

the rarefied feeling that it once might. Everything is coloured – and sometimes given relative urgency – by the news cycle.

At MLF/Marie-Laure Fleisch, **Panos Tsagaris** doesn't try to ignore current events, staging an oscillation between them and, surprisingly, the so-called 'Great Work' of alchemy, in wall-based works that offer a sort of mystic symphony in black and gold leaf. In one series, 'Golden Newspapers', 2016, the US-based Greek artist uses gold to block all columns of newspaper front pages aside from images relating to the refugee crisis. The canvases surrounding these tend towards the crepuscular, essaying a downbeat Rauschenbergian aesthetic in which silkscreened fragments – black blocks, bits of what could be letterforms, starbursts – cohere into graphic abstractions overlaid with gold geometries and suns. They have mood to spare, but Tsagaris is aiming higher than that. His dream, the handout suggests, is 'the reawakening of individual and collective conscience, accompanied by a growing inner spirituality which allows us to comprehend with greater consciousness the reality that surrounds us'. The churl in me says that Tsagaris's 'conscience' might extend to confessing the newspaper works' similarity to pieces by Marine Hugonnier from a decade ago, but maybe it's just a crazy cosmic coincidence.

2016 was the Chinese Year of the Monkey, which lasted until 7 February 2017, which in turn means that Emanuel Layr's five-artist group show **Year of the Monkey** caught the monkey's tail. A year of likely notoriety to future historians is here already being historicised, though it is hard to say exactly how. Alongside Lena Henke's untitled, uneasy 2011 sculpture, which looks like a saddle was wrapped loosely in something and then cast in dirtily tinted acrylic, and the rustic pseudo-Fred Sandback effects of Benjamin Hirte's taut lengths of coconut rope, the most detaining works presented nothing much happening, anxiously. Matthias Noggler's *not yet titled* gouaches, all 2016, offer *Neue Sachlichkeit*-style views of millennials at close quarters, ears plugged with earbuds, data-sticks held like cigarettes, laptops lying around, plus evidence of health consciousness: minera-water bottles, smoothies, toothpaste tube poking from a jeans pocket. While these paintings thus reaffirm generational typecasting, they feel painted from the inside, as if Noggler were admitting that the clichés are true. And Juliette Blightman's drawings and gouaches from 2016, numbered by the day (eg *Day 321*, *Day 321b*), tumble together bits of domestic clutter as if constant

Niklas Lichti
The Year of the Monkey 2017 video



attention to the minor, and the homestead, were now a means of necessary self-care. Such, then, is the force of history as it is made. In the Year of the Monkey and after, intimism redirects to everything outside its frame: the boundary issues, the world as prison, the protests. ■

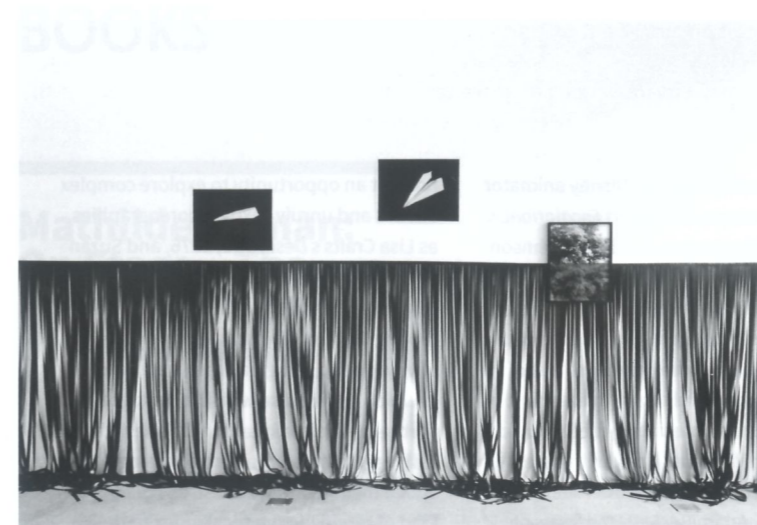
MARTIN HERBERT is a writer based in Berlin.

London Round-up

Frith Street Gallery • Tintype • Barbican • Handel Street Projects

Jaki Irvine's Frith Street exhibition, 'If the Ground Should Open ...', utilises eight chunky video monitors mounted on large metallic boxes, each monitor accompanied by dedicated speakers, these compact units being scattered throughout the gallery space. The walls display related documents. Partly based on her 2013 novel *Days of Surrender*, concerning the hundred or so politically active women involved in Ireland's Easter Rising of 1916, Irvine's installation presents 11 songs she has written to commemorate these women who, as the accompanying information reports, were 'consigned to the margins as the [historical] narrative was masculinised'. This ultimately bloody insurrection against the invasive British government was quickly suppressed, and only retrospectively regarded as a key moment in the founding of the Irish Free State in 1922. The sound of the songs fills the gallery, the screens showing close-ups, all in black and white, of individual instruments in motion, their players or the singers, the press release noting the generosity of all those involved in what is in effect a complex collaboration. The songs themselves, using an oral scoring system designed for Scottish Highland pipes, employ female revolutionaries' names as the scores 'ground', thereby musically restoring their involvement in the uprising. This emphasis on generosity and self-sacrifice is heightened by the inclusion of extracts from taped conversations between two bankers at the Anglo-Irish bank during the 2008 financial crisis. The model of music as collaboration seems confusingly contradicted by each screen's presentation of only a single element of the whole, though perhaps this 'dialogical' distribution of elements is intended to focus attention on the required responsibility of individuals at times of crisis or political dissent.

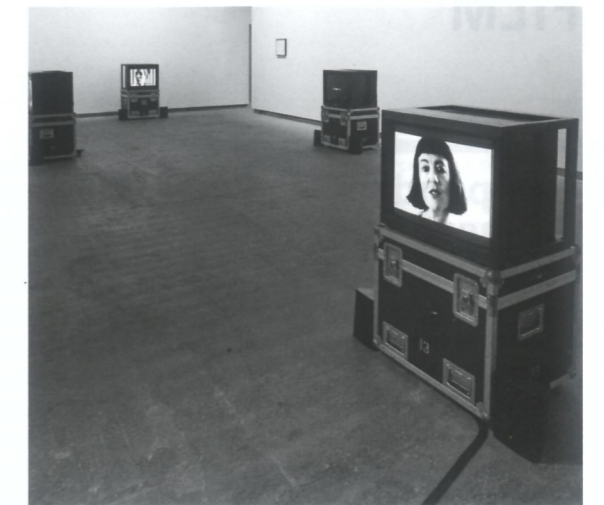
'Aiming or Hitting', **Marion Coutts**'s exhibition at Tintype, is a collection of disparate pieces employing photography, drawing and found materials. Although the press release mentions that this is the artist's first exhibition for eight years, it is difficult to see why such a gap in Coutts's CV should carry any positive weight. It is rather hard to make out what the exhibition is concerned with, save in a vague and unassertive sense. Around a substantial section of the space runs a black-and-white strip curtain, dividing the gallery horizontally, as well as embodying a loose wall-length 'barrier' of overlapping vertical stripes. This division into black-and-white banding is a too-obvious metaphor, if such it is meant to be: of life and death, good and evil, before and after. We know from Coutts's 2014 memoir *The Iceberg* about the early death, in 2011, of her husband, the artist and critic Tom Lubbock, and perhaps a sign of this loss is embedded in her work. But, if so, one would hope for a more imaginative translation of this distressing circumstance to manifest itself in the work on show.



A small gouache on paper bearing the words 'actual size' seems merely mannered, 'justified', as is much else here, by little except its superficial closeness to Conceptual Art. The large photographic work *Library*, 2017, showing several shelves with their books aslant, suggesting the removal of many volumes, again tiredly points to presence and absence. The two black, shaped paintings forming *The Middle Distance*, 2007, are arguably more engaging than much else in this unfortunately disappointing collection.

Richard Mosse's 'Incoming', in the Barbican's Curve, is dominated by a vast three-screen projection of the same title from 2016, made utilising a novel, heat-based, telephoto camera capable of detecting a human body at a distance of over 30km. Mosse has worked with cinematographer Trevor Tweeten and composer Ben Frost to produce this anthology of distress and displacement. The resulting 52-minute projection is assembled from numerous shots of the overpopulated confines of several vast encampments of present-day migrants fleeing to Europe from the Middle East and North Africa. On the screen, human bodies, objects and landscapes are rendered in an eerily ghostlike fashion, a result of the camera's operational hypersensitivity to heat. We are also shown numerous people in peril and despair as they cross choppy waters in overloaded boats or, at calmer moments, moving about in vast refugee camps oddly reminiscent of (and sometimes actually inside) sports arenas. There are scenes of fighting, destructive burning, military patrols, individuals speaking on mobiles or running through pathways lined with fences and tents. Occasionally the two outer screens dim down and the action at the centre is highlighted, framed by a deep darkness. Employing surveillance-related technology in this way, counter to its intended usage, reveals terrible circumstances while also awkwardly aestheticising them, making them fascinating in a problematic way, something which the ambient soundtrack does little to disrupt. *Incoming* is an incredibly powerful work but, as with much overtly political art, the drift into shock-horror spectacle is difficult to destabilise or contain.

At Handel Street Projects the walls are painted a seductive blue-grey in order to showcase **Mark Fairnington**'s quartet of large-scale flower paintings collectively entitled *The Worm*



in the Bud, a phrase borrowed from Ronald Pearsall's 1969 book of that name, documenting the variegated mores of Victorian sexuality. Each vase of flowers – there are roses, lilies and peonies among the troupe displayed – is depicted in a technique somewhere between that of the archival botany painter starkly recording paradigmatic specimens and the Surrealists' pushing for an irrational reconfiguration of natural form. There is, furthermore, something of the Victorian gentleman amateur implied by Fairnington's technique, which is simultaneously brash and detailed, generalised yet technically subtle. With the scale and intensity of the work one feels that the artist is, perhaps inadvertently, touching upon the psychedelic and the monstrous while retaining close contact with the discourse of the botanical specimen and the supposed objectivity of Science – capital S – prior to its descent into the dark introspective dominion of self-doubt.

On Coutts's photographic bookshelves is a copy of Penguin's 1965 anthology of Stéphane Mallarmé's writings, within which can be found his much-quoted remark about art conjuring up a supreme, essentialist flower, one nonetheless 'absent from all bouquets'. In the context of Fairnington's crazily 'straight' paintings, this aesthetic consideration is entirely apt. ■

PETER SUCHIN is an artist, critic and curator.

Marion Coutts
'Aiming or Hitting'
installation view
Tintype, London

Jaki Irvine
'If the Ground
Should Open ...'
installation view
Frith Street Gallery,
London

Richard Mosse
Incoming 2015-16
video installation