



# Art review: Leon Kossoff – London Landscapes, Annely Juda Fine Art, London

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A small correction. Kossoff does not paint landscapes. He paints and draws the cityscapes of London, and he has been doing so for the last sixty years or so.

Recently he painted and drew a heroically decrepit cherry tree in an urban garden, but, generally speaking, nature is present almost by default. He is 86 years old now, and the most recent works in this show, a suite of drawings dated 2012, see him returning to Arnold Circus in Shoreditch, the locale of his childhood, much changed since his boyhood days as the son of a Jewish baker.

Kossoff is utterly besotted by London, and its physical metamorphoses. If the Blitz and its aftermath had not happened, Kossoff might just have been tempted to invent it. It's a smutty place, Kossoff's London, congested, seething, murky, messy, relentlessly itself, and usually rendered in a mixture of charcoal and pastel.

Just imagine the sight of his finger ends. He used to draw and paint it in a mood akin to frenzy, with ferocious slashings and wrigglings of marks. The colours were most often sombre - greys edging off to black. He has always loved architectural decrepitude, often seen from a fairly high

view point: gantries; a gasometer ; the demolition site; conventionally unlovely industrial locations; places between places; grubby edgelands.

Bridges fling themselves from one bank to another like a headlong flourish of muscle. In some of his best drawings, he has shown us railway tracks in the half-light peeling away from us into a kind of blurry nowhere. Or the silvery bullet nose of a train – like some wild apparition – speeding by the end of a garden, half hidden by a tree. His people are frenzied bit players, puppet-like often, utterly humdrum in appearance. They exist to prove to us that nothing ever stops or falters – at the market, in the riotously overcrowded swimming pool, outside Embankment underground station.

But in the last year something has changed a little. These late drawings of Arnold Circus are a little different in touch and mood. The atmosphere seems to have lightened, mellowed. These drawings of the green space at the circus's centre, its architectural features – flights of steps, a balustrade, a bandstand-like structure – feel almost harmonious. The drawings seem less pulverised into life. Perhaps Kossoff has reconciled himself somewhat to the idea that places change and change again, and that at a certain moment of ahness we find ourselves capable of registering that flow with a touch more serenity.