

The Week (print)

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THE WEEK

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Art

Exhibition of the week **Fahrelnissa Zeid**

Tate Modern, Bankside, London SE1 (020-7887 8888, www.tate.org). Until 8 October

In recent years, Tate Modern has made a point of featuring overlooked, often female artists from outside “the usual European-American art historical canon”, said Karen Wright in *The Independent*. The latest is the Turkish-born painter Fahrelnissa Zeid (1901-91), whose “long and eventful” career is now the subject of a show at the gallery. Born into Ottoman nobility, she married into the Iraqi royal family, and her husband was subsequently appointed as the country’s



The Fight Against Abstraction (1947): a move towards pure abstraction

ambassador, first to Germany (where Zeid struck up a brief friendship with Hitler over their mutual love of painting) and then to Britain. Zeid’s glamorous lifestyle and “privileged financial position” did not stop her working, and her art was well received in Europe by critics. But in 1958 she narrowly avoided execution when the Iraqi monarchy was deposed in a military coup. The rest of her life was spent in significantly reduced circumstances, but she carried on painting nevertheless, drawing equally on traditional Islamic art and the European modernity of Matisse and Cézanne. The result is a “rich and rewarding” body of work, adeptly showcased by this intriguing exhibition.

Zeid’s early work shows her “finding her feet” as an artist, said Ben Luke in the *London Evening Standard*. In paintings such as

the Kandinsky-influenced *Three Moments in a Day and a Life* she is clearly trying to synthesise the art of East and West. But it is only after the War that she begins to “realise her grand ambitions”, her paintings turning increasingly towards pure abstraction: 1947’s *The Fight Against Abstraction* depicts body parts “consumed by webs of pure pattern”, and subsequent works dispense with figuration entirely. The highlight is a room of “monumental” abstracts “filled with interlocking geometric and organic

forms jostling across the surface”. Thereafter, however, things go downhill, reaching a nadir with a series of portraits from the 1980s that might well be “the most hideous paintings I’ve ever seen at the Tate”.

The show’s real achievement is in showing how easily an individual can be “erased” from art history, said Sarah Kent on *TheArtsDesk.com*. In the 1940s and 1950s, Zeid’s art was exhibited at some of the most prestigious galleries in London and Paris. But following the coup, and the death of her husband in 1970, she relocated to Jordan and was gradually “forgotten” by the Western art world. I “can’t pretend” to like her work, but Zeid was clearly an “exceptional woman” who “deserves to be honoured with a retrospective”.

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The Week reviews an exhibition in a private gallery

Courting Favour: From Elizabeth I to James I

at The Weiss Gallery

The title of this show more or less tells you what you’re in for. It consists of 20 or so portraits of the dramatis personae of 16th and 17th century Europe, from Francis Drake’s brother to the young Edward VI to Elizabeth I herself. There are some astonishing works here, capturing their subjects’ sartorial finery just as evocatively as they do the thick layers of powder covering their faces. Highlights include a breathtaking likeness of Elizabeth’s maid of honour Anne Russell (complete with lapdog and an eye-watering number of pearls); and an enigmatic portrait of the possibly pregnant Jane, Lady Thornagh, whose elaborately embroidered dress is so vividly rendered



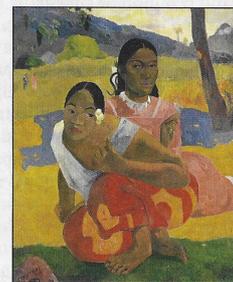
Elizabeth I of England (c.1560)

you can almost sense the feel of its fabric. But this show is really a hook to get you to visit The Weiss Gallery’s astonishing holdings, which also feature fine works by Cranach and Frans Pourbus the Younger. Prices range from £45,000 to £325,000.

59 Jermyn Street, London SW1 (020-7409 0035). Until 14 July.

An ungentlemanly deal

The auctioneer Simon de Pury has built a reputation in the art world as the go-to art dealer for Hollywood stars, says *The Times*. But in a case in the High Court that could put an end to the “gentlemen’s



agreement” system commonly used in art deals, de Pury is now suing the renowned art collector Rudolf Staechelin for \$10m. That’s the commission de Pury claims he has been denied for negotiating the sale of Gauguin’s *Nafea faa Ipoipo*, a work in Staechelin’s collection, to the emir of Qatar. The sale was completed in 2014 for \$210m – then reportedly the second-highest price ever paid for an art work. Staechelin insists de Pury had assured him the emir would pay \$230m for it, and that therefore all commission was forfeit. But de Pury’s lawyer says there was an oral agreement to pay commission and that, unlike most contracts, those in the art market still “operate in a gentlemanly manner, based on mutual trust”. The case continues.

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