





## Exhibition of the week **Strange and Familiar: Britain as Revealed by International Photographers**

Barbican, London EC2 (020-7638 8891, [www.barbican.org.uk](http://www.barbican.org.uk)). Until 19 June

For the past 40 years, the photographer Martin Parr has aimed his “unflinching lens” at Britain and its inhabitants, said Ben Luke in the London Evening Standard. When he’s not behind the camera himself, Parr is a collector and scholar of photography, and it is in this role that he has curated this “extraordinary” new exhibition at the Barbican. The show is an attempt to understand how our country is perceived by outsiders, bringing together a huge selection of images by 23 international photographers who have tried to capture the UK from the 1930s to the present day. The range of work is “diverse”: established greats including France’s Henri Cartier-Bresson and the American Paul Strand are displayed side by side with images by virtual unknowns. But the result is an exhibition full of “remarkable” images, forming a “portrait of a constantly changing Britain”.

For the most part, the portrait of Britain isn’t a pretty one, said Andrew Dickson in *The New Yorker*. “Decade after decade, the photographers find Britain in a bad way” – a country “trapped by the shadows of its past”. “Soot and dirt” are everywhere, from a “wintry” series of 1950s London by Chile’s Sergio Larrain, to French snapper Raymond Depardon’s images of Glasgow in the



One of Akihiko Okamura’s “stark and chilly” pictures of Northern Ireland

“startlingly different” images here, said Mark Hudson in *The Daily Telegraph*. No British photographer could have taken the “stark and chilly” pictures of Northern Ireland’s Troubles captured by Japan’s Akihiko Okamura. But the exhibition’s weakness is that most of these photographers seem to share the same polarised “two nations” view of Britain: its citizens are either “smugly privileged” or “in the gutter”. The Swiss-American Robert Frank’s “grainily mesmerizing” images of the 1950s, juxtaposing prosperous London City gents with the “beleaguered” Welsh mining towns, set the tone. For these foreign snappers, the middle classes simply don’t appear to exist. The show is “lively” and “consistently entertaining” – but if it’s nuance you’re after, look elsewhere.

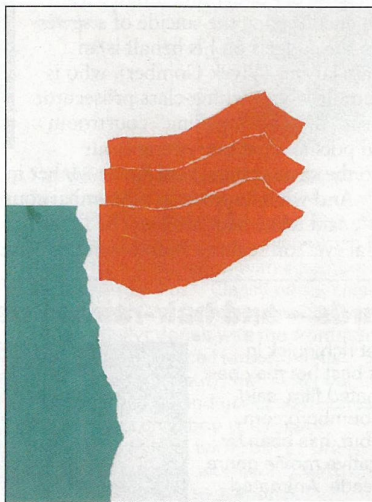
### Where to buy...

The Week reviews an exhibition in a private gallery

#### Barry Flanagan

at Waddington Custot

Despite the enormous variety of work he produced in the course of his career, the Welsh-born artist Barry Flanagan remains best known for the strange series of giant bronze hares he created from the 1970s onwards. Though these sprightly sculptures have a certain kitsch charm, they are not even on nodding terms with the excitement of his best work. This marvellous show at Waddington Custot forces the point home, concentrating on the imaginative, diverse and often very funny pieces he produced early on in his career. The brightly coloured collages, quasi-surrealist sculptures and oddly runic symbols on display pay testament to an uninhibited and rather mischievous imagination – one much missed since Flanagan’s death, in 2009. If you’re not already familiar with his



June '68 (1968): paper collage, 26 x 20cm

work, head straight for the vitrine of his sketchbooks and ephemera: there’s an electric spontaneity to his jottings that almost steals the show. Prices range from £2,000 to £220,000.

11 Cork Street, London W1 (020-7851 2200). Until 14 May

### Treasures of early Christianity

It has been called “the Sistine Chapel of the early Middle Ages”, said Nick Squires in *The Daily Telegraph*: a 1,500-year-old church in Rome that has been restored to display some of the world’s earliest Christian art. The church of Santa Maria Antiqua is located in the ancient Roman Forum, but was buried under debris by an earthquake in AD847, and only rediscovered by archaeologists in 1900. A painstaking 30-year restoration has now been completed, revealing an “exquisite interior, decorated with multi-coloured frescoes of saints, martyrs, angels and emperors”. The church itself was built in the sixth century, but the main pictures were painted under Pope Martin I, who was in office from AD649 to AD655. The fact that the church was buried ensured that, unlike other such churches, the interior was not altered in later centuries. Among the most “significant” frescoes is a depiction of the Virgin Mary with child – one of the earliest known Christian icons

