

Exhibition of the week **Noah Davis**

Barbican Art Gallery, London EC2 (020-7870 2500, barbican.org.uk). Until 11 May

Noah Davis's death from cancer in 2015, aged only 32, was "a terrible loss to contemporary art", said Laura Cumming in *The Observer*. Based in Los Angeles, he was a pioneering painter who left behind a young family, and an extraordinary body of work, which focused on black life in America. The Barbican's "spacious and loving retrospective" traces Davis's all-too-brief career via 50 of his paintings, most of which he produced over a mere eight years. Davis's work is "steeped in art history"; it shows the influence of everyone from Matisse and Manet to Mondrian and Rothko. But what characterises it is a level of "honesty and heartfelt sincerity" that is rare in 21st century art. Whether Davis is looking at the city at night, his family at different stages, or a flea market trove of other people's family photos from the 1970s, he loves what he is looking at. This is a "beautiful" exhibition and a testament to the artist's unique vision.

The son of a lawyer, Davis was born in Seattle, but spent much of his adult life in LA, said Jackie Wullschläger in the FT. In works of "haunting loveliness" that were often based on photographs, he repeatedly "memorialised" the city. He produced cityscapes and depictions of ordinary people framed by LA's distinctive architecture, but specialised in "deeply considered portrayals of the unspectacular everyday", which he endowed with "iconic" or faintly mystical qualities. One "characteristically moody, slightly



Pueblo del Rio: Arabesque (2014): like Degas "transmuted to LA"

blurry composition" features his wife, the artist Karon Davis, posing as the goddess Isis "in the yard of a white wooden Los Angeles home". In his *Pueblo del Rio* series, he reimagines a modernist inner-city housing estate as "an enchanted arena for art and music". In one case, "spotlit buildings" become a stage for "rhythmic black dancers in white tutus": it is like a scene immortalised by Degas "transmuted to LA". A decade on from his death, "it is clear that no American figurative painter of his generation" matches his virtuosity, humanity and vision.

In his work, Davis avoided "the clichés" associated with the black American experience, said Alastair Sooke in the *Daily Telegraph*. He depicted black people in everyday scenarios (whether splashing around in a local pool, or walking down a street lost in thought). His palette tends to be "muted and bruise-like", the mood "otherworldly, sombre" – particularly in his more personal canvases. *Painting for My Dad (2011)*, which he created in response to his father's terminal cancer diagnosis, shows "a hunched black figure ... contemplating an abyss beneath a starry sky". Still more heartbreaking is one of his final paintings, in which he depicts a funeral from "coffin-level", as if observing his own death. You'd have to have "a heart of stone" not to experience at least "a twinge of emotion". This is a "spellbinding, spine-tingling" exhibition. Do not miss it.

Where to buy...

The Week reviews an exhibition in a private gallery

Egon Schiele

at Omer Tiroche Gallery

There are many reasons to visit this show of work by Egon Schiele, not least the fact that almost every one of the 15 portraits on paper here can fairly be described as a masterpiece. Serving as a succinct summary of the Austrian expressionist's madly inventive draughtsmanship, *Portraits on Paper* takes us from a red chalk portrait of the artist's mother, realised in 1906 when he was just 16, through the haywire, borderline obscene character studies for which he is best known, and on to two delightfully sensitive nudes executed with clean lines and startling economy shortly before his premature death in 1918. None of these works cleaves to a specific formula: a pencil portrait of a long-haired woman, achieved in not



Portrait of Wally (recto), 1913

more than two-dozen lines, has her glowering out of frame with fanatic intent; a likeness of a boy in a green coat traces its subject's outline in a blazing halo of white gouache. However well you know his work, Schiele never fails to astonish. Be warned, though, prices are likely off the scale of most prospective buyers.

21 Conduit Street, London W1 (020-7499 5143). Until 2 May

Police raid a forger's "lab"

Italian police have seized dozens of forged paintings attributed to Rembrandt, Picasso and others from a workshop in



a suburb of Rome, says CNN. The authorities described it as a "clandestine painting laboratory", and said one room contained hundreds of brushes and tubes of paints, among other art materials. Reportedly, there were several near-finished works on the forger's table bearing the signatures of well-known artists, indicating that the workshop had been used quite recently. Police also seized forged certificates of authenticity, gallery stamps and examples of artists' signatures. Seemingly, one tactic the suspected forger employed was to impose an image of the fake painting over a real one in an old auction catalogue, to make it appear that the forged work had a respectable provenance. No arrests have been made and no suspect named; however, police described the suspect as a "forger-restorer", and said he or she had listed hundreds of works on eBay.