

## The Arts

# Silken threads lead to indecision

## EXHIBITION

Do-Ho Suh

Serpentine Gallery

Claire Bishop

UNLESS you're an habitu  of the international art world, you probably won't have encountered much cutting-edge Korean art before — let alone the work of Do-Ho Suh. Which is a pity, as his sculpture is rather good. Think meticulous attention to detail with a knack for the iconic. The best work in this

show is a life-size reconstruction, in diaphanous blue silk, of Do-Ho Suh's New York apartment. As light pours in through the pale gauze, its cramped mundanity becomes positively Venetian — spacious, liquid and bright.

From air vents and radiators to the fridge and toilet, everything is exquisitely sculpted with neat little stitches. It's like a walk-in Oldenburg with Oriental precision: a quiet, shimmering and delicate riposte to the sombre domestic monuments Rachel

Whiteread showed in the same room last summer.

But the subtle, immersive quality of this silken dwelling — which folds up for global transportation, like a parachute — is somehow lost in the other pieces, which seem to strive for a more political agenda without letting us know exactly what that is.

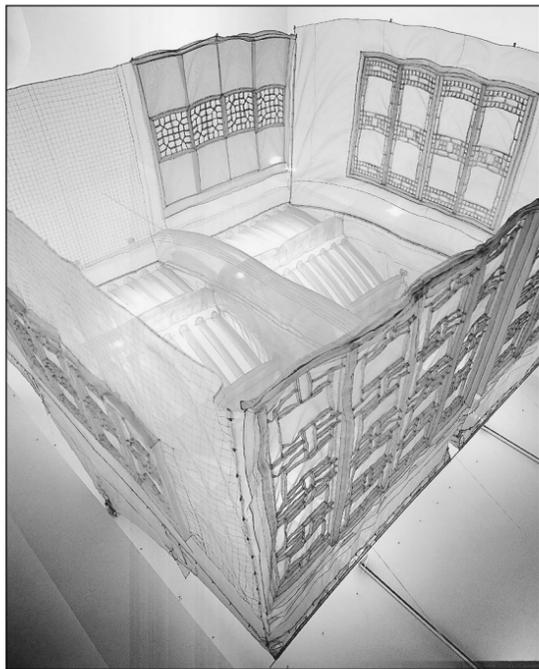
In Floor, for example, a raised glass surface is held up by a seething mass of 180,000 little plastic figures. Are you supposed, as you tread on them, to feel the power-kick of dictatorship — or just guilty at your clumsy Western feet?

And then there's the army of 60 schoolboy jackets, stuffed plump and mounted on a rolling rack. There's something vaguely spooky about these headless torsos, which might lead you to think it an indictment of institutional conformity in Korea. But is it? Striking as the image is, the overall message seems non-committal.

Do-Ho Suh presents a tricky cocktail of Eastern and Western cultures. He is wary of the former's collective ethos, but seems reluctant to embrace the individualistic mentality of the latter.

This unresolved ambivalence is the only thing to mar his otherwise succinct and highly seductive sculpture.

● Until 26 May. Tel: 020 7298 1520.



Stitched up: a folding version of Do-Ho Suh's apartment

## A baroque blow-out

## CLASSICAL

New London Consort

Queen Elizabeth Hall

Stephen Pettitt

JUST so that we knew what we were about, the New London Consort billed this strange event as a Baroque Concerto Marathon. So we made sure we were adequately refreshed and otherwise comfortable. We took our seats and a few deep breaths. We surveyed the list of a dozen pieces calmly. We told ourselves, just do it. With luck and the self-discipline to get through The Wall — which we would probably hit with one of the Vivaldi concertos in Part III — we might just reach the finishing tape, four hours away.

One second, though. This is all wrong. Music shouldn't be presented as an endurance test, but in a way that encourages engagement. A programme planned

with more care, and without that "marathon" label, would have helped everyone. But this was a juxtaposition of the soloists' favourites.

Vivaldi scored six concertos, Bach five, and there was just the one by Telemann: a fascinating D major horn concerto, bravely given by Andrew Clark on that most perilous of instruments, the natural horn.

Most of the other soloists gave good, though hardly earth-shattering, performances. The violinist Adrian Chandler in Vivaldi's Spring from The Four Seasons brought to bear the fruits of his own performance practice studies on a reading rich in melodic elaboration. David Roblou negotiated the terrifying challenges of Bach's D minor harpsichord concerto, BWV 1052. Sally Holman, in a Vivaldi bassoon concerto, and Philip Pickett, in a Vivaldi recorder concerto, charmed with their characterful

timbres at opposite ends of the pitch spectrum.

But by the time Pavlo Beznosiuk, who earlier partnered Chandler in Bach's double violin concerto, attacked the same composer's E major violin concerto, energy levels were sagging, and playing that had earlier lacked polish now came across as rough and distinctly unready. Less would surely have been more.



Testament to survival: Sam Taylor-Wood's Self Portrait as a Tree 2000 commemorates her defeat of cancer

## EXHIBITION

Sam Taylor-Wood

Hayward Gallery

Nick Hackworth

COURTESY of the Hayward, Sam Taylor-Wood has joined the tiny group of contemporary British artists honoured with a retrospective at a major public gallery.

A Goldsmith's graduate who works with photography and video, she has — like so many of the YBAs' group into which she is lumped — seen her star rise swiftly. She began exhibiting in earnest only in the mid-Nineties. Less than a decade later, she finds herself stamped with the seal of state approval.

Unfortunately, the Hayward Gallery has done her a disservice. Spread through these cavernous rooms, Taylor-Wood's celebrity-infested videos and photographs look light at best, non-existent at worst.

Her body of work is neither broad nor deep enough to sustain this level of exposure. The decision to grant her the show is all the more absurd as much of the recent work on display here was seen last year in a high-profile exhibition at White Cube 2. Perhaps it's time the art establishment took a leaf out of Manchester United's book and introduced a rotation system, giving their stars a well-earned rest now and again. Honestly but foolishly, the

# Stick to the stills, Sam

curators decline to save the worst till last.

In the first room we encounter Third Party, a seven-screen video installation from 1999. It is a typical Taylor-Wood piece, featuring celebrities and dealing with superficiality and alienation in contemporary society.

A dysfunctional drinks party is in progress. On one screen a man spouts small-talk; on another, a girl dances alone; on another, Marianne Faithfull impassively surveys the scene; on another, Ray Winstone sulks.

The work dramatises the atomisation of contemporary existence and the charade of social life, but it is the obviousness of the gesture that numbs the mind.

Other video work deals with the alienation from religion. Piet  is based on Michelangelo's Vatican sculpture; it finds Taylor-Wood herself cradling Robert Downey Jnr, who plays

the dying Christ. Once again the work itself is stubbornly unmoving. There is something tellingly appropriate about Taylor-Wood's use of celebrities as proxies for everything from Christ to drinks-party guests.

She is at her best when sticking to still images and focusing on aesthetics. The Five Revolutionary Seconds series, long, thin photographs taken with a 360-degree camera; Wasted, her contemporary reworking of the Last Supper; Self-Portrait as a Tree, commemorating her survival through cancer — all these works are powerful and attractive images.

They were created with feeling for composition and colour. If one is looking to find a point for this retrospective, it may as well be the opportunity to see these particular pieces once again.

● Until 21 June. Phone: 020 7921 0600.

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