

## This Muddy Eden reviewed

3 March 2020, by Jane Fae

Some insults cut deep. One of the worst I have received lately came from a supposed friend and fellow creative. An artist, no less.

For there was I, at the opening of the *Muddy Eden* exhibition in Letchworth Gallery, explaining what an utter Philistine I was and her response was to deny the very essence of my identity. "Jane", she said sweetly: "I don't think you are a Philistine at all".

There is no coming back from that. She will not be getting a card this Christmas. (To be fair, no-one else is, because I am chronically useless at sending cards). But still, the thought will be there. Or rather, it will not.

Although the point she was making did connect with the event we were both attending: opening night for a new treat of pictorial wonderfulness. And that was that I am always nervous around visual phenomena. Words. Narrative. Characterisation. I love it. But pictures? No. I just do not trust my instincts.

Perhaps that is not unconnected to the fact that I lately discovered that in terms of thinking style, I genuinely lack visual thinking as an option. That explains much – and also leaves me open-mouthed in astonishment at a parallel finding that some folks do not have an inner voice. I mean, how don't they?

Anyway, here's my take on the Exhibition and you must now go and let me know if I got it entirely wrong.

### This Muddy Eden

Right now, the Gallery is home to three displays and four quite different artists. *This Muddy Eden*, in the main gallery, showcases the works of Hannah Brown and Christopher Orr, two very different yet, in this space, complementary styles. Hannah's works are great explosions of nature, depicted in vivid colours that bring to mind the saturated hues of the pre-Raphaelites. And Maxfield Parrish, who seems, according to mood, to be counted as one of them, or not.

Hannah's focus is on the natural world; trees and leaves and growth; and yet in the patterns and in the light, one is also dealing with something more abstract: patterns of light and shade.

Christopher's work is very different. Altogether gloomier, more narrative, as each fog-swirled picture (the programme notes hint at echoes of Turner) seems to tell a tale. Though since I am not privy to the artist's private intentions, it is a narrative that I can only guess at.

If Hannah's work is large, bold, John's is more compact: and while this may feel like it ought not to work, it does. *This Muddy Eden* draws its inspiration from a line in a book on Victorian Utopias: elsewhere, the Gallery is doing dystopia.

### A Garden Futurity

Over in the side room, John Vincent's *A Garden Futurity* continues his intriguing take on Letchworth through use of time lapse and special effects photography. A time traveller is travelling back and forth in time and space, bearing witness to the destruction of civilisation as we know it. This time, he has documented well-known landmarks – including Letchworth Library – from now to flooded, climate-changed future decay.

It is well-done, thought-provoking and...OK: I am something of a sucker for apocalyptic vision.

### Bit Rot

Which is probably why I also enjoyed *Bit Rot* (aka Bit Decay, Data Decay or Data Rot), the exhibition upstairs in the studio space. Here, Bob Bicknell-Knight exhibits paintings, sculptures and videos showing relics from past, present and future, where our technological civilisation has been over-run by machines.

There is a more conventional sci-fi feel to this work: and the landscape depicted will be much more familiar to those familiar with virtual worlds and gaming. Which is not at all criticism. Because that, nowadays, is landscape as familiar to many young people as more distant real lands are to an older generation of actual travellers and, as we rethink our lives in response to climate change, perhaps we are all going to have to get better at living inside, rather than out.

If I do have a criticism, it is that these landscapes and artefacts are more familiar than most (which possibly betrays my own middle age mis-spent in virtual space) and a certain sense of "seen it before". Still, the whole is impressive and the clever juxtaposition of conventional image with 3-d sculpture adds an additional dimension.

And if you like the images, Bob's limited edition book is on sale in the Gallery below.

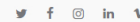
### Now make your own mind up!

So there you have it. I, who count myself as not the most visually talented of Letchworthians, quite enjoyed these exhibitions: enjoyed them enough, in fact to HAVE OPINIONS about them.

But am I making sense? Well, perhaps you should now go, visit and decide: Is Jane a Philistine? Or not? I think we should be told.



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