

Alan Bennett

Audio Guide transcript

This was Tom Wood's second portrait of fellow Yorkshire man Alan Bennett who's one of the best loved playwrights and actor raconteurs of our day. The artist is a former portrait award prize winner whose imaginative portrait of Prince Charles, on loan to the gallery also demonstrates the effective blend of realism and symbolism which he brings to his work. Alan Bennett talks about his reaction to being painted.

'I'd rather be thought of as it were through what I've written than my own physical presence because I think it's such a dismal physical presence most of the time. But he doesn't make me look so...you know...the usual take on me is that I'm this monkish recluse and he doesn't quite endorse that view of me. I wrote a play, "A Question of Attribution", where there's a discussion on portrait painting. Anthony Blunt, the surveyor of the Queen's pictures, is hanging a picture in Buckingham Palace and the Queen happens to come along and they get talking:

Blunt: "You must have had more experience of painters than most ma'am".

Queen: "In what way?"

Blunt: "Through having your portrait painted".

Queen: "Oh that yes, though one gets the impression that as artists portrait painters don't really count, not nowadays anyway."

Blunt: "They are seldom standard bearer to the avant-garde ma'am."

Queen: "They would hardly be painting me if they were. One doesn't want two noses! Mind you that would make one no more unrecognisable than some of their efforts. No resemblance at all. Sometimes I think it would be simpler to send round to Scotland Yard for an identikit. Still I can understand when they get me wrong but sometimes they get the horse wrong too. That's unforgivable.'