

Exhibitionist: The best art shows to see this week

From Sean Snyder to Mark Wallinger, serious art makes a return this week in Laura McLean-Ferris's pick of the best exhibitions around the country



Laura McLean-Ferris

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A detail of a portrait from Joanna Kane's series *The Somnambulists*, part of Mark Wallinger's exhibition *The Russian Linesman*. Photograph: Joanna Kane/Hayward Gallery

Work it! Your mind, that is. Some may put it down to the credit crunch sifting out superfluous art – what's been called the "content crunch" – others call it a return to form, but there's been an influx this week of serious artwork. First stop: London's ICA. At first glance, it seems that Sean Snyder's exhibition is austere and intellectual, featuring monochrome photographs of computers discs and memory sticks as well as cardboard files and folders. Dig deeper into the show and you find that it also shows us how important political images are reworked in complex "image wars". In the film *Casio, Seiko*,

Sheraton, Toyota, Mars (2004-5) Snyder narrates the story of how multinational corporations have attempted to distance themselves from their involvement in conflict zones. Thus we see Mars bars in Saddam Hussein's secret hovel, and Sheraton hotels clarifying that the Baghdad Sheraton is not part of their brand.

It's been a big week for Mark Wallinger, what with the giant white horse sculpture in Ebbsfleet and everything, but his true victory, for me, is The Russian Linesman, the show that he has curated for the Hayward Gallery. The title refers to England's disputed goal during the 1966 World Cup final, and the crucial ruling which changed the course of sporting history. In the curious space between being something and not being something sit a wonderful selection of works, including a pair of rocks by Vija Celmins – one real, one an exact replica made of bronze – and a beautiful film by Jérôme Bel of a ballet dancer narrating her last dance to an audience as she stands on the threshold of retirement. Wallinger leaves you and your imagination to work their own way around. And that is exactly why you should go and see it for yourself.

Away from London, the dark heart of Soho has miraculously bloomed in the middle of the New Forest, as part of an exhibition entitled Dark is the Night by Jordan Baseman at ArtSway. Experimenting with documentary interviews is core to Baseman's work, and this former stable near Lymington will echo to the sound of a transsexual prostitute describing her experiences while images of Soho flash by on film. In another film, Nasty Piece of Stuff, gay activist Alan Wakeman describes his first gay experience in 1960s Soho in disturbing detail, his speech patterns again intercut with images of the area today.

Scottish artist Claire Barclay has had a quiet yet impressive ascent, as is evident from Openwide, something of a retrospective at Fruitmarket Gallery in Edinburgh. Barclay's installations see handcrafted and industrially produced objects sitting side by side, playing with our subtle associations with materials. The installation Openwide, for example, features

black hanging metal rings and rods, futuristic gold cones and bunches of hay. It seems like a simple contrast between the natural and the inorganic, but Barclay manages to infuse one with the other – the straw becomes somehow alien, while the stark metallic shapes appear perfectly natural.

We might think of Keith Arnatt primarily as a photographer who captured the world around him – cows, flytipping sites, the Forest of Dean. Photographs of notes left for him by his wife Jo are a particular favourite of mine (sample: "You Bastard! You ate the last of my crackers!"). But the Henry Moore Institute in Leeds is keen to remind us that Arnatt is a sculptor too - burying several people up to their heads in sand to form a wiggly line in Liverpool in 1968, or extracting minimal cubes of grass-topped earth from the landscape, in works such as Earth Plug. One of Arnatt's most famous photographs is a self portrait of the artist holding a sign saying "I'm a real artist". This exhibition would like you to think of him as a real sculptor too.

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