

Jeff Keen

★★★★

Hales Gallery and Kate MacGarry.
► Feb 27.

The films of Jeff Keen (1923-2012) are some of the most extreme works of art cinema you'll ever encounter – extremely chaotic, that is, and occasionally extremely violent. You don't really watch his films in the way you watch most movies, because there's simply far too much going on: too many frantic edits, too many slogans and bursts of animation constantly bombarding you. Rather, viewing the late British filmmaker's works feels overwhelming, like you're being confronted by something monstrous and inescapable.

No wonder two Shoreditch galleries have collaborated on showing a pair of pieces from the 1970s – a single film of his creates more than enough mayhem for each small space. 'Rayday Film', at Hales Gallery, is a sort of crazed homage to comic book superheroes. Sped-up,



multi-exposure footage shows Keen's wife and friends acting the role of various masked or costumed characters, and performing weird, cultish rituals in locations around Brighton, where they all lived. Thrown into the mad mix are images of toys and dolls being melted, sections of damaged film stock, fragments of stop-motion animation, and a montage of TV clips showing wartime atrocities. Oh, and the soundtrack

is a near-constant cacophony of overlaid tracks, forming a pulsing, shrieking vortex of white noise. Needless to say, there isn't much in the way of a coherent plot. And yet, amidst the sensory assault, certain themes can be picked out: war and the dark energies that lurk beneath the surface of civilised existence.

At Kate MacGarry, 'The Cartoon Theatre of Dr. Gaz' (still, pictured) tackles the same sorts of ideas, but

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with more emphasis on animation – a stop-motion maelstrom of sketches and cutouts (imagine the surrealism of Monty Python collages, but more disturbingly demented and visceral). Around the walls of both galleries are original paintings, props and pop-cultural ephemera collected by Keen. It makes for a fascinating portrait – both of Keen as a trailblazing artist, but also of Western society and its manic, and at times terrifying, excesses. *Gabriel Coxhead*

THE BOTTOM LINE Two chances to immerse yourself in larger-than-life films of a true pioneer.



SAUL LEITER: RETROSPECTIVE

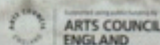
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Red Umbrella, ca. 1958 © Saul Leiter.
Courtesy Howard Greenberg Gallery, New York

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Elizabeth Peyton

★★★

Sadie Coles Davies St.

► Feb 20.

US artist Elizabeth Peyton shot to fame in the early 1990s with her portraits of subjects as diverse as Kurt Cobain and Napoleon Bonaparte. Her most recent work puts the emphasis on history rather than celebrity. As self-aware as it may be, Peyton's wispy, laboured style of painting does occasionally short-circuit itself. But her watercolours are engaging, and her coloured pencil drawings possess a delicacy and sureness of line. Decisive where her canvas-based works are circumspect, these are the show's revelation. *Matt Breen*



Oscuramento: The Wars of Fabio Mauri

★★★

Hauser & Wirth. ► Feb 6.

Fabio Mauri (1926-2009) grew up in Mussolini-era Italy and his art consistently examines the ways in which the traumas of war and fascism are assimilated by history. For the most part it's the simpler works that resonate – such as a lone artillery shell on a plinth. The horrors of totalitarianism are most effectively spelt out in the central installation, 'The Grand Council,' in which a waxwork Mussolini and 28 of his military personnel are gathered around a dinner table. Walking amongst these jackbooted men will send a shiver down your spine. *MB*



AR Penck: Early Works

★★★★

Michael Werner. ► Feb 20.

Grim twentieth-century history continues – if more obliquely – in this survey of German artist AR Penck's early work, made under the Communist regime in East Germany during the 1950s, '60s and '70s. The earliest painting, of a man strapped into an electric chair, possesses a naturalism Penck quickly abandoned, and a pessimism he didn't. His tight, graphic pictorial works are filled with numbers, letters and symbols. They're like hieroglyphic friezes in the age of the Iron Curtain and the atom bomb: bleak, but captivating. *MB*