

MODERN PAINTERS

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teristic of *Sebastiane* and *Carravagio* (1986); in *Blue*, Jarman reveals his most intimate and his serene wait for death. This atmosphere of quiet meditation is at odds with the installation, next door in the Serpentine's rotunda, of a half dozen of Jarman's Super-8 films, silently shown on multiple screens. They may give a certain taste of his luxuriant artistic universe, but the installation doesn't allow the audience a full view of the works, and their content here is being sacrificed for the benefit of display. Jarman's film *Derek*, shown across the rotunda and interweaving extracts of the filmmaker's interview with news footage of the time and numerous clips of Jarman's own works, provides the exhibition with some much-needed context. And despite a certain nostalgia, Swinton's speech, which is used as the backbone of the film's narrative, does also offer an engaging critique of the state of independent cinema. "The world has got awfully tidy recently," she laments; "the formula merchants are in force." *Derek* would probably have benefited from losing the interminable shots of Swinton wandering around London, or Julien's industrious exploration of the British Film and Television Archive—but it remains, nevertheless, a fascinating introduction to the filmmaker's life and work and a cornerstone of this rich introduction to Jarman. —COLINE MILLIARD

ARMEN ELOYAN

TAYLOR GALLERY

Armenian-born, Swiss-based painter Armen Eloyan might derive his inspiration from cartoon characters and menacing toy animals that surround his canvases, but the way he uses his buttery paint around, and his sense of vivid coloration, and his sense of the push-pull tension in his tightly worked areas and broad areas of loose color speak of pure joy. Much has been made of the violence in Eloyan's works, but, in reality, what crimes is he recording? His subject matter is open-ended. Eloyan's kooky: in *Man Dressed as a Wolf* (2007) a scary-looking, top-hatted, wolf-like figure jauntily through the streets; we might imagine him as a metaphorical for a man of dubious character—but we have to invent the story. This is imperative, Eloyan—unlike many well-known painters working with paint today—doesn't derive his source material from photographs; instead, his images are from his imagination, and he expects us to use ours in turn.



Eloyan, *Man Dressed as a Wolf*, 2007–08. Oil on canvas, 19 3/4 x 15 3/4 in. © 2008 Armen Eloyan. Courtesy the artist and Timothy Taylor Gallery, London.

The exhibition title, "Bookstore Cure," suggested solace for the tired and perturbed, so perhaps the artist was presenting the work as an antidote to melancholia. Yet to write off his paintings as therapy is facile; these are immediate and powerful visions, and the crazy cartoon violence Eloyan depicts—as in (*Bunch of a Story*) *Tea Table* (2007–8) where a goggle-eyed cat sees through a table, or *Smoking Boy* (2008) where a goofy, gap-toothed clown looks like he's been propelled out of a messy hell—demands a strongly visceral response. —JANE NEAL

GLASGOW

E-J MAJOR

STREET LEVEL PHOTOWORKS

In her solo debut, the London-based artist E-J Major revisits a number of the well-worn tropes of critical postmodernism (intertextuality, framing, semantic play, fractured narrative, appropriation, "the real," the photographic signifier, et cetera). Despite this, works such as *Marie Claire RIP* (2006) are undoubtedly powerful and timely. A series of 12 large, digital C-type prints which appear to track the physical and emotional decline of a drug addict, this work is based on an article in *Marie Claire* magazine which published police mug shots of a woman taken over a similar time span. Casting the artist in the guise of the anonymous woman (who was found dead shortly after the last image was taken), Major's work acts as a memorial and questions the idea of authenticity in photographic portraiture. And it arguably confirms that certain themes and issues so dominant in the '70s and '80s are still worthy of investigation and discussion in art today—not least feminism.

Among the other works, *from a distance* (2007) is the most intriguing. It's a playful, ambiguous set of 50 small images



E-J Major, 172, 001, and 0314 from the series "Love Is..." 2004–06. Giclee print, 9 x 9 in. Courtesy the artist.

derived from Brownie annuals and other sources—via rephotographing, scanning, and further manipulation—combined with fragments of text from Major's own annotated, adolescent-era copy of William Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying*. In some instances apparently anodyne images of children at play become startling via the inclusion of jarring texts and visual adjustments (the image of a young girl astride a dildo with the word *steer* below is a prime example). *From a distance* could almost be a Surrealist card game, highlighting as it does the complexity and endless fascination of how visual and textual languages function. —SUSANNAH THOMPSON

BORIS MIKHAILOV

SPROVIERI PROGETTI

Junkies and alcoholics will tell you about a peeling-away of reality's veneer which occurs when the drugs depart

from their systems, leaving them overexposed to the reality they had been avoiding. Boris Mikhailov's set of photographs titled "The Wedding" had this effect on me, causing horror and fear and haunting me for the rest of the day. There's no humorous escape route for the viewer of these scenes, which depict the mock wedding of a homeless couple in Mikhailov's Ukrainian hometown, Kharkov, where the breakdown of the Soviet Union has caused accelerating homelessness. Mikhailov has experimented with every kind of colorization and developing technique throughout his 40-odd years challenging the restrictiveness and fantasy of socialist realism, but this series is ultrareal. Not the snapshot naturalism of the modern everyone's-got-a-camera age but the compelling dramatic authenticity that photographic art can achieve with good composition and forceful material. The three largest prints, nearly six feet tall, echo the perspective of Jan van Eyck's "Arnolfini Portrait": the almost naked protagonists, arranged as though awaiting the marriage vows, are laughing at the photographer as if he has just tripped on his perspective-enhancing footstool. A close relationship (underwritten, Mikhailov freely admits, with money) exists between photographer and subject. The effect isn't cosy but realist: because the camera is intimate with its material, we trust it, and are horrified. —TONY PEARSON



Boris Mikhailov, from the series "The Wedding," 2005–06, C-print, 12 x 18 in. Courtesy Sprovieri Progetti, London.