

Critics' choice

Life&Arts

Visual arts Jackie Wullschlager

Gerhard Richter

John Hansard Gallery, Southampton
Joining the string of south coast museums at Bexhill, Hastings and Margate, the John Hansard launches this weekend in its new Southampton home in the reopened Studio 144 arts hub. Though far from a trophy building — Studio 144 resembles a shopping arcade — the gallery is big and bright, and its inaugural show full of promise: ambitious, international, conceptually engaging.

We know Richter, 86, as painting's great shape-shifter, switching between smudgy figuration, gestural abstraction — the aluminium "Abstract Painting (Silicate) (800 4)" here depicting the molecular structure of silica at enormous, abstracted scale is both — and geometric minimalism: "4900 Farben (Version I)" is a seven-metre square arrangement of identically sized gridded panels, their order randomly selected. With such major loans of mostly recent work from Tate, Artist Rooms and Richter's own holdings, Southampton presents the German grandee as a 21st-century multimedia virtuoso, transferring images and effects between photographs, paintings, glass and textiles, the better to neutralise intellectual or emotional intent.

In "Self Portrait Standing, Three Times, 17.3.1991", Richter overpaints



Gerhard Richter's 'Yusuf' (2009) — Nigel Green

photographs with thick oil, obscuring the figure. Monumental tapestries each reproduce a quarter of an abstract painting, mirroring and multiplying its forms in complex symmetries and painterly colours: cobalt overlapping red in "Abdu",

lilac and midnight blue bursting from a white centre in "Iblan". In "Abstract Painting (809-3)", golds, greens and greys are dragged across the canvas with a squeegee, smeared, smudged and scraped, to leave fragmented bands recalling out-of-focus imagery

and the blur of photographic motion. "I blur things to make everything equally important and unimportant," Richter says. "The meaning of life is absurd, to confer meaning is inhuman." *jhg.art, May 12-August 18*

Suzanne Perlman

Dutch Centre, London
I first encountered Perlman in Ruth Borchard's self-portrait collection: a slash of gold dark marks, urgent, free but precise, forming a semi-abstracted head stood out as expressive, visionary, deeply engaged with modernist tradition. That portrait, painted aged 79, is a highlight here; now 94, Perlman still paints. Born in Budapest, she was taught by Oskar Kokoschka, fled Nazi oppression for Curaçao, whose bright light influenced her palette, and lives in London. This show includes an empathetic new depiction "Curacao Man", and portraits, nudes, landscapes from across her career. *dutchcentre.com, to August 31*

Callum Innes

Ingleby Gallery, Edinburgh
Innes featured in Ingleby's inaugural 1998 show; now the pre-eminent abstract painter of the Young British Artist generation, he is the perfect choice to launch the gallery's stunning new premises in the former Glasite Meeting House.

Beneath a glass hexagonal dome, he shows his latest monumental blue "Exposed Paintings", created by applying dense layers of oil paint, then removing large sections with turpentine-soaked brushes, leaving flickering, ghostly veils subtly balancing presence and absence, the weighty and the ethereal. *ingelbygaller.com, to July 14*

Desmond Morris: Works on Paper 1948 - 2018

The Redfern Gallery, London
A 90th birthday show of the zoologist's Miró-indebted paintings, populated with "biomorphs": hybrid creatures, by turns elegant, delicate, monstrous, with titles — "The Vigilante", "The Innovator", "Four Friends" — conferring human social characteristics. *redferngallery.com, May 16-June 9*

The Return of the Past: Postmodernism in British Architecture

Sir John Soane's Museum, London
The first show to explore post-Modernism in British architecture — including Terry Farrell's SIS Building,

and TV AM; CZWG's The Cascades and China Wharf; Jeremy Dixon's Royal Opera House scheme — displays drawings, models and building fragments in its exhibition galleries and in Soane's period interiors, stimulating a dialogue between attitudes to the architectural past over the centuries. *soane.org, May 16-August 27*

August Sander: Men Without Masks

Hauser & Wirth, London
Hauser took on the Sander estate last year and is positioning the German photographer as a forefather of conceptual art. Creator of a systematic yet nuanced sociological panorama of Weimar Germany in images that are matter-of-fact, technically exact, and use straightforward perspectives and natural light, Sander tried not to impose personality but to enable self-portraits. Rare large-scale photographs here include "Boxers", "Country Girls", "Aviator", "Circus Artiste" and "Bohemians". *hauserwirth.com, May 18-July 28*