

Old ladies arrive at the Peter Pears Gallery in Aldeburgh step inside the door, are monetarily rooted to the spot as they see the paintings on the wall, then step outside again and depart with exclamations of 'Oh No!' and 'Oh dear me!' left hanging on the air. Although, in Lear's phrase the poor, bare, forked animal shown in the paintings are self portraits of a man, each of the old women is spot on in grasping that her own death is prefigured in the canvases hung before her.

Rogers is not known for compromise. One of the canvases shows a livid yellow corpse, emerging violently from a heap of turned earth, blood beginning to run again in the left arm, toes touched with a fervid green. In this case the title is *The Valley of the Bones* and it is about life emerging from death, but you'd sooner forget it and have a quiet cup of tea. Visitors ask Rogers what it's all about, 'I give them titles,' he says, 'What's the matter with them, don't they know it's a reference to Ezekiel.'

Of course we do Howard. Ezekiel Chapter 37 'The hand of the Lord was upon me and carried me out in the spirit of the Lord and sat me down in the midst of the valley which was full of bones. Thus sayeth the Lord God unto these bones: Behold I will cause breath to enter into you and you shall live.' So the painting is, in a sense, positive an Old Testament prototype of a story recast in the life of Jesus, as so much of the Old Testament is now seen, in this case Lazarus raised from the dead. But just as this agonised figure struggles against being restored to life so an extraordinary drawing specifically of Lazarus shows a naked figure with one arm thrown out blindly as the winding cloths tangle themselves around the head as they wrench themselves from his body. This is a darkly modern vision, part of the culture, reiterated in Colm Toibin's novel *The Testament of Mary* in which the narrator says: 'Lazarus it was clear to me, was dying. If he had come back to life it was merely to say a last farewell to it he recognised none of us barely able to lift a glass of water to his lips as he was handed small pieces of bread by his sisters.'

Rogers' Lazarus is full on, so is all his new work painted and drawn. Rogers own family begged him to take down one of the stark self-portrait nudes from the wall of their home. 'Too embarrassing,' one of his daughters said, which may have loomed large at her age but to anybody beyond the point of embarrassment is the shadow of the brute end of life waiting round the corner, the fear that drove the old ladies from the gallery. Rogers paints himself in a series *The Perfect Fool*, his body bruised purple and flayed pink (and there is a painting too, specifically of Marsyas, who challenged Apollo to see who could best perform on the flute, won and for his reward was flayed alive.) The Fool is not just Rogers, or the artist, but humans in general the singular keeps the universal relevant. He is Lear's fool 'Why should a dog, a horse, a rat, have life and thou no breath at all?' the King laments, but still he equates a man with a rat. Rogers' new paintings are excruciatingly direct a reality of extraordinary force with roots I'd say, in Bruegel's mass of stupid drunken peasants but as in Bruegel the peasant stands for mankind in general.

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