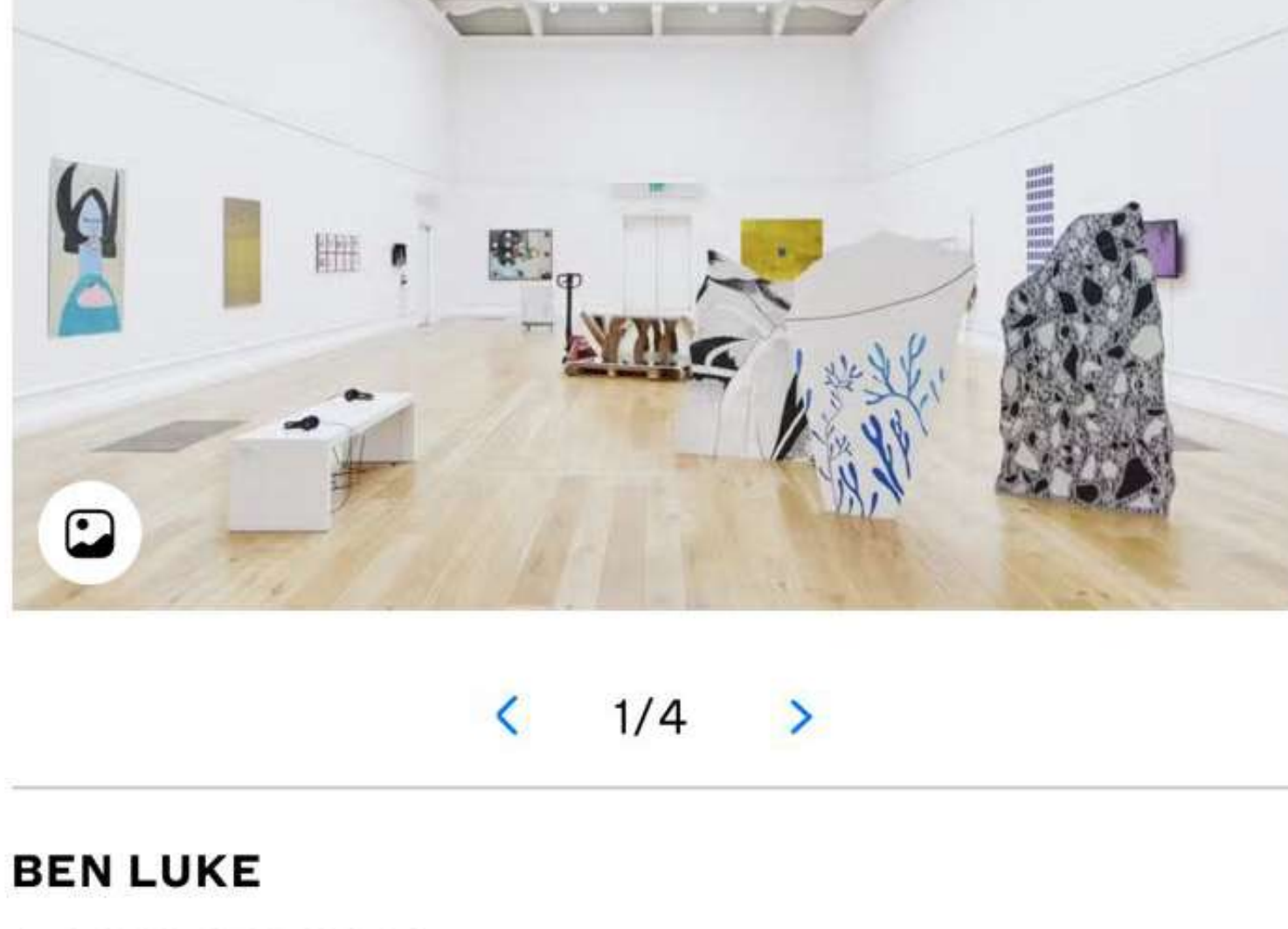


CULTURE

Bloomberg New Contemporaries review: Buzzing with fresh energy



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Review at a glance



One of the delights of the New Contemporaries show is that every year it's a bit messy. Given its selection process, it's an inevitability.

The artists are either final-year students or recent graduates and the panel, different every time, consists of three established artists with diverse aesthetic and intellectual sensibilities. This year there's Sonia Boyce, a key figure in the Black Arts movement, who began with drawing and painting and now makes performance installations; Ben Rivers, acclaimed for his poetic and historically rich films; and Rana Begum, who makes abstract paintings and sculpture loaded with colour. The judges see the art knowing nothing of the gender, background or education of the artists they're choosing.

There are 45 artists, 12 fewer than last year, which did feel a little over-stuffed. It goes without saying that the show is uneven. But I won't dwell on any weak or derivative work, because this year is among the strongest New Contemporaries exhibitions I've seen.

No medium dominates, though painting parades its perennial capacity to shapeshift. Alaena Turner's Secret Action Painting nods to the history of abstraction. Its sparse, coloured panels are apparently the opposite of Jackson Pollock's expressive "action painting" gestures. But Turner adds in an unpredictable element: she fixed her panels together with paint as a glue. Some of them hold, but two panels have fallen to the floor, leaving a trace of their "action" on the wall. Paintings have become performers.

Stefania Zocco's beautiful painting Looks Like A Cloud features a series of uneven horizontal lines across the canvas in green paint, like fine woven threads or wood grain. In fact, they refer to the origins of digital imagery — they're like a murmuration of data.

In Gabriela Giroletti's big, bold painting Around And Around, we could be looking at a cartoon limb or paw or a mountainous landscape. Whatever it is, there's a luxurious feeling in her paint. At the opposite end of the scale are Laura Hindmarsh's exquisite little black and white gouache and pencil studies based on computer screen grabs — YouTube pages, Google image searches. They all feature women and seem to ponder our personal connection to how bodies are transmitted and mediated through the screen. Jan Agha's Pompous Prick, meanwhile, is a self-satire, an absurd phallus exploring the artist's complex personal background.

Agha is not alone in using humour. Taylor Jack Smith's animation of a tooth-grinding baldie has a soundtrack that might be wood being sawn but is excruciatingly indivisible from our anxious protagonist. Elsewhere, Cyrus Hung sends up a commercial gallery's earnest video puff for its Georg Baselitz exhibition by recording the words from the soundtrack as a hip-hop lyric.

There's something eerily comic, too, about Bulgarian public sculptures coming to life in George Stamenov's video-game inspired video Yonak, based on childhood memories but seemingly evoking an apocalyptic future. Memory, personal and collective, is the subject of Wilma Stone's short, fragmentary but absorbingly poetic film about her gypsy background. Nearby, Zoe Bradford's photographs are elusive and enigmatic: they're apparently abstract at first, yet glimpses of bodies reveal them to be frozen moments of movement, stills from an unmade film.

Social and political subjects are mostly worn lightly. Roei Greenberg's Syrian Tank pictures the armoured vehicle in an Israeli National Park — the pastoral invaded by an infernal machine. Louis Blue Newby stylishly gives David Cronenberg's film version of JG Ballard's novel Crash a queer re-reading, and Rafael Pérez Evans's Wheels, Pluriyuca uses unpromising materials — yams, cardboard, sticky tape, a forklift trolley — to create an enigmatic illusion of the titular wheels as a symbol of the exploitation of workers.

New Contemporaries should fizz with ideas, it should feel more like a series of proposals and experiments than a gathering of fully fledged, accomplished work. This show does that abundantly; it buzzes with fresh energy.

Until Feb 23 (southlondongallery.org)