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charmed
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THE WEEK

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THE BEST OF THE BRITISH AND INTERNATIONAL MEDIA

Runners and riders Who will challenge the PM?

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Exhibition of the week **In Bloom: How Plants Changed our World**

Ashmolean Museum, Oxford (01865-278000, ashmolean.org). Until 16 August

Spring is in full swing, and the new exhibition at the Ashmolean Museum, *In Bloom: How Plants Changed our World*, has been perfectly timed for the season, said Tim Adams in *The Observer*. It's "a celebration of the ways that plants have sprouted and unfurled in our artistic and scientific imaginations". With a series of artworks and other items sourced largely from the collections of Oxford University – from 17th century flower paintings to preserved plant specimens to works of contemporary art – it also provides a potted history of this country's horticulture. Its story begins with John Tradescant the Elder, keeper of Charles I's gardens, who travelled the world to bring back specimens for his patrons: phlox and jasmine from Virginia, horse chestnuts from the Balkans. That "zeal for collection seeded many branches of curiosity": artists reproduced flowers in minute detail, helping Enlightenment thinkers to identify "the precise mechanics of plant reproduction". As this exhibition moves from Carl Linnaeus to Erasmus Darwin to contemporary painters, it is "consistently illuminating".



A sunflower from the Duchess of Beaufort's Florilegium

horticulturalist's crumpet", like "a 17th century Monty Don". The Tradescants "embodied a new type of naturalist" who approached plant-collecting scientifically. Among these was Mary Somerset, the Duchess of Beaufort, who showed off her plant collection at her Gloucestershire estate. She commissioned a *florilegium*, a book of flower illustrations: there's a "dramatic, mind-bending" watercolour of a sunflower featured here, as strange as any painting by the surrealist Paul Nash. This exhibition is full of interesting stuff – we learn that the Victorian obsession with ferns probably inspired the frond-like design of custard creams – but it struggles to tell both a scientific story and an aesthetic one. Its "overarching narrative could have done with more training and pruning".

It's a "rather special" show nonetheless, said Ann Treneman in *The Times*. I loved the paintings of tulips and roses, poppies and orchids: the still life of "broken and fraying" tulips by Simon Verelst (1644-1721) "feels so real that it almost pops out of the frame". And a "scent trumpet"

allows us to enjoy the "intoxicating" scent of the opium poppy. The exhibition certainly tries "to cover too much ground" – and I could have done with more detail on the plants that have "changed our lives": tea, for instance. Yet it has "oomph and originality", presenting a "mix of the wonderful, the weird and the downright wacky". "I would happily go back."

Dominating the first gallery is an "imposing" portrait of Tradescant's son, John Tradescant the Younger, who succeeded to his role, said Alastair Sooke in *The Daily Telegraph*. Depicted as a bearded gardener, he looks "every inch the Royalist

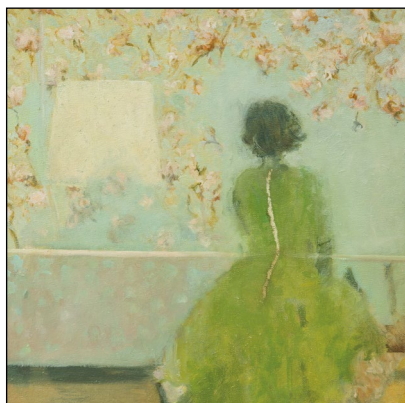
Where to buy...

The Week reviews an exhibition in a private gallery

Emma Cousin/ Audrey Reynolds

at Niru Ratnam

This double-header of a show is an intriguing one: two painters, both women, both working with (relatively) representational imagery. Yet their styles could hardly be more different. Emma Cousin (b. Yorkshire, 1986) specialises in howling expressionism, fielding a suite of canvases that depict highly stylised but recognisable scenes, in a garish clash of reds, greens and yellows. The faintly emetic effect is not unintentional, as confirmed by a number of equally anguished drawings shown alongside. Downstairs, Audrey Reynolds (b. Manchester, 1969) channels Sickert, Renoir and Vilhelm Hammershøi for a series of soft-focus scenes of female figures in transitory



Audrey Reynolds' Wait a year (2020-26)

moments. Many of them turn their backs to us, adding a suggestion of narrative to compositions that, at times, are nearly abstract. The brushwork hints at an ideal, but the palette and the settings hint towards something more grimy. Both are good, their combined efforts making for a weirdly harmonious synergy. Prices on request.

71-73 Great Portland Street, London W1 (*niruratnam.com*). Until 23 May

Blind patriotism, by Banksy

Banksy's back, with a new statue in central London. The 25ft resin piece is a commentary on "blind patriotism", says Aurelia Foster on BBC News: it shows a besuited man walking forward off a plinth while carrying a flag that covers his face. In the early hours of last Wednesday, the statue and its plinth were placed in Waterloo Place in St James's – an area "designed to celebrate imperialism and military dominance in the 1800s" – and near statues of Edward VII, Florence Nightingale and the Crimean War Memorial. Westminster City Council, which is responsible for the area, placed barriers around the work, but appeared to welcome it. A spokesperson said: "We're excited to see Banksy's latest sculpture in Westminster, making a striking addition to the city's vibrant public art scene." Banksy signed the plinth and later confirmed that he was responsible.



The week's guide to what's worth seeing

Showing now

Now in its final week, **Seurat and the Sea** is a “stunning, scholarly and revelatory” exhibition devoted to the pointillist’s paintings of the French coast (FT). Ends 17 May, Courtauld Gallery, London WC2 (courtauld.ac.uk).

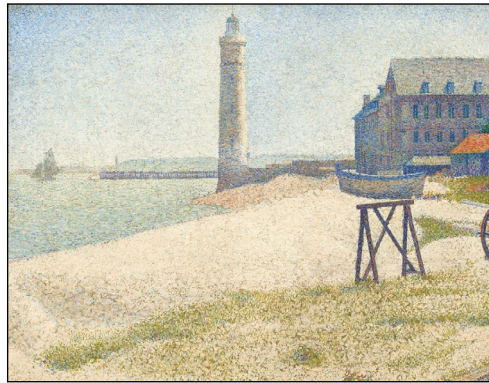
Alexandra Wood has adapted Hilary Mantel’s provocative short story **The Assassination of Margaret Thatcher** for the stage. A tense and darkly comic two-hander, it stars Robbie O’Neill and Anita Reynolds. Until 23 May, Liverpool Everyman (everymanplayhouse.com).

Book now

Tate Britain is staging the largest retrospective of **James McNeill Whistler** in Europe for 30 years. There will be more than 150 of the American artist’s works on display, including *Portrait of the Artist’s Mother*. From 21 May, Tate Britain, London SW1 (tate.org.uk).

The **Aldeburgh Festival** is marking 50 years since the death of its co-founder, Benjamin Britten. Highlights include Isabelle Faust and Kristian Bezuidenhout performing Bach’s six sonatas for violin and harpsichord. 12-28 June, Snape Maltings, Suffolk (brittenpearsarts.org).

Lee Child, Ann Cleeves and Anthony Horowitz are among the crime writers gathering to discuss their craft at the **Theakston Old Peculier Crime Writing Festival**. The actress Brenda Blethyn will also be there, talking about her role as the doughty detective, Vera. 23-26 July,



Seurat’s *The Lighthouse at Honfleur* (1886)

Old Swan Hotel, Harrogate, North Yorkshire (harrogateinternationalfestivals.com).

Keira Knightley is returning to the West End for Robert Icke’s adaptation of **The Lives of Others**, the Oscar-winning film about East Berliners living in the shadow of the Stasi, with Luke Thompson and Stephen Dillane. From 14 October-9 January 2027, Adelphi Theatre, London WC2 (lwtheatres.co.uk).

Just out in paperback

The Usual Desire to Kill by Camilla Barnes (Scribner £9.99). Barnes was encouraged to write a novel by her uncle, the novelist Julian Barnes, because he had so enjoyed her gossipy emails about their family. The result was this “wry and witty” debut about ageing and stubborn parents (Daily Telegraph).



Best books... Ardal O’Hanlon

The comedian, actor and novelist picks his favourite books. He is a judge of the Book of the Year, at The British Book Awards 2026, which will be announced on 11 May. His third novel, A Plot to Die For (Simon & Schuster £20) was published this week

The Catcher in the Rye by J.D. Salinger, 1951 (Penguin £9.99). This made an instant impression on me as a boy. As well as having a comic fizz, it spoke to me in a way that no other book had. It’s a howl at the Moon by an adolescent on the cusp of adulthood, calling out the world’s hypocrisies.

The Butcher Boy by Patrick McCabe, 1992 (Picador £10.99). McCabe sidestepped the spectres of Beckett and Joyce to forge his own literary path. This “border gothic” novel is tragic, macabre and extravagantly funny. He writes about a place and in an idiom

that felt familiar to me, having grown up in the same county. It was the first time I’d seen that world on the page.

Beloved by Toni Morrison, 1987 (Vintage £9.99). Morrison uses the supernatural to tell the gut-wrenching story of slavery in the United States and its searing psychological legacy. As well as being a riveting, essential read, it’s an extraordinary imaginative feat. This book has the power to not just move but to change you.

Outline Trilogy by Rachel Cusk, 2014-2018 (Faber £30). Bold and experimental, Cusk

writes with a precision instrument. The largely invisible narrator brilliantly dissects the human mind and its capacity for delusion. Despite the absence of a conventional narrative, it grips.

The Anarchy by William Dalrymple, 2019 (Bloomsbury £14.99). I prefer to read fiction, but occasionally a history book lands in my lap that has a profound impact on how I see the world. Dalrymple exposes the greed and barbarity of the East India Company, the standard bearer of global capitalism.

The Sellout by Paul Beatty, 2015 (Oneworld £9.99). A timely novel about black experience in America, it is pacy and powerfully funny, written in a Pynchonesque stream-of-consciousness. But none of this quite conceals the character’s anger and frustration.

Television

Programmes

Children of the Blitz During the Blitz, more than two million British children stayed put in Britain’s towns and cities. Here, some of the last survivors of that cohort tell their stories. Mon 11 May, BBC2 21:00 (90mins).

Wrestling With Trump Satirist Munya Chawawa travels to the US to immerse himself in wrestling and Maga politics, in an effort to uncover the links between Donald Trump and the theatrical world of the WWE. Tue 12 May, C4 22:00 (65mins).

The Future with Hannah Fry The scientist travels from California to Japan to explore the latest age-defying technologies in this new six-part series. Wed 13 May, BBC2 19:30 (25mins).

The Hardacres The escapist rags-to-riches drama about a Yorkshire family in the 1890s returns for a second series. Thu 14 May, 9pm C5 (60mins).

Films

A Room with a View (1985) Lush, romantic Merchant-Ivory adaptation of E.M. Forster’s comedy of manners, with Helena Bonham Carter and Julian Sands. Wed 13 May, Film4 11:00 (135mins).

Imitation of Life (1959) Lana Turner and Juanita Moore play an actress and her black maid in the classic melodrama highlighting the hypocrisies of 1950s America. Thu 14 May Film4 15:25 (155mins).

Le Mans ’66 (2019) Matt Damon and Christian Bale star in this engaging true story about Ford’s effort to defeat Ferrari. Thu 14 May, Film4 18:00 (180mins).

New to streaming

Widow’s Bay Comedy-horror starring Matthew Rhys as the mayor of a cursed New England coastal town. “Rich and wonderful” (Guardian). On Apple TV.

Should I Marry A Murderer? “Gripping” true crime about a pathologist in Glasgow whose fiancé confessed to her that he’d killed a cyclist (Daily Telegraph). On Netflix.

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