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Sample Portfolio | Arts

### **Portraits From The Bottom Up | 2013**

Published by Ohh Deer

Whatever your thoughts are on London's Frieze Art Fair – arguably the pinnacle of the capital's art diary – this infamous week dedicated to international art, unquestionably provides wonderful spectacles in abundance. Cynics will attest that the event has mutated into a millionaire's playground where the currency of celebrity dinner table-talk commands the estimated £1 billion of artwork that was up for sale across auction houses and satellite fairs. If you're like me and simply enjoy the visual stimulation of art world dynamics then there is no place like London in October.

For the 358 days when this cultural circus is not in town, the publishing art platform Other Criteria provides an accessible exhibition programme of artworks by both British and established international artists. On the eve of Frieze I went along to the opening of Brit duo Tim Noble and Sue Webster. Their latest 'body' of work made up the exhibition *Portraits from the Bottom Up* situated at Other Criteria's New Bond Street outpost. Noble and Webster have carved a celebrated practice of transformative art since 1996 with fanciful assemblages and projected light shadow installations akin to sideshows from a bygone era. They combine form and anti-form to create unexpected visuals around themes of portraiture, psychology and humour. Meticulous and dramatic in their execution, the contradictory aesthetics of mounds of waste, sex toys or mummified animals fused together to produce self-portraits in silhouette (revealed by a beam of light) are perversely stunning. The new series of work showcased in *Portraits from the Bottom Up* is the result of a residency the artists undertook in the Caribbean. Webster confesses, "Unfortunately this idyll rendered us impotent and we retracted back into our darkened room and turned to our bodies for inspiration."

The collection of monoprints (*Black Bottoms*) and bronzes on display, from which the exhibition takes its name, lie firmly in connotative waters, with the artists casting their own shadows; using their bodies as human printing presses. They print their bottoms (cue full moon innuendo) and cast their nipples and arseholes, repositioning them to resemble a face with eyes and a mouth (remarkably charming). Tribal in their making yet ironic in their innocence, Noble and



Webster successfully explore notions of intimacy, identity, consumerism, perception and science – this is where the Rorschach technique meets rumpology. The exhibition is one of pairings: Noble and Webster; man and woman; the playful and the obscene.

I figured the artists must have felt the exhibition would not be complete without toilet humour. On sale are *Wipe That Grin Off Your Face* toilet paper rolls designed with a portrait of the collaborators grinning affectionately on every sheet. Perhaps a printed umbrella would have also been a welcome addition from the torrent of puns flying around the gallery. Who was the butt of the joke on? The shrewd and subversive Noble and Webster? The hungry consumer trading in cultural currency via the guest toilet? Or both? What is certain is this sort of debate makes for exemplary dinner table talk and I'd happily drink to that. Bottoms up!

*Portraits from the Bottom Up* by Tim Noble and Sue Webster is on show until 20th November 2013 at Other Criteria, 36 New Bond Street, London W1U 3BG.

Image: Tim Noble & Sue Webster 2013

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### Ker-Chin-Chin | 2013

Wine collectors will already regard their cellars as a gallery of fine taste equal to any art collection, however collectors may want to keep Dom Pérignon's 2003 Rosé Vintage above ground. The prestigious champagne house has invited Jeff Koons to produce a limited edition collaboration package that includes a scaled down version of his 2008 sculpture *Balloon Venus*, inspired by the ancient fertility statue Venus of Willendorf. The voluptuous vessel, exaggerated by Koons's trademark inflatable aesthetic is anything but understated and the same can be said for its price tag – at \$20,000 this is Dom Pérignon's most expensive collaboration to date, after David Lynch, Andy Warhol, Karl Lagerfeld and Marc Newson. The iconic bottle's label and foiling mirrors that of its presentation box in metallic majenta – a nod to its rosé interior.



This is not of course Koons's first foray into the cellar – in 2010 Baroness Philippine de Rothschild continued the annual tradition since 1945 at the winery of Baron Philippe de Rothschild to commission an artist to design the label for its Château Mouton Rothschild bottles. Koons joined Picasso, Dali, Freud, Bacon and Warhol in this exclusive club with a reworking of the classical fresco image from Pompeii of yet another Venus - the House of the Venus Marina III - superimposed with an infantile silver line drawing of a sun and sailing boat. Château Mouton Rothschild 2010 remains one of the most expensive of the Moutons from the winery's vintage from Pauillac over the last decade and is sought after by wine and art connoisseurs alike.

This latest luxury association with an art world grandee is somewhat of a first with regards to its price bracket, inevitably posing the question: is Dom Pérignon's 2003 Rosé Vintage the most expensive champagne in one's cellar or is *Balloon Venus* the most accessible Jeff Koons one can collect? Whatever camp it lies, Dom Pérignon affirms the high-culture-formula to be much more than a trend in recent years but an essential staple in a brand's heritage and a profitable identity strategy that justifies larger than life price tags, and in this instance, larger than life lifestyles. For when money is no object, why not have one *Balloon Venus* in the cellar and the other on display upstairs. *Chin-chin* to the best of both worlds.

Dom Pérignon's *Balloon Venus* by Jeff Koons is now available in select stores.  
Image: Jeff Koons 2013

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## In Fine Style | 2013

For its latest exhibition the Royal Collection explores the sumptuous costume of British monarchs and their court during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The Queen's Gallery at Buckingham Palace has previously hosted celebrated exhibits such as *Leonardo da Vinci: Anatomist* and *Renaissance* works from Northern Europe – all of which are in no short supply in what is one of the finest, and oldest, comprehensive art collections in the world.

With over sixty paintings, drawings, garments, armour, jewellery and accessories on display, *In Fine Style: The Art of Tudor and Stuart Fashion* documents the evolving avant-garde tastes of both royalty and the elite in England and across the Continent. Speaking with me at a Bloggers' Breakfast preview, the exhibition's curator, Anna Reynolds explained the Royal Collection's new agenda for The Queen's Gallery as a cultural destination for all interests – akin to its London counterparts such as the Victoria & Albert Museum and Somerset House. Given the collection's vastness of in-house content and context, traditional and academic themes have tended to be favoured over more popular avenues such as fashion, which incorrectly assumes superfluous and solely superficial status in comparison. What has been the culmination of three years of research *In Fine Style* is by no means art-lite. The exhibition is a first for the Royal Collection on several counts: it is the first time it has looked at fashion in portraiture; the first time objects have been loaned to the collection, breaking with longstanding curatorial mandate, and the very first time a playlist has been commissioned to accompany the exhibit. Anna proudly describes the collaborative, and eclectic, direction she has successfully achieved – working with The Blackborne Lace Collection at The Bowes Museum to XFM DJ and musician Eddy Temple-Morris and international fashion designer Gareth Pugh – to create a multi-sensory experience of fashion as spectacle as well as its depiction through art, bridging the historic with the contemporary.

As the first monarch to embrace fashion in court, Henry VIII welcomes visitors into the space by way of his potent portrait by Joos van Cleve. Power was woven into the construct of fashion and there is no better royal than the second monarch from the Tudor dynasty to set the tone of the exhibition in all its rich, allegorical splendour. The meeting between Henry VIII and Francis I of France in 1520 in Balinghem, near Calais, was a dazzling installation by both royal courts to outshine one another using unimaginable quantities of elaborate gold cloth - woven with silk and gold thread - for costumes and the erection of temporary palaces. The monarchs had enforced so much attention to flamboyancy and presentation that the meeting place took the name, *Field of the Cloth of Gold*, due to its impressive execution and scale, to which this portrait is suggested to commemorate. This is a fine example of the roles fashion and taste played in communicating wealth and status – important aspects of Tudor life that can be traced down to Princess Elizabeth I and Prince Edward VI, painted by William Scrots, who flank their Father and join members of the Tudor court illustrated by Hans Holbein the Younger. Entry to the royal inner circle, which directly granted political and professional upward mobility, had been largely driven by personal appearance and the cut, cloth, colour and composition of garments and accessories became sartorial symbols of success for both sexes.

In the knowledge that the exhibition has 'fashion' in its title, it certainly triggers one's attention to the cuffs, ruffs, pattern, pleating, jewels, hats and hairstyles that command equal weight with the historical significance of the canvas within this specific context like never before. *In Fine Style* questions the extent of the artists' execution of representing fashion as the genuine article or an interpretation for canvas as not to detract from the subject. This idea of painting as a reliable source is raised in works by Sir Peter Lely who controlled his aesthetic by adapting the sitters' attire. One of the exhibition's highlights is a lace cloak band, or

collar, reputed to have belonged to Charles I on loan from The Blackborne Lace Collection. The finely embroidered needle lace of linen thread is an exquisite example of technique as well as preservation of its rarity. Its allure is greatly magnified as it stands aside Sir Anthony van Dyck's enduring triple portrait of the monarch, with only the glass display case separating its contents from canvas with an almost identical representation in form and design of the cloak band, depicted to be worn by the monarch in his profile to the right. A pair of late-seventeenth century embroidered velvet mules are looked on by their owner Henrietta Maria, wife of Charles I, in a nearby painting also by van Dyck. The dainty heeled shoes that were invented in France to project one's social standing find themselves in an installation of extremes between the feminine and androgynous as can be seen in the portraits of cover girl for the exhibition, Frances Stuart, in dress and soldier costume – painted by Lely and Jacob Huysmans respectively. Simon Verelst's portrait of Mary of Modena in a masculine-inspired riding habit also plays with notions of androgyny, the practicality of feminine attire and in this instance, a symbol of her marriage to the Duke of York who wore a similar coat design at their wedding in 1673.

The low hanging installation of paintings is a triumph of intimacy between viewer and canvas. Fashion enthusiasts will no doubt be in their element when confronted with the intricate patterns of stitching or formation of pearls in oil paint and the minute brush strokes that form the illusion of crisp white ruffs that alone would have cost the equivalent of between £10,000 and £20,000 in today's money. The detail however can admittedly be overwhelming – even after five centuries, this is a testament to precisely what the royal court intended to achieve in its day. In addition to a video interview with fashion designer Gareth Pugh who points to Elizabeth I as inspiration for many of his collections in his East London studio, the free multimedia guide also provides an excellent escape from up-close examination with a twelve-track playlist curated by XFM DJ Eddie Temple-Morris. In response to a selection of paintings that are featured in the exhibition, music by contemporary artists have been chosen to complement the works of art and introduce a unique visitor experience walking within the gilded setting that is The Queen's Gallery. Some song titles easily link track to image – William Dobson's painting of Charles II in armour is paired with Reso's *War Machine* and van Dyck's triple portrait of Charles I with *Angles* by dan le sac Vs Scroobius Pip. More abstract selections come in the form of Lana del Ray's *Blue Jeans* hit remixed by Maribou State that reflects the ethereal score with the ethereal beauty of Frances Stuart. I particularly enjoyed Temple-Morris's choice of Dubstep in Nero's *Innocence* selected for the magnificent portrait of Charles I's three eldest children by van Dyck. In 1635 the young Prince Charles had come of age and therefore wears a golden doublet and breeches to display his loss of innocence, in contrast to the tradition of young boys, as depicted by his younger brother who wears a skirt. The 2010 release crescendos to a sense of foreboding that not only echoes the young Prince's imminent future as King, but the state of the country during the English Civil War and subsequent execution of these children's Father in 1649.



Armour's design and styling on the battlefield directly copied fashionable tastes of the time, often with detail found on expensive fabric being replicated in metal through engraving and with additions to produce a highly decorative surface in silver and gilt. An extraordinary

display links a miniature of Henry, Prince of Wales by Nicholas Hilliard at the age of thirteen wearing a suit of armour dating from early-seventeenth century France. The same armour, or *Cuirassier*, that Hilliard illustrates can be found adjacent in all its intricate beauty and attention to detail that strikes an image of pure physical strength of the young prince.

In the final room of the exhibition, Continental tastes are explored as closer relationships are formed between the European courts. On the Continent, fashionable styles were closely linked to political power – Spain's strong influence coincided with its political dominance across much of Europe in the sixteenth century that was later to be succeeded by France's supremacy in both politics and fashion under the rule of Louis XIV from the court of Versailles. The English were viewed as chameleons, adopting different elements of costume from Europe as a result of greater circulation of prints and portraiture. It was not until Charles II's reign that a notion of Englishness, portrayed directly through fashion, developed in the eyes of Europe: introducing the precursor of the men's three-piece suit and abandoning a short doublet and cloak for a long vest and coat – a trend the diarist Samuel Pepys could not resist to replicate. On display are portraits that demonstrate the links and distinctions across Europe that include mirror images of Prince Rudolf and his brother, Archduke Ernest of Austria wearing replica fashions painted by Spanish court artist, Alonso Sánchez Coello and the subtly divine costume of Agatha Bas by Rembrandt van Rijn.

Fashion is one of very few facets in history that is able to communicate without words by means of a visual and tactile language. When discussing royal fashion, it is impossible not to mention the phenomena of style that has accumulated throughout the centuries to the present House of Windsor who receive fanatical dissection from head to toe. While technology may have opened up the once-exclusive royal wardrobe of material and styles, personal expression through fashion is just as powerful today as it was in Tudor England. From Victorian romanticism to a dapper Duke of Windsor; a colour-conscious Queen Elizabeth II followed by a furlong of hats and fascinators in her reign, to the most recent obsession with the fashionably accessible Duchess of Cambridge. *In Fine Style* presents an impressive formula for future curation: in an age when modern monarchy is *seen* and *not heard*, it will be their costumes that historians will look to for invaluable messages of evolving identity to expose the social and cultural influences of epochs past, present and future.

*In Fine Style: The Art of Tudor and Stuart Fashion* is on exhibit at The Queen's Gallery, Buckingham Palace until 6th October 2013.

Image: Royal Collection Ltd 2012

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## A Portrait Of A Duchess | 2013

It was the morning after the media furore as I walked up St Martin's Place to the scene of much debate and criticism. While the press pack had come and gone only the day before, my Twitter feed on Saturday morning continued to show virtual commentary on the Royal state of affairs that was the first official painted portrait of Her Royal Highness The Duchess of Cambridge. "It's just amazing..." said The Duchess to Paul Emsley, the award-winning Scottish painter who took brush to canvas for the Royal commission by the National Portrait Gallery, of which The Duchess is Patron.

With less than twenty-four hours since its official unveiling, it was a surprisingly quiet Saturday morning in Room 36 with only a handful of visitors standing face to face with the larger than life profile. Kate shares the space with the neo expressionist style of Paula Rego portraying Germaine Greer, the awkward repose of Thomas Adès by Phil Hale; John Keane's bright strokes of Mo Mowlam and the requisite Royal military presence in neighbour, Lance Corporal Beharry from the Prince of Wales Regiment, in the illustrative style of Emma Wesley. The darkest canvas of them all, Emsley's style of restrained oil application and glazing is in contrast to the liberal and fluid gestures that surround it. 'The singularity and silence of form' is how the artist describes his use of dark backgrounds – pair this with a limited colour palette of blues and greys, the result is certainly silent and perhaps misjudged

for a young subject who only turned thirty this very week. Light, an element Emsley has gained recognition in capturing with his photorealist BP Portrait Award in 2007, has refracted into an unattractive haze that has unfortunately gifted her both unnecessary age and formality. Closing in on the canvas equally disappoints – no revelations are unearthed and the rather mottled skin tones that have had blue tones picked out from other areas in a hopeful attempt at depth, fall quite literally flat on The Duchess's face. With only two sittings and a series of photographs taken by the artist himself, in a press release published by St James's Palace Emsley explains how Kate wished to be portrayed 'naturally' as opposed to her 'official self'. How then *naturally* translated into *soft focus* is a curiosity, however the amount of detail that has been dedicated to her hair and cascading locks – a feature that is globally scrutinized and which the artist surprisingly stresses its importance as being 'strong' and 'recognisable' in a trailer for the National Portrait Gallery - has been executed with such staging and minute attention through a spectrum of grey and luminous copper hues; detail that has been starved from anywhere else across the visage. I found myself transfixed on the unusually defined right eyebrow that somehow escaped this soft focus – a distraction that would have been welcomed in the eyes that suffer from icy up lighting. And so to the mouth: does Emsley's notification that it turned from unsmiling to smiling contribute any more or less to my understanding? He only confirms Kate is in fact smiling, albeit enigmatically. In the words of my esteemed friend and artist Ana Cavic, "is she the Mona Lisa?", a question that may be on the lips of art historians forevermore.

It is however not entirely *off with his head* for Emsley. While he is the executioner, he is not alone for critical execution. It is reported that Kate was involved with choosing Emsley with the help of National Portrait Gallery Director, Sandy Nairne. Include the countless correspondence between palace and institution it would have been undoubtedly a daunting prospect for the new Royal. Yet given the strong signals that both Kate and her husband, Prince William have worked hard at expressing - that of a young, informal, changing face of the House of Windsor - the definitively conservative choice in artist and image is frustrating. *The Sloane Ranger returneth* is a message that instantly came to mind as I viewed the portrait, exposing another misjudgment on the part of Kate's Royal advisors, or lack of if reports are to be believed. The Duchess's choice of a navy blue pussybow blouse, made famous by former Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, teamed with heirloom earrings, present not only a potentially loaded composition but a stiff and detached icon of twenty-first century Britain through in an irrelevant Eighties filter. Also to be noted are the blouse's sleeves that expose a possible amendment from their sleeveless state in the artist's original photographs, which on canvas display very little effort to unify blouse with sleeve. If *Austerity Duchess* were the intentions du jour of Kate and company then this equally falls flat with delusion. Emsley and the club of traditional portrait artists command far greater amounts for this formal style of work than an emerging contemporary talent, which in my opinion would have been a far suitable choice - if not only for style, but also for substance. A graduate from London's many fine art schools such as The Royal Academy or The Slade School of Fine Art, of which aspiring artists from around the world fight for student places, would have been a refreshing and powerful statement against the inevitability of Royal protocol.

What hangs in Room 36 is a portrait engulfed in safety and unexpected dullness of one of the most photographed women in the world. It is a pity an artist, who may have delved into allegorical integration or played with personality through colour or set design, was not elected. As for the choice of frame – a very plain silver number – unsurprisingly has invited damning comparisons to portraits that may be found in establishments on the British high street: a first in the comparison archives for Royal portraiture to date. Emsley will now have to accept his portrait of The Duchess of Cambridge will eclipse his more celebrated works. For Kate, an alumnus of history of art, her first painted portrait now joins its very timeline and with Prince William, their duty as future King and Queen will consist of a whole life ahead of them with portraits and various immortalizations in the name of State and institution. In her early years as a new member of the Royal Family and a time that precedes the imminent birth of her first child, she may have wanted to be reminded of this special occasion in a different light in years to come: when she really is old and grey.

*HRH The Duchess of Cambridge* is on display at the National Portrait Gallery, London from 11th January to 1st September 2013.

The King of Pop Art, Andy Warhol once said, "I want to be as famous as the Queen of England". Since the American artist's death in 1987, countless retrospectives and iconic auctions of his trademark technicolour screen prints have travelled around the world, entering the public and private collections of the most powerful and popular personalities in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Contemporary culture continues to not only reference Warhol's trademark aesthetic but also his intuitive prediction of the phenomenon that is celebrity today, coining the *fifteen minutes of fame* expression in 1968, "In the future, everyone will be world-famous for fifteen minutes".

If there is anyone who is to defy fifteen minutes, or fame for that matter, it is the Queen of England. Presidents, dictators and actors have come and gone, however it has been Queen Elizabeth II who has surpassed Warhol's eclectic global subjects: way beyond fifteen minutes, eighty six years and counting, of which sixty have been to serve her country. In an era when it has been possible for artists, namely Damien Hirst, to become as wealthy as the Queen, it is the untouchable allure of Monarchy that transcends time and remains an inspiration for artists throughout history past, present and most likely future. Hirst is regularly likened to Warhol in practice and panache. Should Warhol have been alive today, Hirst would undoubtedly have some competition on both art and rich list charts, but more importantly he would realize he had achieved the levels of fame akin to the British Monarch. One thing that he may not have predicted was that the person he wanted to be as famous as would one day also be his collector.

In the year that marks her Diamond Jubilee, this September The Royal Collection acquired a series of four screen prints of the Queen by Warhol. The four portraits on paper - edition 14 of 30 from Warhol's *Royal Edition* - were reworked from the Queen's official Silver Jubilee photograph in 1977 by Peter Grurgeon and form part of the portfolio *Reining Queens*, which include Queen Beatrix of the Netherlands, Queen Margrethe II of Denmark and Queen Ntombi laTfwala of Swaziland. Executed with a spectrum of colourways and sprinkled with fine particles of cut glass, known as 'diamond dust', the glittering purchase of Warhol's work for The Royal Collection - property of the Monarch as Sovereign, held in trust for the British nation - signifies the conscious acceptance of the adage that has been synonymous of late with the House of Windsor: changing times. Joining the exclusive and spectacular roll call of artists from Holbein to van Dyck, da Vinci and Rubens, Royal Librarian at The Royal Collection, Lady Jane Roberts explains,

"The Warhol prints are in many ways the most important popular image of the Queen to be created by an artist print maker over the last few decades."



The new works are on exhibit for the first time since their acquisition alongside select images by Beaton, Freud, Rankin and Leibovitz as well as a host of society photographers and international portrait artists as part of the exhibition, *The Queen: Portraits of a Monarch*, at Windsor Castle to commemorate the anniversary of the Queen's Coronation next year. Charting the very first photograph of the Queen after her accession, taken by Dorothy Wilding, to subsequent official and Jubilee portraits commissioned by state and institution, the exhibition consists of works from different Royal residences and presents the image of a woman - a fact society seems to forget when erratic waves of feminist absence stir - whose face and expression has been captured in various sittings and moments in time; for canvas, coins, bank notes and postage stamps.

The addition of Warhol to the collection in this landmark year for Monarchy makes for quite the fairytale: a Queen-to-be and the son of Slovak American-dreamers, born within two years

of each other, both conscious of one another in the public eye and yet leading polar opposite lives across the Atlantic, now come to share the exceptional historical status in both word and image. The conceptual process of repeat that the artist pioneered in the mid-fifties now resides under the Wyattville-designed ceiling of a woman whose very own face has been the most repeated image to date.

Pop Art's message is often lost by its unashamedly superficial surface and familiarity with the language of advertising, however it is a movement that manipulates and exposes the everyday to new narratives for social reflection and its inherent nature of colour and repetition remains a potent product in demand across creative markets. *The Queen: Portraits of a Monarch* is a refreshing display in contrast to the more traditional exhibitions that are sourced from the collection's vast archives for the gothic gallery space at Windsor Castle. Consisting of a variety of mediums and expressions, each with their own individual story, the exhibition complements The Royal Collection's permanent installation in the State Apartments and reminds visitors that the story of British culture and identity is living and breathing - beyond *fifteen* minutes, years, decades and centuries.

I'm sure The Andy Warhol Foundation – whose original collection is currently being auctioned to fund future expansion for the Visual Arts across America – feel a sense of pride that their founder's dream posthumously came true.

*The Queen: Portraits of a Monarch* is part of a visit to Windsor Castle and runs from 23rd November 2012 to 9th June 2013.  
Image: Royal Collection Ltd 2012

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## **Street Dance | 2012** Published by Candid Magazine

Elegant, poised and seemingly still, a new member has joined the cast of street performers in London's historic Covent Garden. While many made-up, foiled or glittering creations vie for your attention at eye-level, this performer commands an elevated view on the corner of Bow and Russell Street. I am of course referring to the celebrated artist Yinka Shonibare, MBE's public art commission by the Royal Opera House earlier in the summer as part of the London 2012 Festival.

*Globe Head Ballerina* contributes to Shonibare's growing repertoire of public art after the Fourth Plinth Commission, *Nelson's Ship in a Bottle*, installed in Trafalgar Square in 2010, as well as the artist's conceptual aesthetic of past times. Inspired by a photograph of Margot Fonteyn, prima ballerina assoluta of The Royal Ballet, the sculpture sees a dancer suspended in pose and structure, scaling the façade of the Royal Opera House and encased in a large-scale snow globe. Almost cosmic in appearance, the sculpture's vertical installation draws your eye up to its untouchable vantage overlooking Covent Garden Market and its fellow resident performers. Never one to disappoint on detail, Shonibare dresses the dancer in Dutch Wax fabrics – with its loaded perception of African identity via colonial supremacy – that are now synonymous with the artist's range of work. Tailored by the Royal Opera House Costume Department, a tutu and shoes are fitted to a body cast from Soloist, Melissa Hamilton, and keeping with the artist's tradition of headless mannequins, a replica Victorian world globe rests on the dancer's shoulders and is a nod to the international work around dance, as art form, that the Royal Opera House has been dedicated to since the mid-eighteenth century. The dancer slowly rotates in her sphere and evokes a sense of wonder and spectacle amongst the buzz and pace of the streets below in the heart of Theatreland. Shonibare explains,  
“... a very grown up piece of public sculpture than can be enjoyed by all. It's like a life-size fairytale ballerina jewellery box that will spin”.



This is not the first time Shonibare has channeled dance into his art works as a medium to explore dialogues of culture and gender, politics and power, all packaged in a seductive scape of colour and sartorial elegance. *Un Ballo in Maschera* (A Masked Ball), 2004 featured in the artist's nominated Turner Prize exhibition and *Odile and Odette*, 2005 in collaboration with ROH2 at the Royal Opera House that involved dancers from both The Royal Ballet and Ballet Black, affirm his interest of physical expression within the context of experimental contemporary art. Public,

playful and possessing pulling power in London's oldest piazza, *Globe Head Ballerina* is a magnificent partnership of art and art form between contemporary artist and performing arts institution.

*Globe Head Ballerina* will be installed on Bow and Russell Street, London until 2017.

Image: Jonathan Velardi 2012

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## The Grayson Perry Effect | 2012

Credit to the gallery steward at Victoria Miro Gallery last weekend: pleasant greeting aside, the young, tall, skinny, hipster at the front door was keeping an eye out for visitors who were treading precariously around the laboratory-esque installation that scaled the floors and walls by American artist Sarah Sze, as well as keeping his other eye out for members of the public that were, let's say, not the gallery's regulars. I somehow passed his beady-Bourdieu gaze and was left to my own devices in the ground floor space. In contrast, the couple behind me was catered to a press release, clear directions to the Grayson Perry exhibit and put at ease with the balsa wood and table lamps confronting them, "*Grayson Perry is through the garden and up the stairs*", was surprisingly what they wanted to hear, without even having to ask. As more visitors, babies, Bugaboos and Micro scooters came through the doors I watched admirably as he greeted the visitors, directing them, *through the garden and up the stairs*. Had he been personally trained by Perry himself to pick out the suburban-explorer-on-safari-in-East-London from the usual gallery-goers on a Saturday morning or taking lessons in social signifiers? Wearing your Sunday best on a Saturday is like having your railcard from destination-outside-the-M25 glued to your forehead and your A to Z of London hanging out of your bag, but this guy was good and clearly knew how to pick those who were there for *the* tapestries. As someone who has been fascinated with ethnography and identity ever since my own days in the social stew that was art school I was finding this reactive environment around Perry's exhibition equally attractive as what was to be *through the garden and up the stairs*.

*The Vanity of Small Differences* has been a two-prong execution that explores the taste tribes of twenty-first century Britain. A three-part series, *All in the Best Possible Taste*, was presented by the artist and complemented the opening of the exhibition on national television network Channel 4 – following the everyday lives of the working, middle and upper classes, Perry portrayed the ultimate lifestyle detective, entering new-builds and manors alike, dissecting decoration of home and human. The series inspired six tapestries that depict the

story of class mobility and reference the mid-eighteenth century paintings, *A Rake's Progress* by William Hogarth, housed in London's Saone Museum.

Channel 4 has a strong relationship with the contemporary art world. It is the official broadcaster of Tate and subsequently transmits highlights in the art world year such as the Turner Prize and more recently, a primetime exclusive of Damien Hirst's first retrospective at Tate Modern transmitted into millions of living rooms across the nation. With the network's remit of minority interest during the Eighties, Channel 4 is now reaping its alternative agenda in an age of social acuteness that spans everything from art to artex. Spawn from the decade of *Cool Britannia* under Tony Blair's New Labour, and importantly pre-recession, British aspiration soared and with growing confidence of expression came a greater divide of social superficiality. Queue Channel 4, who's programming may arguably be seen as a taste barometer and resolutely aspirational: telling us where we should live in the UK (*Location Location Location*), or abroad (*A Place in the Sun*) telling us how to build our dream home (*Grand Designs*), how to fill it with things we've made ourselves (*Kirstie's Homemade Home*), how to entertain (*Come Dine With Me*), how not to enjoy it *too* much (*Supersize vs Supeskinny*) and telling us what to eat from the network's messiah of metabolism Jamie Oliver. Perry therefore is in good company amongst the network's middle class agenda and marks the culture box with a big (Nike) tick. If you followed the television series, you may have noticed that prior to *All in the Best Possible Taste* was Oliver's soapbox prodigy Jimmy Doherty urging, in effect, working classes to buy ethically reared meat in Jimmy and the Giant Supermarket – if they stayed tuned they would then have Perry taunting them with middle class frivolity in Kent that comprised of yet *more* organic meat, John Lewis, AGAs, faux-William Morris, ethnic souvenirs, 'green bling' and crucially, *homemade* cupcakes. As if the working classes, or anyone else for that matter had enough to worry about than with keeping up appearances. The idea of homemade and DIY is an important element that binds Channel 4 with Perry – crowned as the crusader of craft after winning the Turner Prize in 2003, Perry possesses a greater element of public accessibility, than say with Hirst or Emin. The British tabloids may have introduced the YBAs to the nation but few can relate to sharks in formaldehyde and a dirty bed. While many may not be able to understand Perry's cross-dressing alter ego Claire, ceramic vases and tapestries – objects that genetically exude skill – are familiar and culturally accessible to non-art audiences. Perry's appearances on the BBC's Question Time, Desert Island Discs and Have I Got News For You has opened his persona(s) to the masses and with the success of visitor numbers that attended his curatorial showcase, *The Tomb of the Unknown Craftsmen* at the British Museum last year, Perry is well on the way to one day reaching national treasure status. Dame Edna watch your back.

I am fascinated by this acceptance Perry has received and the influence he is now able to command, steering his cultural cohort from the familiar surroundings of the institution to one



of the leading contemporary art galleries in the East End of London. I will not be explaining the works or the journey from Sunderland to the Cotswolds, via Royal Tunbridge Wells, that Perry takes on both screen and tapestry, but wish to share the live performance that was taking place before my eyes last weekend. A steady stream of visitors filled the light-filled gallery and admired the works of our very own twenty-first century Gobelins-guru. Young, old and even newborn set themselves on the journey

from the innocently kitsch interiors of *The Adoration of the Cage Fighters* to the plush décor of *The Annunciation of the Virgin Deal* through to the two tragic landscapes of the upper

classes – the only section of society that has nowhere to aspire to. Similar to my last visit to Victoria Miro in 2009 for Perry's *The Walthamstow Tapestry* a wealth of allegory engulfs the large two-by-four metre wall hangings. Due to technological advancement, more texture and depth has been achieved with these latest works and the neon colours created by the weft are truly remarkable, resulting in an almost three-dimensional sensation. Saturday's audience was captivated by such saturated seduction. The familiarity of brands and objects, which British sensibility inherently recognises in a default-class manner; the very sensibility that I was seeing reflected between tapestry and viewer: the Cath Kidston bag, Birkenstocks, thick spectacles, iPhones and branded headphones to name but a few. "*I have that... oh look, my tea towel... you used to have that...*", could be heard in the breaks of silence as couples and families associated themselves with the work and the characters from the television series. Like a mirror that reflects the past, present and future, visitors were entranced by the social taboo Perry presents in *The Vanity of Small Differences*. Yesteryear's Burberry is this year's Barbour, and so the brand bandwagon rolls on across all three classes - what Perry's tapestries portray is a foundation of taste that is beyond instantaneous trend but of a culture that has evolved within one's own walls and beyond, if such an environment so permits. The ornaments of social mobility are revealed to be a filler between life and death; in *#Lamentation*, these very ornaments – Ferrari, iPhone and other status symbol paraphernalia – come to their bitter end in the destruction that aspiration is capable of.

I usually don't pay any attention to visitor books but on my way out I couldn't help but notice how well received it was and discovered a universal voice of the British public was being penned onto these pages that made for an extraordinary extension of the exhibition. Beginning with comments from the participants that featured in the television series to a mélange of society both near and far – professing, '*We just came on a Middle class pilgrimage to London*'. The visitor book was a font of personal reaction to the works, to Perry and life in Britain. Regional greetings were jotted, cultural conquests dropped – '*... best thing I have seen since the last best which was Tomb of the Unknown Craftsmen!*' – and personal taste revealed, '*PS. There was a mother and toddler in a buggy. The kid was in burberry Jesus! What the fuck woman!?!*'.

One contribution read, '*How odd that the subjects felt flattered*'. Given Perry's growing celebrity status and the lasting association with his work, it may not be so odd that the subjects from Sunderland, Royal Tunbridge Wells and the Cotswolds were genuinely flattered. Flattery however is an interesting concept – in 2009 when I reported on *The Walthamstow Tapestry* I noted that amidst the names stitched across the Bayeux-esque document, Perry's name was absent. In 2012, the artist takes his position as social voyeur in the middle class depiction and can be seen in the reflection of the sun burst mirror, camera in hand, stitched within *The Annunciation of the Virgin Deal*. Playing on a style that has seen artists incorporate themselves into their paintings throughout art history, this is an interesting shift in Perry's self perception since his accolades from 2003 and may be read as a nod to his acceptance in both greater society as well as the exclusive art world. The big players in the art world speak a language many do not understand *au fait* with sharks and bed sheets. In the first series of *All in the Best Possible Taste* Perry confesses he has, "...forged on to be comfortable in the art world" and I question whether he felt he was an ornament in the art world's display cabinet – an exotica himself amongst the echelons of art society, curious of the craft that is now vying for space on the gallery floor. What is certain is that the general public's taste for Perry and his taste for the general public is growing from cultural name drop to cross-cultural personality and television seems to be a medium the artist now relishes. Reports that Perry has signed a two-year deal with Channel 4 for a new commission around themes of etiquette and aesthetics means we will be seeing more of this 'tortured genius', whether he's to our taste or not. If any network executives are reading this, I would like to propose my very own pitch, *The Grayson Perry Effect*, and follow the cultural pilgrims who are swapping their weekends in John Lewis for the white walls of the contemporary art gallery: a *How To Look Good-at-an-art-opening* meets *Coach Trip* perhaps? Stay tuned...

*The Vanity of Small Differences* runs from 7<sup>th</sup> June to 11<sup>th</sup> August 2012.  
Image: Channel Four Television Corporation, Grayson Perry 2012

With centres for higher education, project spaces and a thriving commercial gallery scene already in place to nurture creativity, Angola is in an ideal position to attract Western collectors and investment, promoting new generations of contemporary art practice in Angola and internationally.

Angola's presence in ethnographic and traditional art markets is fuelled by the West's love affair with the skill and craftsmanship present in African art. Angola's Tchokwe wooden masks and statuettes from the eighteenth-century Lunda Empire are particularly popular with collectors and are regarded as solid investments. In the twenty-first century Angolan artists naturally find inspiration in their dynamic recent history of war, peace and unprecedented change. It will be through the exploration of key themes of Angola's history and identity that the Angolan art scene will be brought out of the familiarity of colonial ethnicity and into the constant paradigm that drives market attention: undiscovered creativity.

## THE RISE OF CREATIVE PROSPERITY IN ANGOLA

Fernando Alvim

Before the millennium the lack of cultural support for visual artists in Angola meant that artists traveled to other lusophone countries that benefited from established artistic foundations. However, today Angola presents a very different environment. Angola's growing reputation as a cultural capital with triennials and international exhibitions documenting the nation's heritage and future have contributed to its status as a regular fixture on the art world calendar. The growing network of creative opportunities in Angola is predominantly down to Fernando Alvim, who has gradually established Luanda as a centre for contemporary creativity. From 1987 to 2002, Alvim relocated to Brussels, Belgium and conceived several art projects around Angolan contemporary art and identity that were received by international audiences and with strong critical acclaim. In 2002 he teamed up with Sindika Dokolo – a leading corporate figure in Western Africa - to setup The Sindika Dokolo Foundation in Luanda for the collection of contemporary African art. This commitment to foster domestic creativity has garnered international interest through its partnership with the contemporary art exposition Trienal de Luanda. Since its creation in 2006 it has proved to be an important platform for exposure to many of the country's new generation of contemporary artists working both in Angola and abroad, such as photographer Kiluanji Kia-Henda who says, "... it allowed us to become universal artists and not just local ones".

### Trienal de Luanda 2010

This year's theme was 'Emotional Geographies: Art and Effects' and included four permanent exhibitions and art displays in various mediums including portraits, videos, acoustic music, fashion, theatre and contemporary dance. The Sindika Dokolo Foundation organized and funded the event. Fernando Alvim, the triennial organizer described the event as a cultural movement where the,

"... idea is to create a platform so that artists can display his or her artistic experiences without being conditioned by the art system".

The Trienal de Luanda ran from 12<sup>th</sup> September to 19<sup>th</sup> December 2010.

### Kiluanji Kia-Henda

Kiluanji Kia-Henda explores the deep-rooted narratives of Angola's socio-political history and its post-colonial identity through photography. Born four years after national independence in 1975, Kia-Henda is inspired by the sentiments of national identity in Luanda where he lives and works. Galleria Fonti in Naples, Italy has been the latest venue for Kia-Henda's work, which succeeds an impressive list of group shows, biennials and residencies in China, Europe and the USA. The solo exhibition, entitled *Self-Portrait as a White Man* credited the cities of Luanda and Venice as a framework during his residency programme, 'Art Enclosures', which specifically showcases emerging African artists. Promoted by Fondazione

Venezia and organised in collaboration with Polymnia and Fondazione Bevilacqua La Masa, the residency encouraged intercultural dialogue between Angola and Venice that is celebrated for hosting the international exhibition, La Biennale di Venezia. Narratives of ethnic invisibility in classical art, the validity of historical documents and a kitsch yet profound aesthetic in works such as *The Merchant of Venice* have achieved international recognition for the Angolan artist.

#### ON THE INTERNATIONAL STAGE

##### Exhibition in Lisbon

*Angola – the trajectory for change*: on 4th April 2011, The Angolan Embassy in Lisbon, Portugal, exhibited photographs documenting Angola's political, economic and social history in celebration of Peace and National Reconciliation Day. The exhibition was hosted by the Angolan Ambassador to Portugal, José Marcos Barric.

##### Exhibition in France

This year sees two events in France tailored to collectors and investors alike: under the High Patronage of Miguel Da Costa, Angola's Ambassador to France. On display, is a diverse selection of traditional arts from Angola at le Musée Dapper in Paris. Since it's opening in November 2010 this highly received exhibition has redirected attention onto Angola's tribal legacy and can still be seen through to July 2011.

The second key event in the art calendar will be this year's 15th anniversary of Paris Photo in November with the group exhibition, *From Bamako to Cape Town: a spotlight on African photography*. This will be an important investment opportunity for modern and contemporary African art collectors, dealers and publishers from around the world.

Image: Galleria Fonti, Kiluanji Kia-Henda 2011

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Jonathan is available for articles and reviews on contemporary art, design, fashion, lifestyle, travel, profile and events – no subject is out of bounds and challenging briefs are very welcome.