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# THE SPECTATOR

My letter from Prince Philip  
*Christopher Booker*

When nice guys finish first  
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The case against school sport  
*Melissa Kite*

## Peace vs justice

Global courts make dictators fight to the death, says *Douglas Murray*



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Stand-up comedy's closet Christians

*Andrew Watts*





'Willy Lott's House', 2007, by Simon Carter

## Exhibitions

### Conversation pieces

Andrew Lambirth

#### Light Structures: Halima Cassell

Blackwell: The Arts and Crafts House, Bowness-on-Windermere, until 7 October

#### Francis Bacon to Paula Rego

Abbot Hall Art Gallery, Kendal, until 16 September

Anyone interested in art holidaying in the Lake District this summer — or indeed taking a short break in the Lakes — is in for a treat. The Lakeland Arts Trust, which administers both Blackwell and Abbot Hall, has mounted a pair of exhibitions which offers a range of painting and sculpture a good deal better than most things currently on view around the country. And many people may find that tuning into the wild beauty of Cumbria will help them to look with greater enjoyment and discernment at contemporary art.

Certainly Baillie Scott's magnificent 1898 Arts and Crafts house, Blackwell, on the shores of Lake Windermere, is the perfect setting for Halima Cassell's work in clay, glass, marble and porcelain. Here architecture frames and complements her sculptural explorations, as the landscape frames and contextualises Baillie Scott's building. The total environment (nature, architecture, art) is thus to be experienced and relished both sequentially and concurrently.

Blackwell has the most marvellous views across Windermere, and to see Cassell's sculptures installed in the ultra elegant White Drawing Room against the backdrop of mountains and water is to appreciate fully the subtle strength of their forms, which could so easily be overawed by the magnificence of the setting. Her first ever marble sculpture, 'Folded Teardrop', in Portuguese pink marble, carved after a residency last year at Pietrasanta in Tuscany, is like a drapery study in the form of a vertical horn or seashell. It looks particularly evocative when a yacht appears on the lake, and sail and sculpture come into long-distance conjunction. The marble sits on a plinth and takes the light, glowing inwardly more white

*Tuning into the beauty of Cumbria may help people to look with greater enjoyment at contemporary art*

than pink. In another part of the room, in a window embrasure, Cassell's chunky glass 'Amoeba Pool II', in rhubarb lead crystal, sustains an expressive dialogue with Baillie Scott's stained-glass flowers above.

This conversation between Cassell's work (some pieces made specifically for Blackwell, others fitting in just as naturally) and its surroundings continues eloquently in the Main Hall, where a trio of dark terracotta pots echoes the beautiful copper light fittings. Her sculptures are everywhere, directing the eye to the existing details of the house, whether iron window-catch or wooden panel. The Dining Room is Cassell-free, but there are carved porcelain panels in the

café and even a piece in red hand-carved clay called 'Corona' in the lavatory lobby. Upstairs are a couple of galleries of recent and older work: clay or plaster works, tiles, wallpaper samples made by Graham & Brown to her designs, and a small group of hand-carved solid porcelain sculptures which would, I think, have interested Henry Moore. Halima Cassell (born 1975) is one of our finest young sculptors, working with great inventiveness and versatility in a variety of materials, in a mode that is both stylishly geometric and organic. An artist to watch.

Meanwhile, over at Abbot Hall Art Gallery in Kendal, just a short drive away, is an exhibition of figurative painting curated by Helen Watson, director of exhibitions at the Gallery, and the artist Robert Priseman. This explores the concept of the School of London — that group of artists identified by R.B. Kitaj in the 1970s who reasserted the importance of the figure at a time when abstraction seemed to be calling all the shots — and traces its relevance among younger artists.

As a celebration of the continuing importance of painting it is very heartening, and as a collection of high-quality works by modern masters it takes some beating. Here, for instance, are fine things by Francis Bacon, including the dark greenish 'Study for Figure VI' (1956–7), replete with that sense of mystery and strangeness that makes his early work more compelling than so much of his later work, and an even earlier classic screaming head, from 1949. There are two studies of heads by Michael Andrews, of which the 1967 one is the most thought-provoking; potent portraits and cityscapes by Frank Auerbach and Leon Kossoff; and beautiful things by Kitaj, Hockney and Euan Uglow.

I particularly liked Kossoff's moving c.1952 self-portrait and Kitaj's little-known oil from 1967, 'Screenplay'. Among



'Rubicon', 2012, by Halima Cassell