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# Lynda Benglis, ABJAD, Ori Gersht: this week's new exhibitions

From Lynda Benglis's abstract expressionism in Wakefield to Ori Gersht's haunting photographs and films in London, Skye Sherwin and Robert Clark find out what's happening in art around the country

## Robert Clark & Skye Sherwin

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09.00 GMT



Evaders (film still) by Ori Gersht. Photograph: PR

## ABJAD, Edinburgh

Named after a type of Arabic alphabet, this exhibition proves that abstract painting still makes sense in our postmodern, digitally mediated world. On the face of it, these geometries might come across as improvised and indulgently charming, but on closer scrutiny the four artists featured are obviously working according to rigorous creative systems. Jeff McMillan pays as much attention to the backs of his canvases as to the front. Jane Bustin and Paul Keir, working directly upon the walls and across the gallery floors, conjure colour fields whose pleasantries are offset with a compositional precariousness. Even more off the wall, Kevin Harman drapes shrouds of household paint across domestic double-glazing panes.

*Ingleby Gallery, to 21 Mar*

RC

## **Doug Fishbone, London**

Artist Doug Fishbone has commissioned a Chinese studio that churns out Old Master copies for £120 a pop to replicate one of the Dulwich Picture Gallery's paintings, and swapped the original for the 21st-century fake. There's a prize for those who can name the imposter, which will be revealed and shown next to the original from 28 April. But this is more than a game of spot the difference: Fishbone's stunt sends questions about the value we place on originality and authenticity pinging through the gallery, whose treasures sprung from workshops where apprentices learned by copying their masters.

***Dulwich Picture Gallery, SE21, Tue to 26 Jul***

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## **Lynda Benglis, Wakefield**

The fact that most of us have never heard of Lynda Benglis constitutes something of an art-historical disgrace. Her relative obscurity is certainly not down to keeping a low profile: she marked her arrival on the scene in 1974 by posing naked with a giant dildo in Artforum magazine. As her student, the photo-artist Cindy Sherman recalls, "She kicked ass"; so she did and continues to do so to this day. Working in wax, latex, polyurethane and glitter, she conjures scenarios of both lust and disgust. Great eruptions, coruscations and globs of coloured matter spill from the walls and creep across the gallery floor. Her male abstract expressionist contemporaries might be more recognised, but few can match the overflowing virility of Benglis's irrepressible spirit.

***The Hepworth, to 1 Jul***

RC

## **Magnificent Obsession: The Artist As Collector, London**

Art collectors are typically people with deep pockets playing a finely tuned game of cultural patronage, taste and power. What artists themselves collect is a rather different business: a mix of practical research and heady inspiration. This show lays bare the private treasure troves of international artists. The taxidermy and medical apparatus that Damien Hirst has amassed suggests the obsession with death that has fuelled his sculptures. Ceramicist Edmund de Waal displays his impressive collection of Japanese netsuke, while Martin Parr shows colour-saturated images of the British working classes alongside a collection of Soviet space-dog memorabilia.

***Barbican Gallery, EC2, Thu to 25 May***

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## **Paul Seawright, Dublin**

Paul Seawright's photographs hardly deserve to be so nice and tranquil. Drifting across the rust belt wastelands of America, the Northern Irish artist focuses on the closed curtains of clapboard houses, barbed-wire fences, back yards and vacant lots. Yet the artist interrupts

his desolate landscapes with studies of roadside plants, which despite being dead hint at the faint promise of natural rejuvenation. Nevertheless, Seawright is at his best with urban details. Here's a white sheet hanging on a line; here's a grey stain on a powder-blue wall. Next to nothing going on, but pretty beautiful regardless.

### ***Kerlin Gallery, to 21 Mar***

RC

### **History Is Now: 7 Artists Take On Britain, London**

The seven artists here, who have created displays of art and artefacts tracking British social and cultural life, provide a timely reminder of the past's impact on the present. Roger Hiorns, whose sculptures have housed bovine brain matter and fungus-like accretions of beguiling, decaying blue crystals, cites BSE as a tipping point of a public crisis of confidence in the ruling elite. His collage of drugs, meat and disease-themed art captures a sense of being overwhelmed by forces beyond individual control. Buried histories, from military bunkers to weapons-testing sites, have long obsessed film-makers Jane and Louise Wilson. Here, they've selected artworks by the likes of Richard Hamilton and Mona Hatoum that tackle direct action, from the Troubles to women's rights. Photographer Hannah Starkey's display of documentary portraits from the 1970s, meanwhile, offers a subtle reflection on gender codes.

### ***Hayward Gallery, SE1, Tue to 26 Apr***

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### **Ori Gersht, Eastbourne**

The landscapes in Ori Gersht's films and photographs are awesome and unknowable. In the works on show here, glittering granite peaks sparkle with unforgiving frosty white snow. In some of them, the image has been all but obliterated by a blizzard haze of white over-exposed light. The silhouettes of inhospitable crags, meanwhile, are an impenetrable black void. The artist wants to plumb their secrets, but instead his vistas offer a dumb refusal to give up their ghosts. As titles such as *Liquidation* might suggest, they're all sites related to the Holocaust. The artist's 2009 film *Evaders* features the mighty Pyrenees, which formed the mute backdrop to philosopher Walter Benjamin's escape from the Nazis (his flight ended with his suicide in 1940, having been refused entry at the Spanish border), as well as the blurred view from the train to Auschwitz. Gersht's images are a knowingly unstable record, echoing the challenges of unlocking time and memory.

### ***Towner, Sat to 26 Apr***

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### **Young Adult, Portadown**

Curator Ben Crothers helms this exhibition of contemporary art, which focuses on a "daring, urgent, malfunctioning age". While an alarming majority of artists these days appear to have got stuck within the midsts of juvenile misbehaviour, at least the exhibitors here attempt to

deal with it. The show sees Generation Y face up to the unprecedented horror and obvious futility of growing up: bullying, boredom, internet addiction, fumbled sex and the pain of first heartbreak. The graphic novelist Daniel Clowes presents intricate tales of adolescent paranoia, while Charlie White's video *American Minor* follows a teenage girl through pastel-tinted bedsit reveries.

***Millennium Court Arts Centre, to 28 Feb***

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## FOCUS ON: The Mountain by Ori Gersht

**What's the story behind this photograph?** My father-in-law survived the Holocaust. He vividly remembers events that took place on this mountain in Kosov, a village in Ukraine. When the Germans entered Kosov, they dug two pits on top of the mountain, and summoned the Jewish community. My father-in-law was five years old. His family was on their way up the mountain when a German officer told them to go back. On the mountain, the Jewish people were shot, and pushed into those pits. Some managed to crawl out, and later told what had happened. No one wanted to believe them. In 2005, my wife and I travelled to Kosov, and saw that the 'mountain' is actually a small hill. But in the memory of a five-year-old, seventy years later, it was a mountain.

**How did you create the effect on the photograph?** I exposed the film for a long time. The processed image is ethereal, ephemeral, quite removed from our mundane experience of standing in front of a hill. I've always been puzzled by the relationship of photography to truth. I wanted to create a fusion between what was tangibly there, and something more elusive – a memory.

**What is the connection between your films and your photography in the exhibition?** Geographically, thematically and historically my photographs and films are all connected. For my film *The Forest*, I returned to Kosov, working with the image of a nearby forest as a veil for lost memories.

**Who inspires you?** Goya, Juan Sanchez Cortan, Josef Koudelka, Andreas Gursky, and Josef Sudek.

**If you could take one piece of art to a desert island, what would it be?** A Cup of Water and a Rose, by Francisco de Zurbarán.

Ori Gersht – Don't Look Back exhibits at the Towner Gallery, Eastbourne, until April 25.