, landscapes that capture the mood of an area, portraits that probe the essence of the sitter – all seem a balm to the soul compared to the challenges of today's art. The Americans have always loved this group of painters, which is why it is in the States that you can see some of the best of their work. In the early years of the Twentieth century the Singer sewing machine heir and his French wife, Sterling and Francine Clark, snapped up so many works of art they had to build their own museum in Williamstown to house them all. The Royal Academy is currently showing **From Paris, A Taste for Impressionism: Paintings from the Clark** (until 23 Sept).

In the small Sackler gallery upstairs the walls are crammed with one jewel after the next. The exhibition groups the works by subject matter: nudes, florals, seascapes, portraits, so one can revel in the nuances of each different artist. All the big names are there and, in particular, Clark's favourite artist, Renoir. The 21 paintings were almost all done in his forties, powerful yet subtle works that have none of the saccharine gaudiness of his later years. A girl sleeps in a chair, her hands nestling a dozing cat and the strap of her dress revealing a bare shoulder; a young girl concentrates on her sewing; Naples and Venice glimmer in the light and perhaps most intriguing are the two self-portraits, forty



years apart. From Monet there are fields of tulips and a farm lane with geese, from Pissarro the glimmer of rain on a very ordinary road and wildflowers opposite factories on a river bank, from Toulouse Lautrec the striking features of a redhead and the back view of a dejected woman. This is a heady mix of stunning paintings, and Londoners are making sure they don't miss it.

The **Courtauld** is in itself one of London's small gems, replete with rooms of Impressionists, so it forms a great companion-piece to the Royal Academy. Its current exhibition **Mantegna to Matisse: Master Drawings from the Courtauld Gallery** (until 9 September) is an added bonus, with drawings dating from the Renaissance to the Impressionists. In some of the works we see the artist capturing a fleeting movement, or planning a large-scale piece, some are preparatory works, while others are complete in themselves. The subject matter ranges from religious to Matisse's smouldering half-clad Seated Woman (1919), from the stark interior of a church to Turner's haunting watercolour *Dawn after the Wreck* (1841) and the detail of Canaletto's view from Somerset House to the spontaneity of Guernico's red chalk drawing of a chubby toddler seen from behind (1625). There is a superb Rubens portrait of his 17-year-old wife (1630/1), celebrating her beauty and his consummate skill as an artist, while a work by Charles-Joseph Natoire (1746) shows all the busy detail of a life-drawing class at the Paris Royal Academy.

Some of Andy Warhol's most iconic images are on display in **Andy Warhol: The Portfolios** at the **Dulwich Picture Gallery** (until 16 Sept.). On loan from the Bank of America are over 80 prints of Campbell's soup cans, portraits of Muhammad Ali and Marilyn Monroe, Warhol's own self-portrait and many other lesser known images. They date from the two decades from 1962 when Warhol concentrated on print-making and explode in a riot of colour on the walls of the small south London gallery.

The **Government Art Collection** is one of the most important collections of British art, consisting of 13 500 works dating from the 16th century on display in over 400 buildings. The **Whitechapel Gallery** has been showing groups of work from this collection for the past year, and this final display (until 9 September) reunites five works by John Piper, as well as unveiling a new one by Mel Brimfield inspired by the Olympics.

Captions:

(Below left) JMW Turner: *Dawn after the wreck* c 1841. C The Courtauld Gallery, London
Camille Pissarro, *Road: Rain Effect*, 1870. Oil on canvas,
© Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute

(Above right) Carsten Höller, *The Invisible* (1998). Photo Linda Nylin. /
Jeppe Hein, *Invisible Labyrinth*, 2005. Photo Linda Nylin /
Bruno Jakob, *Breath, floating in color as well as black and white* (Venice), 2011.
Photo Linda Nylin

(Middle right) Yoko Ono: Installation view, *Yoko Ono: To the Light* Serpentine Gallery, London
(19 June - 9 September 2012) © 2012 Jerry Hardman-Jones

(Below right) Henri Matisse: *Seated Woman* 1919. Graphite C The Courtauld Gallery, London
Andy Warhol, *Vesuvius*, 1985, from a portfolio of unique screenprints on Arches 88 paper,
Bank of America Collection, © The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts

