



THE TIMES

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first night

visual art

Walter Sickert

Piano Nobile, London

★★★★☆

Love and death are, said Walter Sickert, “the only two subjects of great art”. Except that, as this lovely exhibition, *Sickert: Love, Death & Ennui*, shows, he was particularly gifted at the expression of another.

Sickert’s “ennui” is the rarely depicted, ambiguous baseline state of humanity — neither joy nor despair, neither comfort nor fear. Here, in a show of 82 works (mostly prints and drawings anchored by a number of choice oil paintings) sex workers chat listlessly with their clients; men gaze, unmoved, from the cheap seats in the music hall rafters; a woman, wearing her hat, solemnly fries a rasher of bacon at a tiny gas hob in her bedsit.

The works come almost exclusively from the private American collection of Herbert and Ann Lucas. They are grouped mostly by subject, indicating just how ad hoc Sickert’s approach was. He’d come across a drawing 20 years later, decide to make a print from it and then often rework the plates between versions. The exhibition showcases those different variations. And it wasn’t just prints. The Lucas collection’s prize painting, *Ennui*, c1913-14, below, an image of a man, smoking glassy-eyed at his table, is a smaller, more loosely worked crop of a painting in the Tate collection.

In *Le Journal*, 1905-6, a startling close-up of a woman reading, you can see the slate grey ground over which he painted showing through, defining the modelling of her chin. Interesting and subtle, just like this little treat of a show.

Nancy Durrant

From Sep 26 to Dec 19

