

Tate Modern unveiled

By PAUL MAJENDIE

LONDON (Reuters) - The Tate has unveiled its stunning new museum of modern art housed in a superbly restored power station on the banks of the River Thames. Hailed by critics as "A Cathedral of Cool," the 134 million pound Tate Modern puts London at a stroke alongside Paris and New York as a leading capital of modern art in the new millennium.

About 600 paintings and sculptures, from Dali to Picasso, Matisse to Mondrian, are housed in a spectacular setting - the cavernous halls of the Bankside power station that once powered the street lights and black and white television sets of post-War Londoners.

The original power station was built by Sir Giles Gilbert Scott, architect of Liverpool's soaring Anglican Cathedral and designer of Britain's distinctive red telephone box. It has been transformed into a grandiose and sweeping art gallery by Swiss architects Jacques Herzog and Pierre de Meuron. "The job was the most important in our career," said the Basel-based Herzog.

Tate Modern will soon be linked across the River Thames to St Paul's Cathedral by a new Millennium Bridge. The museum, which will be officially opened by the Queen on Thursday, is expected to attract up to two million visitors a year.

At yesterday's press launch, Culture Secretary Chris Smith said: "Tate Modern will be one of the world's greatest modern art galleries which will stand alongside New York's Museum of Modern Art and Paris's Pompidou Centre. This magnificent building is a symbol of London and the UK in the 21st century."

The Swiss architects have retained the brick shell of the old power station with its towering central chimney that dwarfs Shakespeare's reconstructed Globe theatre beside it. But they have added a giant glass box along the roof, throwing light onto the themed galleries on three spacious floors.

Artists like David Hockney, with his striking Californian swimming pool canvases and "Britpop Bad Boy" Damien Hirst, with his pickled sheep sculptures, have propelled Britain into the forefront of modern art, often with exhibitions that have outraged as much as entertained.

Now Tate Director Nicholas Serota can boast a world-class new site to display art, claiming at the press launch: "This museum will change the face of art. It will serve London, it will serve Britain, it will serve an international audience."

By EVE TSIRIGOTAKIS

HIS poetry has often been compared to that of Yeats and Frost. In announcing the Nobel Prize, the Swedish Academy praised him for "works of lyrical beauty and ethical depth, which exalt everyday miracles and the living past". Seamus Heaney is undoubtedly one of the most important and popular poets today and has earned his reputation because his poetry is generous and not solipsistic.

Born on April 13, 1939, in the town of Mossbawn, some 30 miles northwest of Belfast, Heaney received scholarships throughout his school years and in 1965 published his first volume of poetry, entitled *Eleven Poems*. Since then, he has published several volumes of poetry and received several awards. In 1995 he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature.

Last week, Heaney presented the locals with the Greek translation of *Alphabets*, his latest poetry collection that includes seven sonnets about Greece (*Sonnets from Greece*). The work is an endeavour of four friends; novelist and translator Stratis Haviaras, sculptor Dimitris Hadjis and publisher Manolis Savvidis.

The Old Parliament building in central Athens was packed when Heaney, along with Haviaras, Nikolaou and Savvidis, read selections of his recent poems. The *Athens News* caught up with him and asked him to share his thoughts.

What would you say is the poet's role and do you feel that poetry can be taught?

I think that poetry can be taught if the person wants to learn it. I can only go by my own evidence to myself, that without the teacher verifying the value of the art and showing it to you as part of a valued possession of his/her memory. When I say teaching poetry, I mean the transmission of a sense of delight in value. We can't make people learn it by heart. You can talk about iambic pentameters but I wouldn't say that that's how culture maintains poetry. It's maintained by individual witnessing. The best you can hope for is a teacher with some form of cultivation and commitment. Of course, it can come from the home, from the individual. But I do believe that it also comes from transmission and that it's impossible to apply it like an injection. There is no way of inoculating it with a shot. It has to somehow be accepted and believed minimally, at least not rejected.

Heaney discusses poetry

Of course, the problem is that in schools it's simple rejection. That's where the teacher's personality should come through.

Do you think that culture makes a difference?

Yes, I do. I suspect that in Greece and in Ireland there is a space for the common mind for the poet and poetry in the way that it doesn't exist in the United States. There you will find that it is only in the third-level education and the English departments where poetry and the poet might be verified. But in primary schools, at least in Ireland, poetry occupies a space that is valuable in the kids' heads.

Sometimes, though, poetry readings especially here in Greece are considered very academic, erudite and geriatric.

It's certainly something erudite but not necessarily geriatric. The word poetry applies to a lot of popular entertainment and it's a nice, delicate and complicated combination of vividly demotic and actual ancient learned discipline. That must be maintained. If you are a poet and proceed with it as your calling, you are bound to eventually take care of it. For example, Irish newspapers tend to have a poem here and there. If I publish a poem in the *Irish Times* on a Saturday, the prime minister, the teacher but not necessarily the literati may glimpse at it. But I don't think that happens in the US. Of course, they have poetry slams but they are very sectional too. I would incline not to be afraid of elitism but it has to be said that it is a difficult art.

What do you think is the usefulness of poetry readings?

If it's a good enough poetry reading, it becomes a memory. You like to hear the noise. It's a communal thing and a statement of value by the community. It can also be a daydream.

Do you think globalisation might do something to local colour?

It might stiffen local colour. But I have a wonderful example of globalisation written way ahead of its time in James Joyce's *Finnegan's Wake*, which is a kind of melt-down computer language. The local can survive almost everything in terms of giving you a position. Archimedes' principle that you have to find a place to position your lever and

then you can move the world. I think that people will find resistance and I don't mean that in any kind of guerrilla war or liberationist movement way. I mean obstinacy, holding on to certain things and refusing others. The economy will certainly be different.

What about the Internet?

I don't know enough about the Internet but I do think that people's intelligence will move that way. The cognition, the ways of figuring reality will speed up and they will have a much more comparative and "cooler" sense of the world. But that does not necessarily mean that the local measuring or starting point, or the sardonic view of the "elsewhere" will be affected. I think that more people will be clued in but will not necessarily be more gullible.

How do you feel about God and how does this notion express itself in your poetry?

I would say that God has to be the speaking being underneath it. I have a lapsed Catholic's confused attitude with the creator and redeemer. One part of me says that personal god does not exist. Another part lives in a world that says that all your language, your equipment of cognition is somehow posited on this presence. So you can live in both places. I think that most people live enigmatically in relation to the ultimate and in between, there is art and the layman's confusion about astrophysics.

How do you feel about your Greek Nobel laureates, Seferis and Elytis?

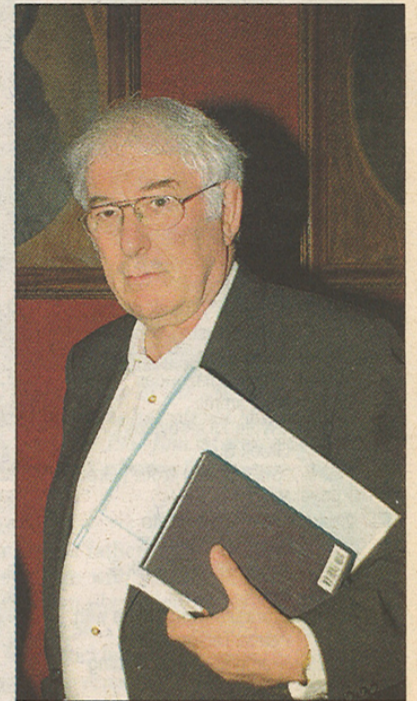
They are two very different kinds of writers. I think that Seferis has a much more restrained attitude towards history, the present, the universe and is more recognisably a part of the modernist game. Elytis is still a little orphic. I find that both exhilarating and unknowable because I don't know his work well enough but I do believe that there is an inspired, romantic urge there.

What brought you to Greece?

Sheer ignorance. I had to come here before I died. I had never been to Greece and it was a country of my imagination.

Do you see any similarities between Greek and Irish cultures?

My intuition is that there is the same paradigm or shape that in the 19th century



'When I think of my dream Greece, I see an old woman with a shawl. When I think of my dream Ireland, I see an old woman in a shawl,' said Irish poet Seamus Heaney at the Old Parliament building on Friday night.

ry a nation-state evolved into independence and part of the impulse for the revolution was a romantic view of the nationalist experience. When I think of my dream Greece, I see an old woman with a shawl. When I think of my dream Ireland, I see an old woman in a shawl. But of course that's a poetic image and you're also dealing with an economy and a modernity that's changing the face of the world literally and yet this changed face and the slightly haunted back of the mind coexist in Greece and Ireland in the same kind of way. Although the sense of belonging to a thing called the nation is something that all European countries should consider, because we are haunted by the German experience and the dangers of the fascist nationalism, we fear about saying too much about loving our country. I think that patriotism of a very large, expanded and ironical sort is still a very fine motive.

Tribute to Cypriot film

CINEPHILES are in for a real treat this week as the *Pallas Cinema* will be hosting a three-day tribute to Cypriot film today, tomorrow and on Friday. The event, a joint collaboration between the culture ministries of Greece and Cyprus, the Thessaloniki Film Festival and the House of Cyprus, features works by filmmakers who have participated in international film festivals as well as short films by representatives of the younger generation.

Stavros Papageorgiou's *O Endomosyllektis* (The Insect Collector), Kyriakos Tofaridis' *Nekri Zoni* (Dead Zone), Adonis Floridis' *Espresso*, Irena Ioannidou's *To Nisi* (The Island) and Panikos Chryssanthou's *To Teihos* (The Wall) are only a few of the films to be screened whose themes are mainly drawn from Cypriot history and tradition especially after the Turkish invasion and its devastating repercussions.

For screening times and full programme contact the *Pallas Cinema* at 1 Voukourestiou St, tel 322-4434.

Oscar-winning actor Nicholas Cage, accompanied by a film crew, arrived in Cephalonia on Sunday night for the filming of 'Captain Corelli's Mandolin'. The ambitious production will be shot in the island's villages of Sami and Vithalia through to late August. According to reports, the actor is so enamoured with the island that he is thinking of purchasing a house there. (The project's director, John Madden, already owns a home in Greece.) In the meantime, he is staying at a private villa. Cage's co-star, Penelope Cruz, arrived yesterday afternoon.

