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Sweet thoughts for the New Year



Hyperallergic.com, with its list of the Top 20 Most Powerless People



Mustafa Hulusi, "The Ruins," installation view, Civic Room, London



Mustafa Hulusi, "Obliteration and Memory," installation view at Patrick Painter, Los Angeles



The author with Mustafa Hulusi

LONDON DISPATCH by Laura K. Jones

Who needs shallow art parties? They're so October. After Frieze, and the glamour, and the attendant madness, I became acutely aware of how edifying it might be to rediscover the other side of the London art world: the smaller galleries and happenings, the quieter movers and shakers that don't have the backing -- for example -- of galleries that are owned by auction houses. The things, in short, that I may have once arrogantly overlooked.

Über-curator Hans Ulrich-Obrist topped the Power 100 list back in October, but it was good to see those cheeky fellows at Hyperallergic.com immediately countering the silliness of such a list with their inventory of the *least* powerful power people in the art world. The lineup included one Candida Home, a supposedly blind art blogger who is said to have caused £80,000 in damage while reporting on the, er, well-known Lakeland Ceramic Fair in Derbyshire.

Also getting a much deserved mention were the "faceless miners" from Sierra Leone who hacked 8,061 diamonds out of the face of the earth so that Damien Hirst could make *For the Love of God*, his skull-covered imitation of a disco-glitter ball. These men no doubt "sleep well at night," noted Hyperallergic, after doing their bit to achieve "the pinnacle of the latest gilded age."

In search of the subtle

Keenly trying to hit the subtler art notes I so craved, I ventured out and walked miles up the Kingsland Road to Mustafa Hulusi's tiny new artist-run space, the Civic Room, in Haggerston, an as-yet-ungentrified part of the old East End. Why not put a show on of your own work first, if you're the founder of the gallery, is no doubt Hulusi's thinking here, although a strong and varied program looks set to follow his inaugural exhibition, "The Ruins."

Hulusi, who showed paintings earlier this year at Patrick Painter in Los Angeles, has always been adept at curating oddball exhibitions. He's also known for fly-posting mammoth posters of his own name across the billboards of the East End (it's one way to get noticed), and for sticking pieces of art up in various Shoreditch lightboxes -- most of which he seems to own, or at least rent.

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Mustafa Hulusi
Salamis Women I
2009
Civic Room, London

In 2001, he let me exhibit in one of those lightboxes a large-scale "epic" poem that I'd written about the Apocalypse called *Stammer Going on in the Flat Background*. It told of a dystopian world populated by managers of poorly imagined catering businesses and gated communities. Someone even did a fireworks display in Hoxton Square for me, on the eve of the unveiling of the piece. Were we all bored? Underemployed? Both, I think.

"The Ruins" at the Civic Room are exact replicas of the marble sculptures of the Roman goddesses, the Salamis Women, found on Hulusi's ancestral home, the island of Cyprus. One major change: he's had them cast in black marble, not white. Hulusi told me he used to play on the ruins during his family summer holidays. The figures are "ravished yet asexual," he says, noting that removing artifacts from their place of origin can distort our reading of the past. The headless statue in the middle looks for certain as if she's holding a large ice cream cone. An ultramodern image always, always, butts in to ancient things for me. It's a constant and tiresome mild form of hallucination.



Barbara Hepworth
Conoid, Sphere and Hollow II
1937
Government

Running concurrently at Hulusi's London dealer's space, the Max Wigram Gallery, is "The Worshipers." (You see, it's impossible to stay away from Bond Street sparkle for too long). Smaller-scale versions of the Salamis sculptures are on show along with Hulusi's hyperrealist paintings of Cypriot oranges still on the trees, and a strobe-heavy video, with which the exhibition shares a title, that's made in conjunction with ex-Turner Prize nominee Mark Titchner. Flashing images of Ayatollah Khomeini do battle with '80s rave-esque geometric patterns and Titchner's signature truisms. A manic mishmash evoking -- I suppose -- an anticongsumerist message. Anti-west? Pro-strobe light? I just don't know anymore.



Mustafa Hulusi
The Worshipers (still)
2009
Max Wigram Gallery

What British art graces the walls of Westminster? I heard that the very feminist Margaret Hodge MP, our new-ish Minister for Culture and Tourism, got rid of her predecessor Barbara Follett's old art works -- which included a ceramic rendering of a mad cow (not kidding) -- and chose the following from the very Orwellian-sounding Government Art Collection: works by Barbara Hepworth, Bridget Riley and

