

## A Riflemaker exhibition

STUART PEARSON WRIGHT

[www.riflemaker.org](http://www.riflemaker.org)

Monday 9 January - Wednesday 15 February

Artists Talk: Monday 16 January

Riflemaker: 79, Beak Street, W1F 9SU - 7439-0000 m:07792-706-494

Stuart Pearson Wright's second solo exhibition at Riflemaker features a series of meticulously-crafted works whose technical virtuosity flirts with high mannerism and heroic realism. The scene is set somewhere between Bow, Dagenham, Ancient Greece and William Shakespeare's Denmark.

Painting the human figure in an era when it was not always seen as a legitimate part of contemporary art, and a winner the BP Portrait Award (2001) aged just twenty-six, Wright (b. Northampton 1975) has spent much of his career attempting to subvert traditional portrait painting.

*"Stuart Pearson Wright's work is masterly and contemporary, as well as slightly unnerving and surreal"*

Sarah Howgate, contemporary curator, National Portrait Gallery, London

These new works emphasise the artist's pre-occupation with the motif of the smile and its traditional role in the history of portraiture as well as its use in advertising, popular culture and the mass media as a signifier of a successful life. His work explores the process of transformation which takes place both privately and publicly when a camera is pointed at a subject and what the artist describes as "the collective, hysterical conspiracy to appear happy which blights our visual world with endless images of disingenuousness".

Wright argues that adult consciousness and experience is rooted in a feeling of melancholy. The smile has evolved to convey an unfortunate sense of fakeness and insincerity. In spite of these notions, the artist's obvious enjoyment of the sheer sensuality of paint and surface coupled with an undeniable empathy towards his subjects mean that the exhibition avoids an overall sense of cynicism.

Included is a sub-series of tattoo-portraits. The subjects of these paintings were

sought out by the artist and chosen for the way in which they represent a number of pre-existing old-school archetypes such as the strongman, the tattooed lady, the Coney Island freak-show performer and the rockabilly hepcat. However, Wright's powers of observation as a reluctant portraitist circumnavigate these familiar characters to create genuinely moving and perceptive portraits of real individuals.

The works are presented in neo-baroque frames which have been hand-sculpted in jesmonite by the artist. The painting's luxurious surfaces are peppered with real diamonds, precious stones and metals, pearls, real hair, make-up, sequins and glitter.

Stuart Pearson Wright has exhibited at the National Portrait Gallery, the Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool, The Geffrye Museum and Jerwood Space, London. His work is included in the collections of the British Museum, Government Art Collection, the Rhode Island School of Design Museum USA, and the Barings Bank collection, Brussels.

## THE PAINTINGS

In 'Together In Electric Dreams', Keira Knightley waits in a sodium-lit, Lynchian backstreet. Her mascara is running down her cheek, her self-conscious and unlikely hand-on-hip pose reminiscent of a knitting-pattern cover. We are entering SPW's world, where vaudevillian melodrama and high camp rub shoulders with a feeling of suburban unease. A dark, underlying melancholia surrounds the subject.

'Self-Portrait as the Bard' casts SPW in a parody of Shakespeare's Hamlet during his *Alas Poor Yorick* speech. Role-play and self-parody are a continuing theme in SPW's work and this painting brings to mind the series of self-portraits-as-cowboys that peppered his previous exhibition.

'Teardrops Can Never Drown the Flame' evokes the moment where Snow White wakes up in the forest, surrounded by animals. Snow White is here replaced by a resplendent naked woman, tears made of real pearls rolling down her cheeks.

SPW employs the air-brushed aesthetic and disingenuous tone of *Hello* Magazine and applies it to a sardonic panoply of smiling, blonde, female pseudo-portraits. The repetition of the smile motif generates a sense of hysterical disquiet: a collective, empty rictus.

The paintings reflect the artist's concern with the masks people wear, the way they

like to be seen and the artifice they employ to convince us of that. Everyday gestures and expressions are scripted and performed and our lives lived in quotation marks.

Riflemaker: 79, Beak Street, London W1F 9SU 0207-439-0000

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Exhibitions:

NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY 'Most People Are Other People' (2006)

RIFLEMAKER: 'I Remember You' (2010)