



Above: Mat Collishaw, *Kristalnacht*, 2002, photograph, glass, acrylic, steel, light and fitting, 30.5 x 40.5cm. Its mesmerising quality reflects the mindless acquiescence of mob violence

THE CRYING GAME

Mat Collishaw

Cosmic Galerie, Paris
(00 33 1 42 71 72 73) to 7 Dec

Reviewed by Sophie L  ris

The visually seductive quality of Mat Collishaw's art is enriched by the physical beauty of this newly opened gallery, a 17th-century *hotel particulier*, rendering the content of the work especially shocking on closer inspection.

Kristalnacht, a series of pictures using photographs taken in 1938 when the Nazis destroyed the shops and houses of Berlin's Jewish community, seems at first to bear little relation to atrocities of any kind. A kaleidoscopic effect is created by neon lights shining from behind the pictures and passing through multi-coloured polarised lenses. The pictures, surrounded by ghostly white neon copies of traditional, ornate gilt frames, glister and sparkle, gently moving like those electric waterfall 'paintings' on sale in Brick Lane. Slowly, the realisation dawns that the near hypnotic state induced by these compelling pieces reflects the mindless acquiescence of mob violence. Superimposed over the photographs, groups of pulsating crystals are misleadingly beautiful; these little explosions of stone are, in fact, cold, hard and brutal.

By virtue of their size and visual impact, the most impressive pieces in the exhibition are the monumental

black-and-white mosaics with which you are faced on arrival. Seen through the window from the courtyard, a vast, simplistic image of a cat is oddly cute but, on entering the gallery, the full picture begins to emerge: the cat is wearing a crown made of taxidermist's tools and is in the process of being stuffed. Another mosaic portrays a classically beautiful woman crying subtle silver tears: she is actually an Indian villager whose life has been destroyed by a flood. A third is taken from a 1912 image of a man who has been castrated and hanged by a lynch mob in America's Deep South. A dark cloud hangs over him, caused in the original photograph by a leaking camera. But if the show is about cruelty and suffering, Collishaw wants us to enjoy our moments of knee-jerk sentimentality. As always, he is exploring the validity of our reaction to pathos, the sincerity of our empathy, and as always he does not judge, lacing his shocks with humour and humanity.

Downstairs, an ancient spinning wheel evokes childhood memories of *Sleeping Beauty* pricking her finger, but the movie that flickers through the spokes is of a girl injecting heroin.

The funniest work is a film in which Collishaw, hanging out of a hotel window, serenades a prostitute, singing "Love is All Around" in very bad French, as she tries, unsuccessfully to find a client. In retrospect, it's actually pretty sad.