

Critics' choice

Visual arts Jackie Wullschlager

Akram Zaatari

Thomas Dane Gallery, London

Through his own photography and film, and his Arab Image Foundation, founded in 1997 to preserve Middle Eastern vernacular photography, Zaatari is a documentary artist. But political and aesthetic concerns meet in his work: his themes are the nature of representation, how images construct individual and communal identities, how conceptual art presents history. This significant first UK exhibition focuses on two structurally complex immersive film/video/photographic installations, "28 Nights and a Poem" and "On Photography, People and Modern Times", recently shown at the Museum of Modern Art in New York.

thomasdane.com
020 7925 2505, from
Wednesday to February 1

Yutaka Sone

David Zwirner, London

"Little Manhattan", constructed from 2.5 tonnes of white marble, looks from a distance like a section of flowing drapery; close up it is an intricately carved 3D map of buildings, bridges, paths through Central Park, Venice and Hong Kong, changing, watery cities, are similarly fixed in marble; metal/rattan banana trees

Jules de Balincourt

Victoria Miro, London

Born in Paris, brought up in Los Angeles and working in Brooklyn, Jules De Balincourt plays off competing sensibilities in inventive, intriguing figurative paintings. His natural elegance of composition looks French. Loose mark-making and free associative style suggest a chilled Californian – De Balincourt spent much of his childhood surfing. But the painterly punch, and engagement with abstraction, acknowledge New York's influence.

"High and Low", the star of this first UK solo show, could not, for example, have been made anywhere else. Painted through August 2013, and exuding the heat and long light of summer in the city, it began with bold swaths of spray paint on a large wooden panel. Using carefully measured tape, stencils and oil, De Balincourt then layered on representations of myriad buildings, cut out and filled

uncannily resemble the real things. Sone trades on tensions between realism and perfection, romantic whimsy and classical ideals, architecture and nature: landscape wittily reinvented as multimedia installation. davidzwirner.com
020 3538 3165, from
Wednesday to January 25

**'Itinerant Ones' (2013)**

in windows – each a little painting in itself, opening on different inner worlds – and added staircases, monuments, parks, and people to create a city of the mind approximating to but not precisely resembling New York.

Oleg Vassiliev

Faggionato Gallery

A condensed retrospective of the Russian nonconformist artist who died this year. From early works such as "Lusja with Tulips" (1967), exhibited for the first time here, to luminous

At Victoria Miro, this structured panorama hangs opposite its hippy alter ego "Firepeople" – a small clan gathered under vast orange-pink washes that course down in abstracted, expressive torrents. De Balincourt is drawn to

recent landscapes, Vassiliev idiosyncratically balanced innovations of the Russian avant-garde with impulses to narrative and realism evocative of 19th-century Russian painting. faggionato.com
020 7409 7979, from
tomorrow to December 21

alternative communities like "Firepeople", from the leisured – acid-bright Brooklyn picnickers with chicken takeouts and styrofoam cups in "BBQ sur l'herbe"; hawkers on Venice Beach in the lyrical "Boardwalk Barter" – to the desperate (in "Exodus", Syrian refugees are depicted at disorienting, varied scales against a dark ground with a nostalgic rose underglow) or the crazy: a treehouse commune in "Itinerant Ones", shamans in "Vision Quest".

De Balincourt has made more politically charged work in the past; he call the tenor of this show "escapist" but his restless, lively surfaces, and improvised flitting between imagined scenes and quirky narratives, remain a sort of protest, claiming space for wandering thought against 21st-century information overload, for ideals of community against a competitive 24/7 economy. His is a pertinent, welcome voice. victoria-miro.com, 020 7336 8109, runs to December 20

Masterpieces of Chinese Painting

V&A, London

A once-in-a-generation show tracing the evolution of one of the great artistic traditions, how it was upheld and reinvigorated by the demands of painting for temples, palaces, domestic

homes, in formats ranging from fans to a 14-metre scroll. Most works are visiting Europe for the first time. The timeline is 700 to 1900 but even those more concerned with dynamic contemporary Chinese art will find much of interest. vam.ac.uk
020 7942 2000, to January 19

Pop Art Design

Barbican Art Gallery, London

Studio 65's stars-and-stripes "Leonardo" sofa, Claes Oldenburg's latex "London Knees", Warhol's jeans-clad male crotch with working zipper for the Rolling Stones' *Sticky Fingers* album, Richard Hamilton's fibreglass "Gold Guggenheim", Tom Wesselmann's pouting "Smoker Banner": how pop's focus on celebrity, mass production, advertising, shaped design. barbican.org.uk/artgallery
020 7638 8891, to February 9

Turner and Constable

Turner Contemporary, Margate

A display of rarely seen plein air oil sketches and watercolours by Turner, Constable and their contemporaries including George Stubbs, John Sell Cotman, Francis Danby, all pioneers of painting outdoors to reflect a direct experience of nature. turnercontemporary.org
01843 233 000, to January 5

Dance Clement Crisp

Mark Morris

Sadler's Wells, London

These are two of the happiest words in the world for contemporary dance-lovers, only equalled for me by the name Paul Taylor. Morris and his company arrive on Wednesday with two mixed programmes and stay until Sunday. Fascinating in prospect is his realisation of Satie's extraordinary *Socrate* in the first programme in Wednesday, Friday and next Sunday. No less intriguing is his dance to the wild verses of Ivor Cutler in *A Wooden Tree*, which you will find in his second programme on Thursday and Saturday, which also includes *Festival Dance* (pictured). sadlerswells.com
0844 412 4300

Royal Ballet

Royal Opera House, London

At Covent Garden today you can see the Royal Ballet's latest triple bill, which proposes a creation by David Dawson (the first for the troupe by a choreographer better known in Europe), Wayne McGregor's *Chroma*, and Kenneth MacMillan's *Rite of Spring*, a tremendous staging that does not betray the centenarian Stravinsky score. roh.org.uk, 020 7304 4000

The Nutcracker

Royal Opera House and Coliseum, London

As the Joyous Season approaches, you may need to take the smaller and more impressionable of your kin to a Christmas theatre. The best outing of all, I believe, is the Royal Ballet *Nutcracker* in the Peter Wright/Julia Trevelyan Oman staging at the Royal Opera House: you will find magic, sublime music, clever plotting and enchanting scenery. It plays – not inexpensively – throughout December at Covent Garden. The Coliseum alternative is English National Ballet's merry version by Wayne Eagling, which plays from December 11. ROH details as above. ENB, 020 7845 9300, ballet.org.uk

