

# No New Thing Under the Sun

There are jauntier bits of the Bible than Ecclesiastes from which this compactly transhistorical, 50-work curatorial project (by Time Out contributor Gabriel Coxhead) takes its appellation: in short, it says that everything dies and gets forgotten and so will you, O vain human. But, framed in terms of recurrence, here the title phrase is also persuasively applied to art over the last 500 years. Transience underwrites events on all scales, whether in Samuel Palmer's atmospheric little 1850 print of a herdsman toiling amid lengthening shadows; present-day Romanian painter Marius Bercea's clotted painting of two rural workers in an encroaching green fog; or Seb Patane's signature ink-doctored vintage print of a Victorian actress's head annihilated by a velvety splatter of black ink.



**Royal Academy** Major spaces

The show's musings on mortality reverberate best when they imply an almost inexpressible anxiety. Sir Lawrence Gowing's autumn-toned vanitas painting, for instance, whose skull and mortar and pestle shimmer with afterimages that make them quiver sideways; or Dorota Jurczak's brilliantly unsettling, resolute drawing of dangling plaits turning into nooses that hang a trio of birds. Elsewhere, there's a flotilla of other Romanians, perhaps reflecting the embassy's sponsorship of the show, and some apparent politicking on behalf of the Royal Academy via a dissonant sketch of a crouching woman by Tracey Emin (RA). But there is enough saturnine succour and pause for thought here to make 'No New Thing...' worth a splinter of one's cruelly finite span. **Martin Herbert**

Amikam Toren, 'Armchair Painting (The End of the World as We Know It)', 2007