

Reviews by Don Grant

Painting © Bob Dylan



Again, there are a number of portraits of this Yankee in the Gallery, which does seem to buck the trend, but Bob's portraits aren't of Americans - they aren't even of anybody. They are all fictitious, amalgams of half-remembered faces, or from magazines, or his imagination. There are 12 very similar portraits in all, each identical in size and frame, each done in black pastel with sanguine smudged into the cheeks and lips and each one is given a made-up name with a play on words using 'face' - *Face the Music: Ray Bridges* and *Face Facts: Ivan Steinbeck*, etc. Once one knows that they aren't 'real' people, the dozen portraits disappoint, as one doesn't know how good they are, which the mild gripe is. Some bring to mind someone we might recognise, but then it evaporates and we are left with nothing. If he had done Nina Felix or Leonard Cohen, or even Al Pacino, then we would know for sure that Dylan was a good artist, or not. It shouldn't really matter, as he has established himself as one of the greatest musicians of his age, and, although times may be a-changing at the NPG in terms of trying to attract a hipper audience, it is just a bit of gentle fun about which no-one should get blue in the face.

Jonathan Yeo Portraits

National Portrait Gallery
Until 5 January 2014
020 7306 0055

Painting © Jonathan Yeo



Going to Jonathan Yeo's new show at the NPG is a bit like flicking through the social pages of a glossy magazine. Sienna Miller rubs shoulders with Grayson Perry as Claire, Rupert Murdoch, looking very unlike a media tycoon and Dennis Hopper, while Stephen Fry vies for prominence with Kevin Spacey as Richard III and Nicole Kidman. The subjects are the movers and shakers of the day, although Tony Blair and Prince Philip also get a look-in. Yeo's style is figurative, with few frills, although the large painting of Hirst has him sitting in an aquarium wearing a deep-sea diver's suit, which was probably a good joke at the time, but we are stuck with it. Michael Parkinson is seen as an avuncular figure with a benign smile, while Helena Bonham-Carter is portrayed as a slightly bonkers beauty, with a stovepipe hat. The portrait of *Girl Reading* is of the Pakistani girl, Malala Yousafzai, who was shot in the head by the Taliban while she was campaigning for girls to have the right to study and attend school in her own country. This shocking act backfired on the ossified and antediluvian Taliban, as she now stands on the world stage and was able to bring her plight, and those of thousands of other girls, to the United Nations, who recently awarded her with the International Children's Peace Prize. After the exhibition Yeo's fine portrait will be sold to raise money for the Malala Fund, which supports the fight for girls' rights to education.

Amongst all the celebrities in this small, but perfectly-formed, exhibition is that of a bespectacled, small, but perfectly-formed, Jonathan Yeo himself.

Richard Wilson - No Formulas

CHELSEAspace
16 Islip Street, SW1 4JU
Until 26 October 2013

Donald Smith, Director of Exhibitions, was heard to say a few months ago, 'Hang on a minute lads, I've got a great idea . . . why don't we get Richard Wilson to have a one-man show at CHELSEAspace in September?'

Those who made it down to the De La Warr Pavilion in Bexhill on Sea last year, would have possibly noticed a 1960s coach balancing on the roof of Erich Mendelsohn and Serge Chermayeff's iconic building. It was a witty response to the last line said by Michael Caine in the film *The Italian Job* when the coach containing the stolen gold bullion skids off the road and is left swaying over a precipice.

Using the Grade 1 Listed modernist pavilion was quite a coup, but it goes to show what a revered sculptor Richard

Installation © Richard Wilson



Wilson is. He first came to my attention with his installation entitled *20:50* (referring to the grade of viscosity of oil) at the Saatchi Gallery in Boundary Road in 1987, which comprised a tank filled with sump oil, the perfect reflection giving the impression that the room had been turned upside-down. It is now on permanent display at the Saatchi Gallery in Duke of York's Square.

The exhibition is made up of sketches, models and photographs of some of his projects, and includes the extraordinary *Turning the Place Over*, made for the Liverpool Biennial, where a circular piece of the building spins around and literally turns inside out in a two minute cycle. As it is above Yates's Wine Lodge, customers may be forgiven for thinking they might have over-imbibed. Three days before the exhibition opened Wilson's latest project *1513: A Ship's Opera* a large scale performance work with Zatorski & Zatorski on the River Thames using nine historic vessels, bells and whistles, horns, and even firing HMS Belfast's 4" and 6" guns for the first time since the Second World War.

His current project, though not represented in this show, is being installed at the present time, and, when completed, will be the longest sculpture in Europe - it is a 70m long aluminium piece called *Slipstream* and replicates the flight of a stunt plane's volume through space, using aerospace computer programming technology and is in the recently renovated Terminal 2 Building at Heathrow, due to open next year. Weighing in at 70 tonnes, it is suspended 20m above the ground, between two passenger walkways.

May Richard Wilson long challenge our preconceptions of space.

A London Year
Compiled by Travis Elborough
and Nick Rennison
Frances Lincoln £25. 608 pp.
ISBN 978-0-7112-3449-9

Imagine a book that contains entries by such diverse people from Alan to Arnold Bennett, Ossie to Alan Clark and from John Evelyn to Evelyn Waugh, all writing in their diaries and journals about London, from Tudor times to the present day, then look no further. With more than 200 writers, with a short biography for each, this tome, at over 600 pages, warrants the descriptor. It is overflowing with pithy, scurrilous, poetic and witty words from the most famous diarist of all time, Sam Pepys, to the youngest, Dickson Edwards, who has kept an online diary since 1997. Another 'youngster' is Clayton Littlewood, who writes about 'the ebb and flow of Soho life' with a sharp pencil and an unflinching gaze. One of our Living National Treasures, Alan Bennett, can be relied on to write down the most seemingly mundane exchange, which then becomes something of immense import - 'I am buying daffodils in a shop in Camden High Street. An oldish woman asks for some violets, but they aren't quite fresh. "Never mind," she explains. "I only want to throw them



down a grave." Each day of the year has up to four entries, and there is pretty much a *bon mot* on every page, although some extracts are rather ponderous. In 1977, Kenneth Williams wrote, somewhat

waspishly in his diary: 'At 8 o'clock I walked to the National Theatre - it's like a terrible municipal housing estate and is nothing to do with the theatre'. Over 35 years on, the controversy about the NT building still simmers (see p. 38)

London Villages

By Zena Alkayet
Frances Lincoln

£9.99. 192 pp. Paperback

This is really a book for Farrow and Ball-imbued estate agents, as they are ones who seem to re-create these so-called villages, to make certain areas of the capital sound more exclusive and, indeed, attractive. Certainly London comprised a number of little communities that slowly joined up to create one big conurbation, with a few outlying villages, like Chelsea, lasting until the 1870's, when the embankment was built, as separate hamlets. This is a book to make the 'villagers' feel better about themselves. It is crammed with photographs that would make the World of Interiors feel smug, showing the very best of 'village life', with delivery bikes, cute shop fronts and artisans hard at work.