

# Critics' choice

## Life&Arts

### Visual arts Jackie Wullschlager

#### Anglo Saxon Kingdoms

British Library, London  
"Spong Man" sits on a ceramic burial urn lid, elbows on knees, hands cupping cheeks, gaping open mouth, enigmatic expression. He is 1,600 years old and the earliest surviving three-dimensional representation of an Anglo-Saxon man. He greets you as you enter this marvellously engrossing exhibition about continuity and change in England across seven centuries, and his beguiling look immediately establishes human drama as the pulse of this rare display. Here is a land contract exchanging a fen for 26 thousand eels, young prince Athelstan's deathbed will disposing of his horses, the first written words of English law in the code of Kent king Aethelberht (died 616), alongside sculptural artefacts, gravestones, fine jewellery and metalwork: sword hilts with filigree interlace, circa 600; the enamelled gold "Alfred Jewel", late 800s. At every turn of this lavish display, you engage not just with

historical fact but with evocations of felt experience and thought.

At the show's heart is an array of stunning illuminated bibles, beginning with Durham's exquisite 7th-century red/gold Gospel, and including foreign loans such as the Echternach Gospel with its lion leaping towards the text, created by a Northumbrian monk in Luxembourg, and the glorious Codex Amiatinus produced in Jarrow as a gift for the Pope. These declare the dominance of the spiritual life, ever-evolving artistic and literary exchanges with Europe, and also the sheer individual inventiveness of the religious imagination: returning from Italy for the first time in a thousand years, for example, is the great Anglo-Saxon poem "The Dream of the Rood", recounting the Crucifixion in the erotically charged language of the (female) cross on which Christ died. This is the most impressive, far-reaching show ever staged at the British Library.  
*bl.uk to February 19*



The exhibition features an enamelled gold 'Alfred Jewel' — Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford

#### Olafur Eliasson: Ice Watch

Bankside and outside Bloomberg, London  
In response to Katowice's United Nations Climate Change conference, the inspirational Icelandic artist and environmental activist brings blocks of melting ice from Greenland to London, installed in a circular grove outside Tate Modern and in the City at the European headquarters of Bloomberg, which sponsors the project. The works are expected to be on view until the end of the week, weather depending.  
*icewatchlondon.com to December 21*

#### Lorna Macintyre: Pieces of You Are Here

Dundee Contemporary Arts  
From archaeology to digital: the Glasgow conceptualist's installation of photographs and sculptural forms developed out of crystalline structures grown from cyanotype chemistry on ceramic surfaces takes as starting point a Roman ceramic artefact — the paw print of a dog who walked across the clay surface of a terracotta tile, excavated

from the Roman fort at Abernethy, near Dundee.  
*dca.org.uk, to February 24*

#### Reimagining Captain Cook: Pacific Perspectives

British Museum, London  
In 2018's final exhibition marking the 250th anniversary of Captain Cook's first Pacific voyage, contemporary Pacific Island artists — Michael Tuffery's expressive fantasy painting "Cookie in the Cook Islands"; Lisa Reihana's "Taking Possession, Lono", showing Cook in the act of hoisting the British flag on a Polynesian island — respond to his arrival and effect.  
*britishmuseum.org, to August 4*

#### Close: Drawn Portraits

The Drawing Room, London  
The UK's only public gallery devoted to contemporary drawing looks back. In a rare show spanning 200 years of portraits on paper, drawings by Ingres ("The Princess Murat", 1814), Picasso (a simplified "Tete", 1943), Lucien Freud, among others, hang alongside works by a dozen living artists: Dryden Goodwin's intimate family

pictures, Paul Rego's distorted, hot-coloured pastel "Self-portrait", Mounira Al Solh's depictions of migrants drawn on yellow legal pads.  
*drawingroom.org.uk to February 3*

#### Essex Road 5

Tintype Gallery, London  
Every Christmas this Islington gallery commissions eight short films connected to its Essex Road location and projects them nightly from its windows to the street. The results of the ambitious fifth iteration span global and local, conceptual and poetic: from "Encore", Michelle Williams Gamaker's exploration of race and Hollywood set in Essex Road's ghostly art deco ex-cinema, and Hiraki Sawa's imaginary psychological landscape of displacement "Wall", to David Blandy's spidery rock garden close-up "Interlaced", and "Unreal Estate", Nicole Vinokur's still lifes scanning the old South Library reading room.  
*tintypegallery.com to January 19*

### Pop Ludovic Hunter-Tilney



#### Daniel Knox

Chasascene  
HP Johnson Presents  
★★★★★

The fourth album by Chicago singer-songwriter Daniel Knox has a decadently sumptuous quality, a fantasy world of handsomely orchestrated songs through which swirl sentiments of the blackest nitch

repertory cinema — is a high-wire act, at risk of suffocating archness. There is a wobble on "Capitol", featuring a guest turn on vocals by Jarvis Cocker (sounding like a gothic Bryan Ferry), which sets overdone lyrics ("I hold your hand but break all the fingers") to breezy bossa nova. But "Me and My Wife" achieves a genuinely unsettling mix of orchestral sophistication, romance and enigmatic violence, a noir fever dream.

the pair, recorded in Shaw's studio in Kent.

The reflectiveness mentioned in the title is partly that of two people bouncing ideas back and forth between each other. It is also true of the polished but contemplative mood that the album has ended up assuming.

"Qprism" sets the ball rolling with two rising and falling melodic lines that mirror one another but seem to want to make a breakthrough into a state of perfect synchronisation, a jaunty study of doubling.



#### Bruce Springsteen

Springsteen on Broadway  
Columbia  
★★★★★

"I've never worked five days a week until right now," Bruce Springsteen announces near the start of *Springsteen on Broadway*. Fingers calloused by guitar-playing but never the manual labour he has so

to see it, this two-CD album is the second-best option; or third-best perhaps, behind the Netflix television show that has been made of Springsteen's Broadway debut. But even stripped of the visual element, the soundtrack proves richly enjoyable, a live album unlike any in his catalogue.

The production shrinks his usual stadium stagecraft to a one-man show based on his memoir *Born to Run*. Springsteen reminisces about his New Jersey upbringing and rise to rock stardom; voice alternating between a

by autobiographical monologues, character-based songs such as "My Hometown" acquire an affecting personal dimension. Meanwhile, the spoken-word sections are almost worth the price of entry alone — grandly comic, grandly sentimental, in the laugh-out-loud, not-a-dry-eye tradition of the great American raconteur.

At the heart of the show lies a thoughtfully crafted attempt to heal his relationship with his depressive father, now dead, the manual worker that

### Jazz Mike Hobart



#### Chucho Valdés

Jazz Batá 2  
Mack Avenue Records  
★★★★★

Cuban composer/pianist Chucho Valdés released the first *Jazz Batá* album in 1972. He tweaked the standard jazz piano trio by substituting batá drums for a standard kit, and

The album opens with the mini-suite "Obatalá", named after the god of wisdom and justice in the santería religion. The deity is depicted through flourishes of Valdés's piano, incantatory vocals and a pensive feature for Yelsy Heredia on bowed double bass.

The next track, "Son XXI", resolves a rumbling expressionist discourse into a sensuous elegant dance.

The album also marks the centenary of Valdés's late father, Bebo, and here other traditions come into play. "100 Años de Bebo",