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23

You *Can* Polish a Turd

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As an antidote to hideous Christmas visuals here is a round up of five of the best art shows in London. Be quick though as some of them are just about to close.

Paul Noble / [Gagosian Gallery](#) / Until Dec. 17

God is not something you associate with conceptual art but Paul Noble has spent fifteen years playing him as the creator of *Nobson Newtown*, a fictional metropolis. The show consists of huge drawings (one is seven metres wide and said to have taken two years!) that are dizzying in their detail. Apart from Noble's incredible draughtsmanship, his work is also architecturally obsessive right down to the design of the sewer system. There are thousands of hand drawn rocks, bin bags, trees, park benches etc. Then there are the turds, which stand in for humans in Noble's dystopian world as well as the monumental pink marble turd sculptures on show.



Noble's turd inhabited world is labyrinthian on so many levels; you could spend hours looking and still see something you hadn't seen before. It is impossible not to think of the 'labour' involved, but for me the beauty of the work is in Noble's drawing skills, his composition and his masterly use of shade and light.

Charles Avery / [Pilar Corrias gallery](#) / Until December 16

Like Noble, Charles Avery has created his own world, as part of his *Islanders project* a fictional anthropological state, which like Noble's work is shown episodically and also uses humour and fantasy to make us question deeper philosophical ideas. The centerpiece of the latest part of the series is a beautiful five-meter wide drawing entitled *Place de la Revolution*, with hundreds of cyclists spinning off in different directions, some meticulously drawn, and others mere sketches. Again, the artist's painstaking skills add weight to a fictional world and his use of line is simply sublime. Avery however likes to see his creation, as a part of this world, not as a parallel world and it is his adherence to plausibility that distinguishes his world from Nobles.

Jeff Wall / [White Cube](#) / Until January 7

Jeff Wall's world is more mundane than Noble's or Avery's but no less time consuming with some of his images taking years. Each photo is stitched together from thousands of others, to create a 'near documentary'; a bar of soap by a dirty sink, kids playing, a carton of milk bursting. It is a complicated and aesthetically deliberate method of working that makes you question the image however banal it may seem on the surface. His new show is split between his constructed images downstairs and his neo-realistic images upstairs. Two really stood out for me, *Boxing* which has two boys boxing in a sterile middle-class home and another of a 'historical' lecture, both images made even more extraordinary when you consider that everything is re-created down to the fixtures and fittings. Wall's new show is excellent and as always challenging.

Mhairi Vari / [Domo Baal](#) / Until December 17



Vari's new work examines the proliferation of information that is thrown at us every day and seeks to make the digital, physical. She uses the everyday as materials; decorative spheres from garden centres, coloured glues, and twigs all come together in a joyful play of materials and process. The term 'site-specific' is vastly overused in the art world, but Vari's standout piece in the main gallery, *Hub (John Street)*, is so enormous (and presumably fragile) that it will have to be broken up before it leaves the gallery. Constructed from twigs picked up from all over the world and held together with vast amounts of coloured glue (used by funeral parlours to glue flowers together!), which drips down to form a stunning cascade of sub-strands. It really is a spectacular piece that uses a unique visual language in an attempt to explain the unexplainable. It works on so many levels and like technology is confusing and beautiful.

***Civil Twilight* / [B&N gallery](#) / Until 22 December**

Finally, B&N gallery is an exciting addition to London's shrinking scene. *Civil Twilight* is a group show of six painters. There is no 'theme' as such here, but with this many painters, all with different concerns, there is bound to be some dialogue. It is however a 'painting show' as opposed to a show 'about painting'. Two of the artists stood out for me, Marcus Cope and Sarah Macdonald. Cope produces frenetic image fuelled work, which deconstructs not just painting but the actual canvas itself. Although based on personal experience, Cope takes a surrealistic diversion into dreamscapes and imaginariums.



One painting of his depicts a camping trip where he encountered a dying owl. Nothing is anchored, including the owl, the tent and the construction of the painting. Smart work.

Sarah Macdonald on the other hand works from architectural plans, but unlike Paul Noble and Charles Avery she is less concerned with the life of the city and is more interested in the aesthetics of urban planning, using the space between the buildings or the negative space, and inverting shade and light to create an abstraction of a cityscape. Macdonald's work has a lovely curiosity about form and structure. Nice show, and a gallery to watch out for.

***Your Garden Is Looking a Mess Could You Please Tidy It Up* is at PayneShurvell until January 7 www.payneshurvell.com**