GLADSTONE GALLERY

Art Review:

December 2014

Previewed

Caragh Thuring
Chisenhale, London
through 1 February

R.H. Quaytman
Gladstone Gallery, New York
through 20 December

Xu Bing
LACMA, Los Angeles
13 December – 26 July

Huang Yong Ping
MAXXI, Rome
19 December – 24 May

Artes Mundi
Various venues, Cardiff
through 22 February

Tunga
Pilar Corrias, London
through 17 January

Pietro Roccasalva
Zeno X Gallery, Antwerp
through 20 December

Brent Wadden
Peres Projects, Berlin
through 10 January

Art Experiment: 32 Questions from John Cage
Garage Museum of
Contemporary Art, Moscow
22 December – 11 January

Kochi-Muziris Biennale
Various venues, Fort Kochi
and Mattancheri
12 December – 29 March
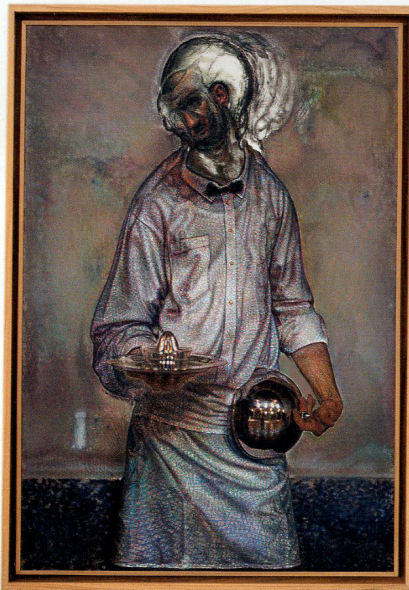
7   Pietro Roccasalva, *Il Traviatore*, 2014,
charcoal and pastel on paper on panel, 113 × 81 cm.
Photo: Peter Cox. Courtesy Zeno X Gallery, Antwerp

1 **Caragh Thuring** makes paintings for, and against, a world that barely has time for such an unhurried, substantial medium: mostly composed of bare brown canvas, they're flecked with imagery that is sparse and fragmented, yet dosed with complexity. In *Rope* (2013), the eponymous cord wraps around a wall-mounted metal hoop before vectoring out of frame, while *Hunter* (2013) is a frieze of exploded slivers and architectural details, a jigsaw lacking most of its pieces. For the Brussels-born, London-based artist's Chisenhale show, a specific logic of substitution is in play. Thuring considers arrangements of objects in the picture windows of Dutch suburban homes as portraits of their owners – how the inanimate might replace representations of people is a fascination of hers – and makes paintings that list, stolidly and densely, all the churches within the Square Mile of the City of London: summarising and complicating, swapping things for people and words for things, accepting the pressured gaze and strategising, in the teeth of what she's called 'the speed of absorption', to slow it down.

Comparably fascinated by, as she's written, 2 '*how* – not only *what* – we see', **R. H. Quaytman**'s silkscreen-heavy suites of *Chapter* paintings (2001–) read as sentencelike structures, ones that suggest, in critic Martha Schwendener's words, that 'how we look at images and the world right now may be provisional, another chapter in the story of vision, technology and humanity'. What these images are constructed from, too, feels personal and edged with happenstance. The Boston-born Quaytman – daughter of a poet and an artist, former assistant of Dan Graham and cofounder of the influential, now-defunct New York gallery Orchard – often filters autobiographical and contingent elements into her work, from references to where her art is shown, to family and friends and fellow artists. *O Tópico, Chapter 27* (2014), shown here, was commissioned for Inhotim, Brazil, and interlaces the Fibonacci sequence, Brazilian and American artists, and, says Quaytman, a particularly relevant line by Hélio Oiticica: 'Brazil diarrhea, what matters: the creation of a language...'

The creation of a language: in 1988, **Xu Bing** 3 first exhibited *Book from the Sky* (1987–91), an installation of books and scrolls covered with a plethora of Chinese-looking characters but whose language, carved laboriously into thousands of woodblocks and then printed, was invented by the artist. Collapsing together Chinese and Western modernist traditions and opening up a space of imagination and possibility that accepted and yet circumvented China's heavy

1   Caragh Thuring, *Dutch Details*, 2013,
oil, gesso, acrylic on canvas, 240 × 180 cm.
Courtesy the artist and Thomas Dane Gallery, London
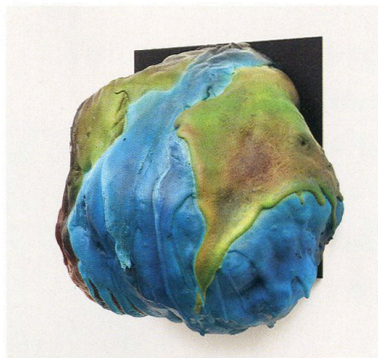
2   R. H. Quaytman, *O Tópico, Chapter 27*, 2014,
encaustic, acrylic, polyurethane foam
and gesso on panel, 102 × 111 × 69 cm.
© the artist. Courtesy Gladstone Gallery,
New York & Brussels
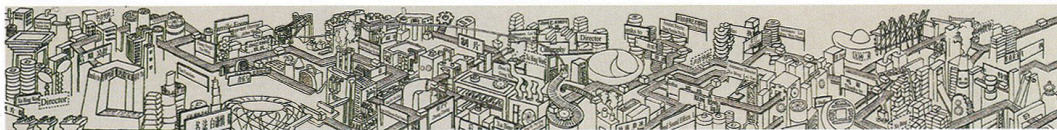
3   Xu Bing, *The Character of Characters*, 2012, animated film, 17 min.
© the artist. Courtesy Xu Bing Studio, Brooklyn

4   Huang Yong Ping, *Serpent d'Océan*, 2012, Saint-Brevin-les-Pins, France.
Photo: Bernard Renoux/ADAGP, Paris

5   Omer Fast, *Continuity* (still), 2012, 40 min.
Courtesy GB Agency, Paris, and Arratia Beer, Berlin

past, the work originally caused a sensation in China; in the West, its meaning shifts, seemingly by design. Cross-pollination is a central issue for Xu: see *A Case Study of Transference* (1994), two pigs printed with language (one from *Book from the Sky*, the other with nonsense sequences of letters from the Roman alphabet), left to mate in a pen scattered with books in different languages. Don't expect pig sex in *The Language of Xu Bing*, LACMA's two-decade survey, but do expect *Book...* and Xu's 'magnum opus', *The Character of Characters* (2012), the evolution of Chinese language explored via more than 1,000 hand-drawn sketches, digitally blended.

4   Xu and **Huang Yong Ping** have exhibited together, and not surprisingly: both are doyens of Chinese avant-gardism and both have performed productively destructive, miscegenating acts on language. Contemporaneously with

Book from the Sky, in *The History of Chinese Painting and the History of Modern Western Art Washed in the Washing Machine for Two Minutes* (1987) Huang put a Chinese art-history book and an English one through a wash cycle and turned them to pulp, then exhibited the result on a wooden box. Following the Tiananmen Square massacre, his work shifted towards Buddhist and Taoist concerns while still merging Western and Eastern aesthetics: see, for example, *100 Arms of Guan-yin* (1997), which splits the difference between a many-armed Chinese deity and Duchamp's bottle rack. At the MAXXI show, *Bâton Serpent*, expect, among other monumental installations, a huge aluminium serpent, 'ideally representing an encounter between East and West and proposing a critical analysis of the contemporary geopolitical situation': somewhere between a Chinese dragon and,

as the press info notes, a reference to the biblical book of Exodus: 'Aaron cast down his staff before Pharaoh and before his servants, and it became a serpent.'

5   Now in its tenth year, **Artes Mundi** – whose first winner, in 2004, was Xu Bing – is a biennial prize with a conscience (and a £40,000 pot, making it the UK's biggest art award), intended to celebrate artists worldwide who reflect the human condition and lived experience. This year, the nine shortlisted figures include Omer Fast, Theaster Gates, Sharon Lockhart, Renzo Martens and Karen Mirza & Brad Butler, whittled down from a list of some 800 entrants by curators Adam Budak and Sabine Schaschl; the work is shown in three venues in Cardiff (the National Museum, Chapter and Ffotogallery); the winner is announced on 15 January; and the event's media partner is, well, yes, *ArtReview*. Live events

in collaboration between Artes Mundi and ourselves will be running in January. (See artesmundi.org for details.)

6   Over four decades, Brazilian artist **Tunga** has developed a Joseph Beuys-esque iconography that, alongside works in film, drawing and poetry, charges a select range of talismanic objects – currently crystals, glass, ceramics, sponges, rubber – with ritual significance. Raised up on plinths, strung through their steel legs or scattered on the ground beneath them, the elements he uses intersect contemporary aesthetics with a cosmology that is ancient-feeling yet self-invented, such that the work comes across like a fictional anthropology and also an insight into something real, if speculative: the origins of modernity in antiquated, tribal aesthetics, and our larger need to invest significance in mute objects. His show *From*

'La Voie Humide', which features sculptures and Tunga's related ink drawings, has toured around in the last year or so: here, in his second show with Pilar Corrias, related but new works arrive in London.

An ineradicable propensity for belief
7   underwrites **Pietro Roccasalva's** work, too: from *Intelligent Artifice(r)* (1999–2003), a painting that looks like a cyborgian Christ, to *The Fourteen Stations (You Never Look at Me from the Place I See You)*, a mix of drawings and 14 framed Moleskine notebooks from 2010 with Judeo-Christian overtones in its title, to recent canvases in which faith and elevation become metaphorical (via iconography featuring balloons, for example), the Italian artist seems to ask what one does with the need for transcendence when one doesn't have faith, when one is alienated from religion. Like Victor Man and a few others, he's a painter

who doesn't stop there: his work branches into film, tableau vivant, neon and more, engendering situations that have a structural logic but are full of ellipses: the title of his latest solo at Zeno X, *The Queen of Gaps,* feeling highly appropriate in this regard.

8   Also in painting-not-painting: **Brent Wadden,** who weaves what look like abstract, geometric canvases from secondhand lengths of yarn. The Canadian artist, who only began weaving four years ago, tends not to have enough material and so fills in the gaps with other shades, lending his work an offhand quality that, like the fuzziness of his line, undercuts what would be precise compositional structures. Not so far removed from Caragh Thuring, then, Wadden insists on the handmade and the slowly accreted: there's nothing digital in his work, but the dematerialised context is present enough.
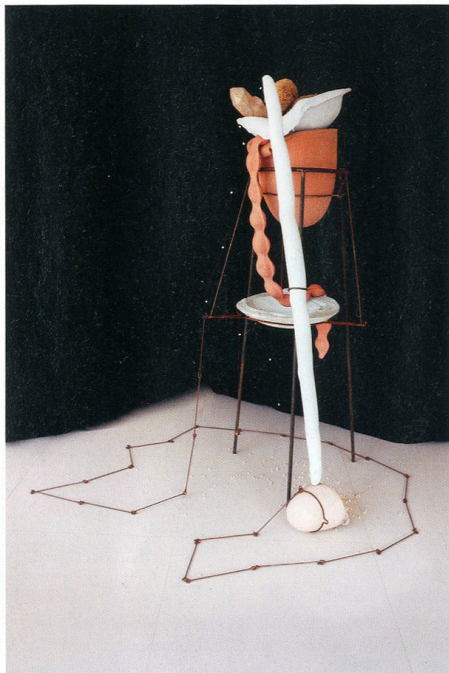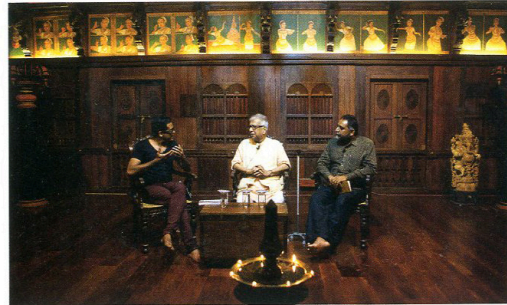

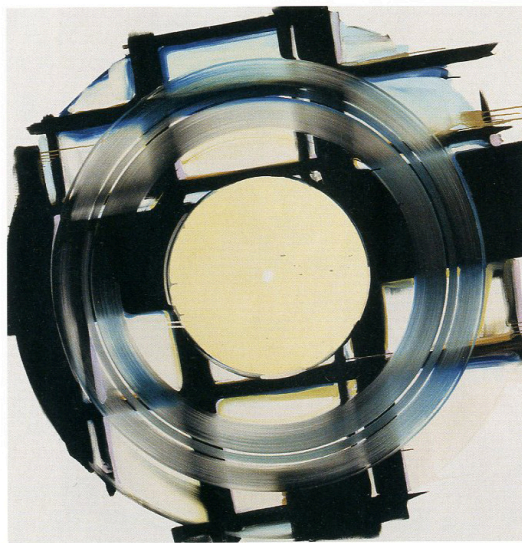6   Tunga, *Untitled (Rubber Pod),* 2014.
Courtesy Pilar Corrias, London
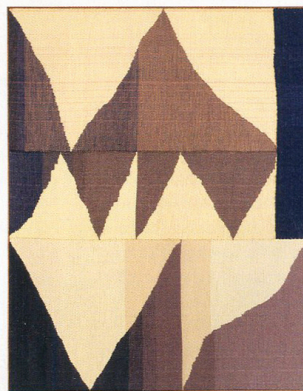
8   Brent Wadden, TBT, 2014,
handwoven fibres, wood, cotton and acrylic on canvas,
182 × 231 cm. Courtesy Peres Projects, Berlin

10   Artists K.G. Subramanyan, Jitish Kallat (left) and Suresh
Jayaram (right) in a Kochi Biennale Foundation-sponsored
talk, August 2014. Courtesy Kochi Biennale Foundation

9   Alexander Hnilitsky, *neoGeo*, 2006, oil on canvas.
Courtesy the artist's family

The chief lesson here, though, appears to be: listen to advice. A few years ago, the Berlin-based Wadden was painting and his friends were telling him his works would make great textiles. He paid attention, and now, while untrained in weaving and working to the dimensions of his own kitchen table – that was the last we heard, anyway – he's starring in his own ripping yarn (sorry).

Chance-related art for the younger generation seems to be a growth area. Following Carsten Höller's giant dice for children to clamber inside at the last Frieze Art Fair, December 9 heralds **Art Experiment: 32 Questions from John Cage** at Moscow's Garage Museum of Contemporary Art, this year's example of the institution's so-called Art Experiment. It's Christmas (and New Year) and the juniors are out of school: what better distraction than, say, using

a hydraulic press to turn any object (homework?) into dust and have the recording of said process turned into a CD, or conducting a 'multichannel virtual orchestra' consisting of 13 robots? Gentrifying these, we're told, is something more like an exhibition: light- and sound-based artworks and installations by Russian and international artists including Cage himself ('questions' from whom serve as a guide through the show), Ukraine's Institution of Unstable Thoughts, the workshop of 'sound sculpture' innovators François and Bernard Baschet, etc.

The first **Kochi-Muziris Biennale** was conceived by two Mumbai-based artists, held two years ago in Kerala, and constituted India's first biennial. It didn't lack for teething problems. The event was dogged by controversy over lack of transparency in the allocation

of funds, and artworks being held up in customs or delayed for other reasons meant that, at the opening, the show was only partly installed. That being said, it was far from a failure: 10,000 visitors attended in the first week and 400,000 in total, the art scene in the area was reportedly catalysed as a result and the second edition, *Whorled Explorations,* is now here. Indian newspapers report extensive sponsorship for the biennial, which is curated by artist (and first-time curator, working unpaid) Jitish Kallat and features 95 artists from 30 countries – including Anish Kapoor, Bharti Kher and Dayanita Singh – as well as a 'Student's Biennale' and a film festival. 'The strength of the biennale is its fragility… of doing what you can with what you have', says Kallat, who's clearly no slouch in the spin department. *Martin Herbert*