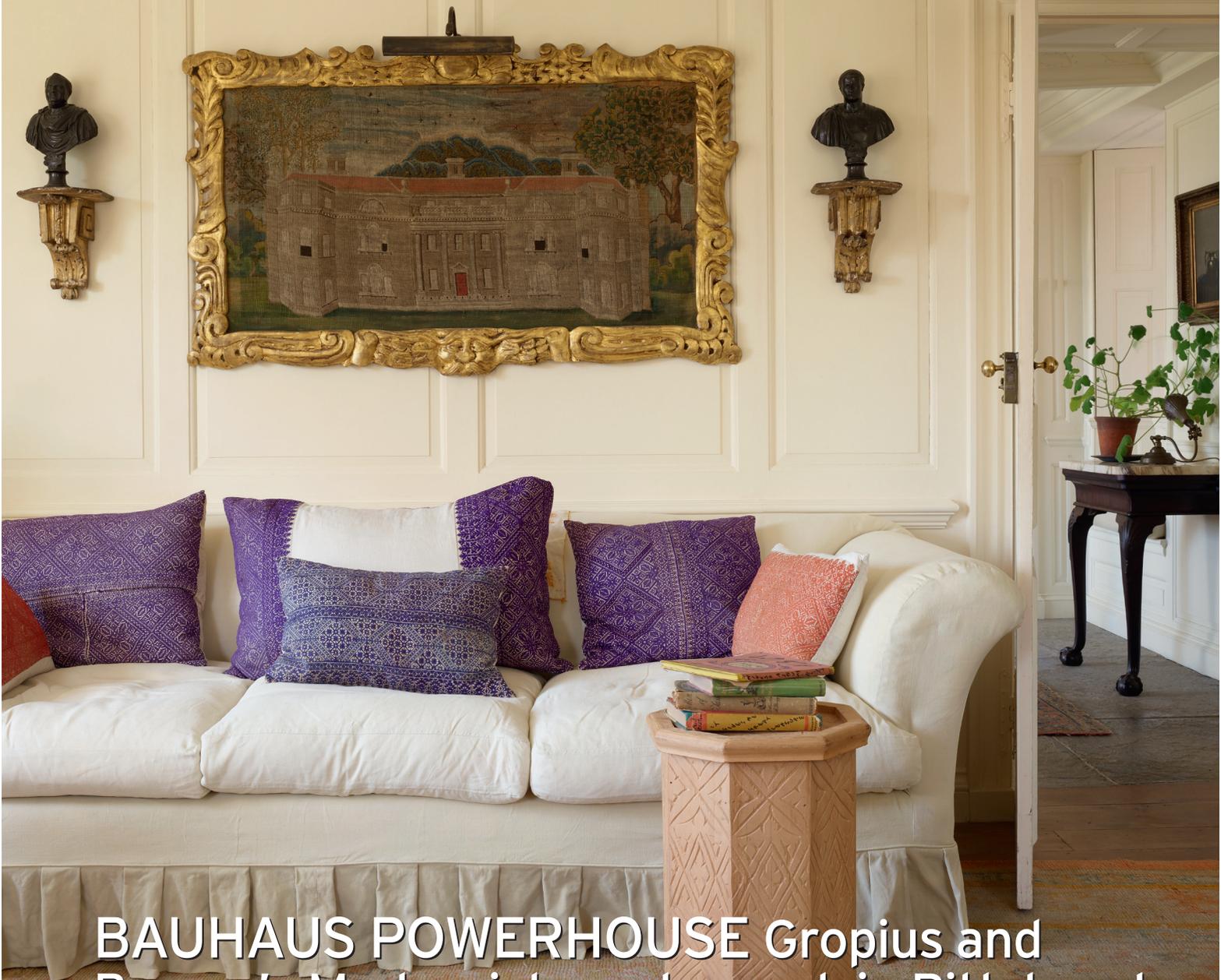


OCTOBER 2020

# THE WORLD OF INTERIORS

**IMPECCABLE MANOR** Jasper Conran  
finds timeworn perfection in Dorset



**BAUHAUS POWERHOUSE** Gropius and  
Breuer's Modernist masterwork in Pittsburgh  
**DECORATION SPECIAL**



## Emma Hart

THE SUNDAY PAINTER South Lambeth Rd, London SW8

A gallery provides a still and silent experience, a serene encounter with objects in an empty room. Somebody should tell Emma Hart. For this artist, the gallery is a stage for a cast of sculptures – talking birds, disembodied tongues, chatty speech bubbles – that engages the viewer in a raucous conversation.

Although Hart used to ply her trade as a photographer, she had been feeling increasingly frustrated with the medium when she came across the work of Oxford philosopher JL Austin (1911-60). Language, argued Austin, is not always a representation of the world, or a ‘propositional truth’, but offers instead a platform for speakers to *perform*. Austin’s notion of a ‘performative utterance’ provoked in Hart a desire to make work that isn’t a flat depiction of everyday experience but conjures it anew, with all its clamour and untidiness. She put aside photography for a dynamic, living art.

Since this Austin-prompted insight a decade ago, Hart has been on a roll. Her first sculptural installation, *To Do* (2011) at London’s Matt’s Gallery, featured half-camera, half-bird hybrids on tripods, all singing and squawking. A year later, a crucial encounter with the artist Jonathan Baldock introduced Hart to the possibilities of ceramics. Unveiling her new medium at Camden Art Centre, the 2013 exhibition *Dirty Looks* created a cacophony of sound, sculpture and image, including those long ceramic tongues.

And the presence of tongues tells us how important language is to the artist: class and cultural codes, and the slipperiness of meaning, everywhere from quiet museums to domestic settings. When she won the sixth Max Mara Art Prize for Women in 2016, the resulting exhibition at the Whitechapel Gallery featured pendant lamps in the shape of comic-book speech bubbles and ceiling fans with cutlery for blades. *Banger* at Edinburgh’s Fruitmarket (2018-19) introduced a new vocabulary of car windshields shattered into jagged abstraction, tunnels reflected in rear-view mirrors and spiralling steering wheels: a wacky road trip in elaborate ceramics.

Puns, both visual and linguistic, feature prominently in Hart’s work. At the Sunday Painter this autumn, a group of speech-bubble sculptures double as cartoonish portraits: the word ‘EXTRA’ fills one bubble, and the X becomes a closed eye, the bubble’s tail a nose, and the crimson A a downturned mouth. Other sculptures will be glazed with a lustrous, reflective surface, a new technique for the artist, and bring to mind round-headed characters gazing into hand-held mirrors. A similar mood enlivens works that resemble long, skinny arms holding up table-tennis paddles. Or are they more mirrors – or even shields? A group of megaphones, meanwhile, feature blank faces in the mouths of the horns. Everywhere Hart’s sculptures call out to the viewer, inviting us to reflect on the objects we use to amplify our voices or protect our egos. **EMMA HART: BE SOME BODY** runs 1 Oct-5 Dec, Wed-Sat 12-6 ■ CRAIG BURNETT is the author of *Philip Guston: The Studio* (Afterall)

