

Facing History: Contemporary Portraiture

27 July – 24 April 2016

#ContemporaryPortraiture



This summer the V&A will present *Facing History: Contemporary Portraiture*, a display of 80 prints and photographs drawn from the V&A's collection that explores the variety of artists' responses to the idea of portraiture over the last 20 years. On display will be work by over 20 artists including Julian Opie, Grayson Perry, Thomas Ruff, Maud Sulter and Gavin Turk. Colour woodcuts and photographs will be shown alongside black and white etchings, cut paper silhouettes and bronze medals.

The display will highlight how contemporary artists have taken inspiration from traditional modes of portraiture such as portrait miniatures, medals and death masks. It will include a pair of prints, *Mr and Mrs Perry* (2005) by Grayson Perry which were inspired by pictures produced by amateur artists in the 19th century prior to the popularisation of photographic portraits. In creating the works, Perry imitated the crude style of such artists, using lino-cut on printed pattern papers.

Facing History: Contemporary Portraiture includes other self-referential pieces, such as Gavin Turk's *Portrait of Something that I'll Never Really See*; portraits of real individuals, as in Thomas Ruff's *Blue Eyes* series; and fictional characters in the work of Lynette Yiadom-Boakye. The subject for Brian D. Cohen's *Man with Eyes Closed (Walter White)* is both a character from the US television series *Breaking Bad* as well as actor Bryan Cranston who played him. The image echoes the style of a death mask, showing the face with closed eyes and a shaved head. Cohen draws on 'tronies', anonymous character heads painted by 17th and 18th century Dutch and Flemish artists.

The display will also examine the ways in which the portrait is used today in passport photographs and identity cards. Inspired by contemporary ID cards, Cecilia Mandrile's series *ID-Intensively Displaced* reflects the pressure on migrants to move from place to place. Mandrile photographs dolls in different surroundings with scant resources to explore current issues relating to migrancy.

The display shows how contemporary practitioners have also been inspired by artists who made a speciality of portraiture, including Frida Kahlo, Rembrandt and Vermeer. Eleven works from the series *Forty Fridas* (2011-12) by Ellen Heck will be included. These woodcut and drypoint prints portray different women dressed as Frida Kahlo, touching on ideas about identity, individuality and self-presentation.

The theme of the display was prompted by the acquisition of the series *Made Up Love Song* by Bettina von Zwehl, a previous V&A artist-in-residence. Taken in the style of silhouette portrait miniatures, the 34 photographs portray a V&A Visitor Services Assistant.

-ENDS-

Notes to Editors

- *Facing History: Contemporary Portraiture* will be shown at the V&A in gallery 88A, and gallery 90, The Julie and Robert Breckman Prints and Drawings Gallery, from 27th July 2015 – 24th April 2016 (Free Admission)
- *Made Up Love Song* by Bettina von Zwehl, is available from the V&A book shop, priced £10. Support for the publication of this book and the acquisition of the photographs came from the Friends of the V&A.
- The V&A is open daily from 10.00 to 17.45 and until 22.00 on Fridays

For further PRESS information please contact the Lily Booth in the V&A press office on 0207 942 2508 or email l.booth@vam.ac.uk. A selection of high resolution press images is available to download at <http://pressimages.vam.ac.uk>