

ArtReview



5 Chantal Joffe, *Bella Reclining*, 2016, pastel on paper, 30 × 40 cm. Courtesy Galleria Monica De Cardenas, Milan

Few painters today can pull off the kind of astringent psychological portraiture mastered by Maria Lassnig and Alice Neel; **Chantal Joffe**, who perhaps not coincidentally shows at Victoria Miro (which represents Neel's estate), is one: and like Lassnig, the St Albans-born artist often focuses – unsparingly – on herself. In a recent interview, she described herself as looking, in one painting, like an old banana. (Oddly, in another canvas, from 2012, she pictures her partner, the painter Dan Coombs, eating the same fruit.) In the 21 years since she debuted in Britain's annual New Contemporaries exhibition, Joffe has built an oeuvre keyed to motherhood and self-portraiture. Her style is a kind of virtuosic, melty smear-and-daub where everything nevertheless resolves into place and rides along on hot, insistent colour, and where interior lives forever rise to the surface of the face. In her first show with her Italian gallery in seven

years, don't expect that to change; her paintings, though, remain fresh because they're translations of palpably vivid vision.

The award for oddball exhibition of the month (a category we've admittedly just invented) goes to a tripleheader at Office 6 Baroque: **Hans Bellmer, Sascha Braunig, Matthew Ronay**. One connection for this time- and aesthetic-spanning show might be the presence, or suggestion, of models: the Canadian painter Braunig uses them, lit with coloured gels, to make her sheeny, technically superb trompe-l'oeil canvases, figures interlaced with Op-art patterning, inhabiting an interzone between Surrealism and CGI renderings. Bellmer, of course, based his chiaroscuro photographic art around his creepy relationship with pubescent female dolls. And virtually everything Ronay makes feels like a cartoon, or a model of something, his sprouting forms and totems evoking