Out of Hours Art

TATE MODERN — THE SWITCH HOUSE

Tate Modern opened in grubby Southwark in 2001. I was there, a cub deputy editor at the *BJGP*. To general astonishment, Nick Serota (now Sir but still insistently Nick), director of the Tate Gallery, had chosen a grand but derelict power station, designed by Giles Gilbert Scott in the 1950s, as a home for the Tate's collection of modern art, mainly European and North American.

Tate Modern has been a triumph. Swiss architects Herzog and de Meuron created spacious galleries overlooking the Thames and St Paul's. Ingeniously they retained the vast cathedral-like space of the Turbine Hall, to house installations, notably Louise Bourgeois's giant spider (*Maman* 1999), and *The Weather Project* (2003), Olafur Eliasson's beautiful, unique offering. Tate Modern expected 2 million visitors a year. By 2002, there were 5 million, effortlessly overtaking the MOMA in New York and the Centre Pompidou in Paris to become the most visited gallery of modern art anywhere in the world.

Tate trustees expected to expand in 2025–2035. Visitor numbers and a relentless programme of acquisitions dictated an earlier start. So the new Tate extension has opened in

Pablo Picasso, *The Three Dancers* (1925), Tate. Purchased with a special Grant-in-Aid and the Florence Fox Bequest with assistance from the Friends of the Tate Gallery and the Contemporary Art Society, 1965.

June 2016 — £230m raised in the teeth of recession. The architects again Herzog and de Meuron. To Southwark, no longer grubby. Approached from Southwark tube station through a borough transformed, the new extension towers above the original power station. When the scaffolding came down in April some critics complained of a big lumpen brick box. Well, it's attached to a big lumpen brick box with a chimney, so no worries for me. And the box is more a pyramid, or a twisted, faceted ziggurat. Brickwork perforated, shimmering like Harris tweed. By day, light seeps in, at night will out. Thin vertical windows echo similar on the Turbine Hall elevations. The building has presence.

Entering the Turbine Hall is still thrilling. Presently Ai Weiwei's *Tree*, moved from the courtyard at the Royal Academy, sits on the original bridge. Four storeys above there is a new dizzying bridge connecting old to newer. Tate is now balanced and symmetrical. Turn right into the basement of the Switch House. Three enormous fuel tanks, 80 m across — the Tanks. That triangular layout shapes the layout of the building above. And the world's first space in a national gallery dedicated to performance art.

Then begins the ascent. A series of marvellous staircases twisting upwards, starting wide and never narrow, lit by natural daylight filtering in. Severe polished concrete walls and acres of warm oak flooring. New full-height gallery spaces on floors 2 and 3, temporary gallery spaces on 4. On floor 5, something new, Tate Exchange — a beautiful panoramic space to explore the meaning of art. Multiple organisations signed up, including the Maudsley and UCL NHS Trusts. Nil from primary care yet (contact Fiona Kingsman, head of Learning Programme and Resources, fiona.kingsman@tate.org.uk). To floor 10, with a glorious 360 degree open-air viewing platform sure to become a queue fest. Lower than the Shard next door but much less tacky.

160404 View of Site Courtesy Lobster Pictures Ltd 2016 © Tate 2.JPG Tate Modern construction site, Spring 2016 © Tate Photography

The art? At best sublime — the Rothko space restored, Matisse and Picasso. At other times baffling with curious omissions; no Lucian Freud, or Francis Bacon. (No Paul Nash, though a retrospective at Tate Britain this October). Almost 80% of works on display are new, purchased since 2000. In Boiler House, a silly name for the original galleries, presently Lebanese artist Mona Hatoum (of interest for auto-colonoscopy), with Georgia O'Keeffe to follow. Tate is now more global, with female artists properly represented.

I'm a GP, not a critic of architecture. How can I assess whether this building works or not? Ask the people who work in it. Fiona on floor 5, a waitress cleaning tables, a security guard. All bubble excitedly, *'It's great!'*

The new Tate inspires and uplifts. A great new gallery for the world.

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With the architect Andy Law, Alec Logan will present a symposium, *Architecture and Primary Care*, at WONCA World in Rio de Janeiro, November 2016. Also at WONCA he launches a new online repository of Encounters in General Practice, <http://redrosesgp.blogspot.co.uk>. With colleagues he plans a symposium on *GPs as Social Activists* at the Nordic Congress of Primary Care in Reykjavik, June 2017.

DOI: 10.3399/bjgp16X686425