

Just over a week ago the US held a national election. Then we fled the country. That's the simple version of events, but it's really never the simple version, now is it? The trip itself was fairly uneventful. Prompt off the ORD runway, quickly through LHR border control, and little turbulence in between. Our first real encounter with a local was our cabbie on the way from Paddington to our flat in Southbank. Upon hearing our accents he asked if we were happy with our election outcome. Further discussion revealed that he was a firm Brexit supporter, entirely due to immigration fears. Had we told him we intended to settle, however, I'm sure he would have welcomed us, given our colour. As with our last team visit here, X & I hit the ground running, as it were, with a show our very first night: *Wordless!* a jazz concert cum lecture put together by illustrator Art Spiegelman and jazz musician Phillip Johnston. It's a history of the graphic novel layered atop a jazz sextet performance. Great stuff. He opens with the works of Lynd Ward and moved on to Frans Masereel, H.M Bateman, Otto Nuckel, Milt Gross and Si Lewen. Spiegelman closed with a new, short, autobiographical sequence — *Shaping Thought* — which he introduced by referring to "America taking a nihilistic mudslide to apocalypse!" Indeed.

But prior to our theatre experience at Barbican Centre, we stopped in at their Martini bar.



This garish pod of craft cocktailing is a holdover from the *Designing 007* exhibition from a few years back.



Our bartender, a willowy waif, starving artist type with blackened fingertips, stringy hair and not the slightest whiff of pretension about him, took our order (£5 happy hour!) and then tendered his apology thus: “To all of my American customers I say, ‘I’m sorry’.” He then proceeded to whip up a couple of truly spectacular drinks. Dowsed the ice in a rocks glass with vermouth, chilled the Martini glasses with ice water, added spirits (vodka for X, gin por moi) to each glass after draining off the vermouth, and then stirred with ennui. Finally decanted into the now cold glasses, the drinks were served sans garnish (at our request) and met with accolades by us both. I think it was the ennui that did it.

An inquiry into the cause of the previously mentioned blackening of his fingers revealed him to be an art student, who just that afternoon had been dying paper pulp. **Pawn** suggested rubber gloves for future such projects.

Saturday, coincidentally enough, was the Lord Mayor’s Show day, which consists of a flotilla up the River Thames followed by a procession through the streets of The City, and culminating in fireworks from Victoria Embankment at dusk (an early 5pm here). Despite mist and drizzle we slogged our way across the river and up to Ludgate Circus and got prime viewing just as the procession approached.

The City of London these days most often refers to the financial centre of the country, but has historical roots dating back to Roman times. Indeed the London Wall — remains of the original fortifications of Londinium — define what is also called The Square Mile or, simply, The City. Even as the monarchy arose and various stages of city and state grew around it, The City has remained fiercely independent. The Lord Mayor does, however, extend the occasional invitation to the monarch to come and visit, and this is one such occasion.

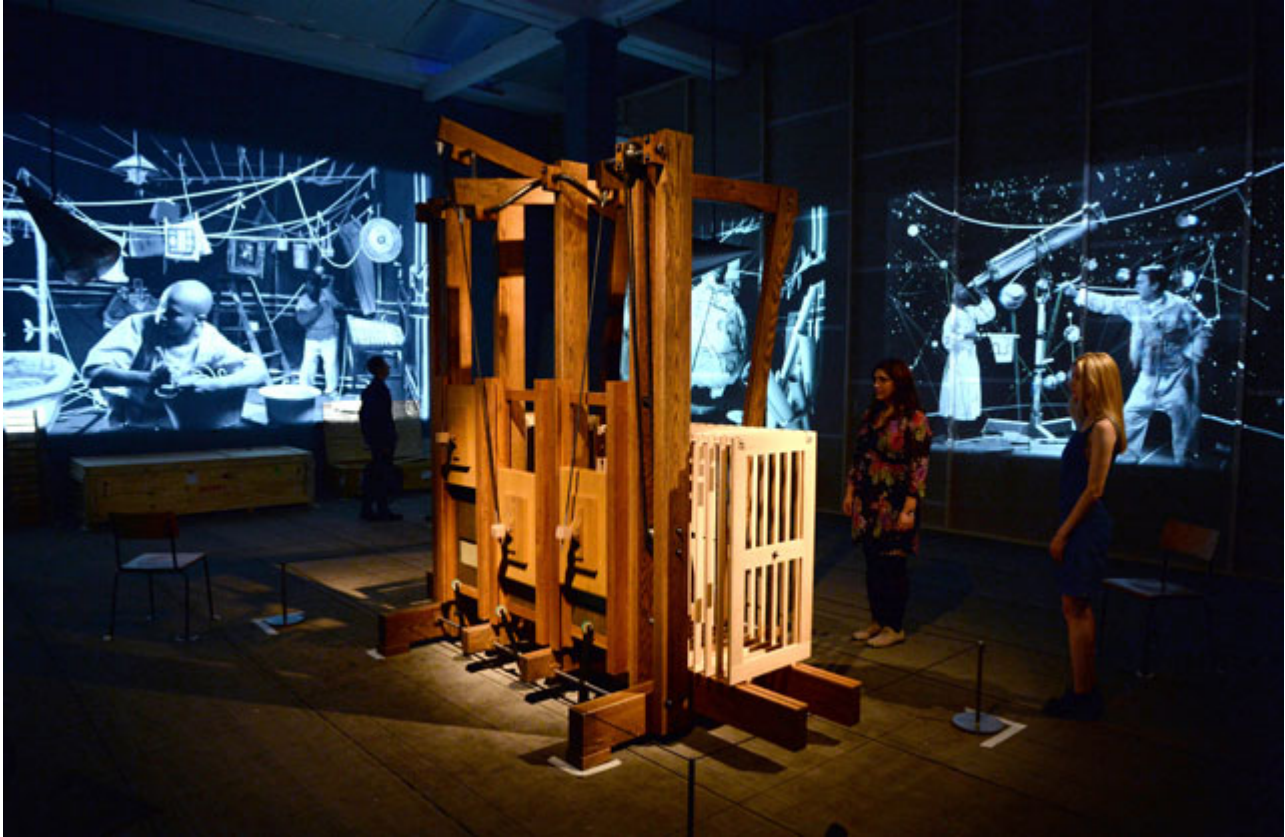
The procession is comprised of various guilds and orders, Masons and Joiners, Nurses and Accountants, as well as military units, government bodies, municipal grandees, etc. It was a joyous event, that’s for sure. Here’re some snaps (note: coming soon).

Finally a repast at Slug & Lettuce in St Mary Axe, and a meet-up with our friend **A**. She had been fighting through obstructed traffic to try to get in some long postponed shopping, and seemed glad for the burger and tea we had waiting for her. Then off to Whitechapel and *Thick Time*, an exhibition of works by William Kentridge.

X & I had enjoyed a large retrospective of the South African’s work, several years ago, at MoMA in New York. This smaller exhibit focused on recent works, including environments, films, animations, book-arts and studies for an opera, Lulu, which, coincidentally, we were to see in two day’s time. **A** was tickled to learn that!

There was a lot to like, and some to love, in this compendium. Of particular note was the

large installation, *The Refusal of Time*.



This collaboration with a team of artists comprises sound, light, video projection, a large "Breathing Machine" and more. It was truly a stunning, enveloping experience. Other favourites include the many artist books on display and the film *Second Hand Reading*. The exhibit closed with another installation piece, smaller and more theatrical, *Right Into Her Arms*, which included footage, imagery, illustrations and sound from the workshop process for Lulu.



It was wonderful to have this little taste of this work prior to seeing the show.

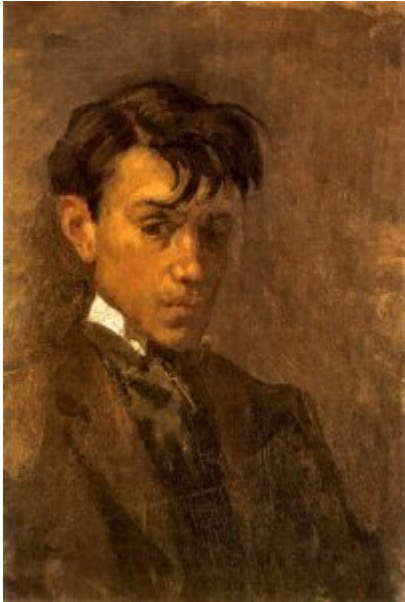
Surprisingly, no show Saturday. After parting ways with **A**, we returned home to Southbank and stayed in. This is a fairly nice flat, tucked into a block-long side street, behind the OXO wharf, just west of Blackfriar's bridge. There's a Little Waitrose two blocks away, a couple of caf s around the corner, our choice of pubs, even a cake-making school! A damp terrace abuts the lounge through lovely French doors, adding some light and greenery to our stay.

A "Supermoon" hung in the sky as we traipsed uptown to Islington and the Hope Theatre (above the Hope & Anchor pub) for a Sunday performance of *Rigor Mortis*, an Irish two-hander of recent vintage. **Jazz Dancing Criminals** brought this stiff little one-act, fire breathing, chest thumping, pogo-sticking, drug addled, funereal farce to the Hope for it's British premier following a successful run of its earlier "incarnation," *Urbs Intact Manet* in Waterford, Ireland.

A drunken tosser has pinched his late friend, casket and all, from the mortuary, he discovers when he awakens, hung over, to the pounding on his door from his equally dissolute mate. They proceed to wok their way through a monumental pile of cocaine and a couple cans of stout as they wake their friend and debate what to do with his remains. Irreverent, loud and at times barely indecipherable, it was a fun 75 minutes of Irish mayhem. Thumbs Up!

NPG have Picasso Portraits on special showing, so we went and saw it. Lovely stuff, as one might expect. The real treat here, aside from the expected and widely known masterpieces, such as woman with hat and self portraits, were the small sketches from his youngest days.





Often meant as throw-away pieces, these are little gems. Whimsical and light. Unfortunately, no good samples on the web to show here.

Lulu, the aforementioned opera directed and designed by William Kentridge, is based upon “the Lulu plays” by Frank Wedekind, by Alban Berg, and completed by Friedrich Cerha (English translation by Richard Stokes). This production originated at Dutch National Opera, and last appeared at the Metropolitan Opera in New York. The fourth producing company is Teatro dell’Opera di Roma. Each country providing a new cast, the real attention getter is the stunning, almost literally, as in hit-you-over-the-head, visuals; a combination of projection, props and constantly unfolding set (set design Sabine Theunissen). Here are a few images from the production (most from ENO, but some from other stagings):







"Solo Performer" Joanne Dudley

Lulu is 3½ hours of discordant music, striking imagery and implausible story, but a wonderful time. The "Solo Performers," Joanna Dudley and Andrea Fabi nearly stole the show, but Brenda Rae, in the title role, was amazing, as was James Morris as Dr Shân/Jack the Ripper (yes, really).

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More to come...