



Christopher Le Brun, New Art Gallery, Walsall

BY MICHAEL GLOVER | WEDNESDAY 05 MARCH 2008

From the fourth floor of the New Art Gallery, you get a view of the architectural mix and match of this Midlands city: mosque, parish churches, multi-storey car park, Next, Powerhouse, Asda... Inside, as you examine this 30-year retrospective of the paintings, sculptures and etchings of Christopher Le Brun, you seem to have shifted back in time to a world more familiar to Tennyson, Browning and other 19th-century medievalists. And perhaps even further back, to Malory himself. You spot a plaster disc of a winged horse, a painting of a horseman in plumed helmet entering a city gate. There's Gothic Revivalism in the air. Romanticism, too. It all feels curiously anachronistic.

Le Brun left art school in the 1970s, his head full of the recent past: Pop Art, Abstract Expressionism, more native abstraction. None of it was for him.

The aim here is to show us Le Brun, the man as maker, from start to finish. There is a display of his notebooks. The top floor is about life at his studios in London and Suffolk. There is a sense of the clutter, the indecision of making: maquettes on shelves, watercolours hung hugger-mugger on the walls.

All are points of reference, points of departure. Le Brun is going back to the same motif again and again: the tower, the horseman. Scenes of chivalry. And horses; the nobility, the sleek beauty, of horses. Horse and rider as symbol of – what? The painter's spiritual quest of a subject worthy of his gifts? The painter himself in pursuit of the Grail of artistic perfection? It feels lofty, high-minded stuff.

But Picasso the sculptor is coming through too, in knobbly organic forms. And sometimes Le Brun rather awkwardly fuses the two – see the large sculpture, monstrously tall, called Statue with Shield and Shadow. The plinth is a soaring steel girder, topped by a figure of a woman who looks like a society dame. She casts a giant shadow, and that shadow, the shape so jarringly inappropriate, reminds us of Picasso the sculptor.

Other large works are often yearningly symbolic. Childe Roland trit-trots towards the Dark Tower, and waits for the significance of his quest to be revealed. And that is the problem; so much of this work yearns to mean so much. It's like that giant chest in the attic, full of ancient lumber and always labeled Highly Significant.

Glover, Michael. "Christopher Le Brun, New Art Gallery, Walsall," *The Independent*. March 5, 2008.

FRIEDMAN BENDA 515 W 26TH STREET NEW YORK NY 10001
FRIEDMANBENDA.COM TELEPHONE 212 239 8700 FAX 212 239 8760