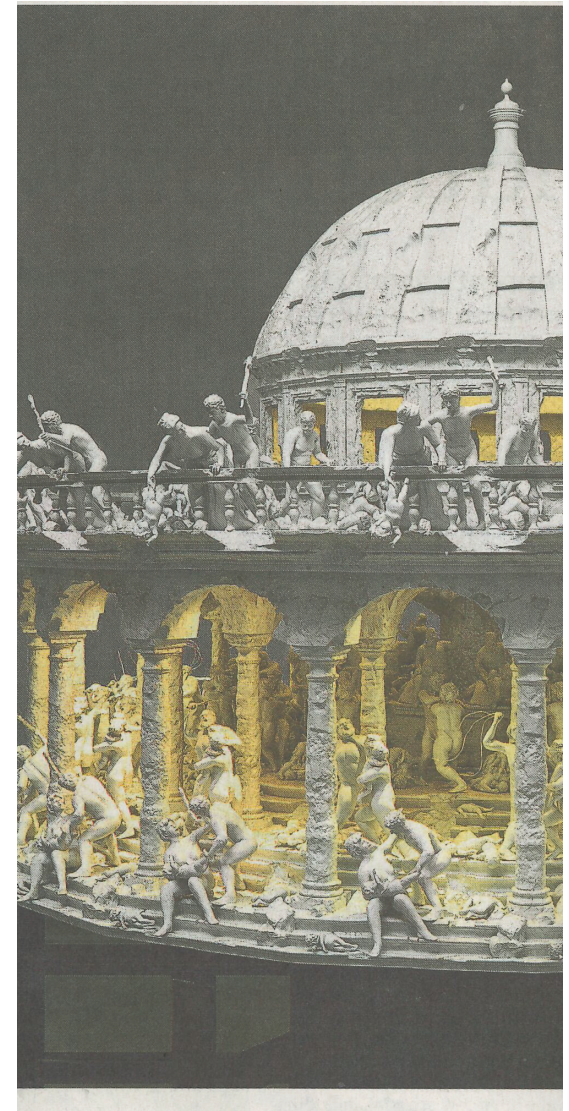


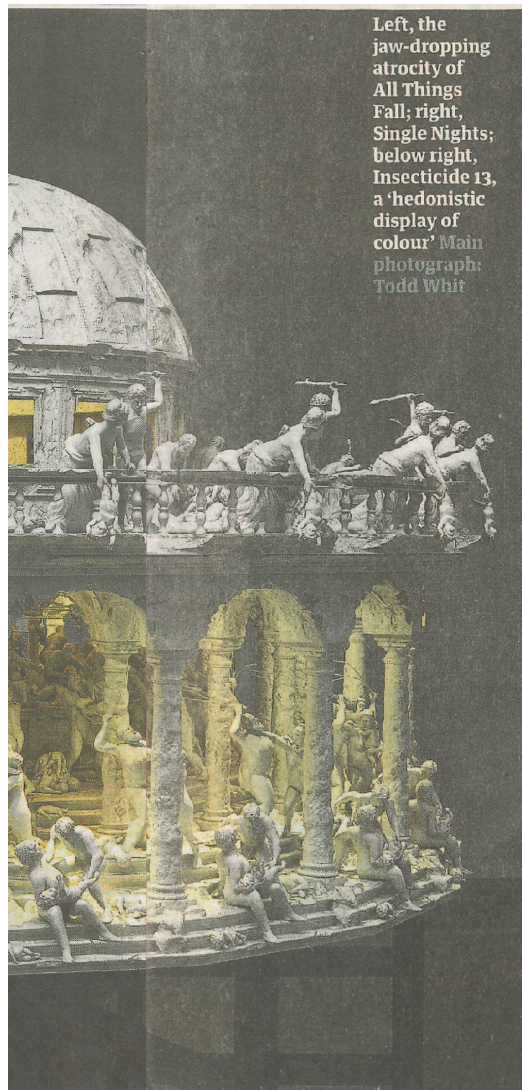
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‘This is a formidable meditation on art’s sinister relationship with violence.... It is the art of our time at its most poignant, beautiful and vile. So much in today’s art is insubstantial and overhyped. Collishaw is the real thing, an artist entranced by looking and horrified at what the eye can find beautiful’

— *Jonathan Jones*







Left, the jaw-dropping atrocity of *All Things Fall*; right, *Single Nights*; below right, *Insecticide 13*, a 'hedonistic display of colour' Main photograph: Todd Whit



## Review

# Troubling art of a true modern moralist

Jonathan Jones

Art

Mat Collishaw

*The New Art Gallery, Walsall*

★★★★★

The Massacre of the Innocents is one of western art's most horrific themes. The slaughter of infants ordered by King Herod has been depicted by Bruegel as a war crime in a snowy village and by Poussin with an intimate realism.

Now Mat Collishaw has turned it into an animated sculpture of cruelty under a huge domed temple. It is as if Ray Harryhausen had collaborated with the Renaissance sculptor Giambologna. Picture the scene in *The Golden Voyage of Sinbad* where Harryhausen makes a multi-armed statue come to life, a sword in every hand. Replace one statue with a multitude of naked fighting figures and you start to get close to the awful wonder that Collishaw has created.

*All Things Fall* is a giant zoetrope, modelled on Bramante's Tempietto in Rome, and resembling the Bramantesque temple in Raphael's painting *The Marriage of the Virgin*. A fat naked man is flogging a woman. Another naked figure is throwing a baby out of a window. There are heaps of dead babies.

It is a shocking tableau that gets even more troubling when the zoetrope starts to spin. For a moment it is a blur. Then it hits a speed to fool the eye and creates an illusion of movement. The statues come to life. The fat man flogs the woman over and over. A baby falls to

the ground. As the zoetrope slows, their movement becomes more jagged, until the frieze of slaughter is static again.

*All Things Fall* is the most disturbing British work of art since the Chapman brothers' *Hell*. But this is no cheap shock. It is a formidable meditation on art's sinister relationship with violence, using state-of-the-art technology, Victorian optical gimmickry and a deep feeling for art history to question the way we look at violence. It is the most jaw-dropping atrocity in a brilliant exhibition that brings together some of Collishaw's most troubling images.

A pole dancer performs in slow motion to a throbbing soundtrack on three screens framed by gothic windows. The composition suggests she is undergoing a crucifixion, but her movements are eerily balletic. My eye is drawn in. Perhaps I would watch the crucifixion as a ballet, too. What's wrong with me?

“A naked figure is throwing a baby out of a window”

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Out of darkness flash images of adults rescuing children from war and disaster. This should be moving but it is uncomfortable and tense. The sudden bright images are shocking and violent. Why do we look at media images of suffering?

It is not easy to contemplate the last meals of death-row prisoners, beautifully arranged and photographed to resemble 17th-century Spanish still-life paintings. But it is easier than it should be, and this is the point.

Collishaw is an artist whose feel for morbid beauty echoes the violently sensual paintings of Delacroix. He is a gothic artist, literally, when he frames a film of a burning orchid inside a gothic arch. Enormous images of crushed butterflies explode in hedonist displays of colour, picked out by spotlights in darkness along with sculptures of flowers mutated by chemicals.

This is art in bad taste. It is art with a big brain. It is the art of our time at its most beautiful and vile. So much in today's art is insubstantial. Collishaw is the real thing. In his installation at the Library of Birmingham, photographs of 1930s crime scenes flicker and fade. Ghost rooms. Dead places. I could have sworn there was someone else in the empty space around me.

Lazy artists condemn the evil done by others. Collishaw makes you glimpse the evil in yourself. He is a true modern moralist.

Mat Collishaw At the New Art Gallery, Walsall, from today until 10 January