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Critics

Coins, no matter how defaced, start as pairs of art gold aureus, 40% of their face value. Right: trial photograph of Elizabeth II, 1936, and a coin minted in 1937, shortly before the king's abdication.



Two sides of the same coin

From beaky Roman emperors to Elizabeth II gone slightly wrong and banknotes by Joseph Beuys and Banksy, money and art are inextricably linked in this fascinating show

Critic of the year
Laura Cumming
Money Talks. Art, Society and Power
Abacus Books, 194pp, until 5 January 2025

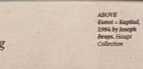
An exhibition that explores money through art. Centuries of money are depicted, and there are plenty of gold coins, but the focus is on the defaced banknotes of the Falkland Islands, the trial photograph of Elizabeth II, and a coin minted in 1937, shortly before the king's abdication. The show is a celebration of the intricate relationship between art and money, and how they have shaped each other over time. It is a must-see for anyone interested in art, money, or history.

Italian trips, would be translated by the French master into portrait of him, Vasquez and Verdel for his away home). But even there, no matter how defaced, start as pairs of art gold aureus, 40% of their face value. Right: trial photograph of Elizabeth II, 1936, and a coin minted in 1937, shortly before the king's abdication.

RIGHT Head of England (Edwards VIII) on the reverse of a gold aureus, 40% of their face value. Right: trial photograph of Elizabeth II, 1936, and a coin minted in 1937, shortly before the king's abdication.

Elizabeth II grows fatter, thinner, older, eyes more sunken or lowered depending where in the world you are

Elizabeth II grows fatter, thinner, older, eyes more sunken or lowered depending where in the world you are. This is a critical look at the monarch's image and how it has been manipulated by the media and the public. The text discusses the various ways in which the queen's image has been portrayed, from the traditional to the modern, and how these portrayals have shaped the public's perception of her.



Theatre

The Birthday Party
Theatre Royal, London
Until 18 August

Where Peter Strang's play is set in a small town in the north of England, the characters are a mix of the old and the new. The play is a study of the human condition, and how it is shaped by the forces of nature and society. It is a powerful and moving work of art, and a must-see for anyone interested in theatre.

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creeping into established traditions in any case. For the coins that were scheduled to enter production on 1 January 1937, were cancelled by the king's abdication on 10 December 1936. Only the trial coins were ever made, and then entirely lost for more than 30 years until someone discovered them sealed in a box inside a Royal Mint safe.

Artists do keep trying to infiltrate the currency, however, especially in Europe. Viennese secessionists such as Koloman Moser repeatedly try and fail to get their designs for art deco beauties with smouldering eyes on to every denomination of Austrian paper money in the 1900s. Joseph Beuys defaced banknotes with his signature and the slogan "Kunst = Kapital" in the 1980s. Of course his conceptual gambit didn't work because eagle-eyed Germans rapidly spotted the notes in circulation and sold them to collectors for a profit. Art = Capital has ever been a truism.

It is startling to learn that the so-called *Dressed Head* of Elizabeth II, as sculpted by Arnold Machin RA in 1966, is the most reproduced image in history (300bn copies to date). And here it is, the original

the safety right to wonder whether the move to virtual money will lessen this crownless portrait's impact.

Strange variations of Elizabeth II occur in different Commonwealth countries. Yousuf Karsh of Ottawa's famous portrait photograph is traduced into a long-nosed and slightly horse-faced queen on Canadian banknotes. She grows fatter, thinner, older, eyes more sunken or lowered depending where in the world you are, shifting from profile through three-quarters view until she appears full frontal on the Falkland Islands currency. Nearby, the curators have judiciously displayed Chris Levine and Rob Munday's equally frontal holographic queen with a faraway gaze, as if rising above or beyond the cares of office.

What appears on the back of your currency is a charming subplot in this unfolding story. In Bermuda, it is a blue martin, a whistling



a 2004 tenner.

Art loves money as political metaphor. There are tart deployments all through this show. The Brazilian artist Cildo Meireles used banknotes to transmit messages defiantly critical of the country's military dictatorship in the 1970s. Paula Stevens-Hoare stamped the likenesses of Marie Stopes, Rosalind Franklin and the engineers Sarah Guppy and Beatrice Shilling over the faces of men on Bank of England notes as a protest against the removal of the social reformer Elizabeth Fry from the £5 in 2016.

Sharpest of all is the Beninese artist Meschac Gaba's African market stall selling bundles of decommissioned banknotes. These went out with colonialism and are now gleefully worthless, except as flimsy souvenirs.

There is so much to learn – that the dollar sign is based on a Spanish colonial coin; that a goldfish is the symbol of wealth in China, in Sumatra the rice barn – that the art is very occasionally overshadowed by sheer knowledge. But this is a vivid and revelatory show throughout. And it ends as dramatically as it began, with a work of art made out of money: a Victorian-style dress by Susan Stockwell, literally stitched out of a wealth of colonial banknotes.

RIGHT Money Dress, 2010 by Susan Stockwell. Courtesy the artist and Patrick Heide Contemporary Art, London