

News Release

Tuesday 20 June 2017

HUSBAND'S PORTRAIT OF HIS WIFE AND YOUNG BABY WINS BP PORTRAIT AWARD 2017



Breach! by Benjamin Sullivan (c) Benjamin Sullivan

The winner of the *BP Portrait Award 2017* was announced this evening at the National Portrait Gallery, London on Tuesday 20 June 2017. The prestigious first prize - in the 28th year of BP's sponsorship of the competition - was won by Suffolk based artist, **Benjamin Sullivan** for *Breach!* a portrait of his wife Virginia breastfeeding their eight month old daughter.

The winning portrait was selected from 2580 entries from 87 countries, submitted for judging anonymously by a panel which included broadcaster Kirsty Wark and artist Michael Landy. The judges were particularly struck by the tenderness and intimacy of Sullivan's composition, evoking Madonna and Child paintings through the ages and the depth of the maternal bond. Commenting on the portrait, Kirsty Wark said 'The woman is tired. She is in love. Her life has changed forever. We know her.'

Journalist and Presenter, Mariella Frostrup, presented Benjamin Sullivan with £30,000 and a commission, at the National Portrait Gallery Trustees' discretion, worth £5,000 (agreed between the National Portrait Gallery and the artist). Sullivan has been selected a record thirteen times for the *BP Portrait Award* exhibition and was awarded third prize for his portrait of the poet Hugo Williams in 2016. His portrait of the cosmologist and astrophysicist Professor Martin Rees was commissioned by the National Portrait Gallery in 2008. Sullivan's paintings often depict family

members reflecting his belief that 'the emotional connection between sitter and artist is at the root of all successful portraits.'

The portrait can be seen at the National Portrait Gallery from Thursday 22 June when the *BP Portrait Award 2017* exhibition opens to the public. Admission to the exhibition is free.

The second prize of £10,000 went to French painter and illustrator, **Thomas Ehretsmann**, for *Double Portrait*, depicting his pregnant wife Caroline. The judges were particularly impressed by the artist's refined and detailed technique, which adds to the subject's sense of stillness, strength and serenity.

The third prize of £8,000 went to **Antony Williams** for *Emma* his portrait of model turned friend, Emma Bruce, completed in his studio in Chertsey. The judges appreciated how the artist's intimate and distinctive technique lends the sitter's form an almost sculptural density and solidity.

The **BP Young Artist Award** of £7,000 for the work of a selected entrant aged between 18 and 30 has been won by 26 year old New Zealand artist **Henry Christian-Slane** for *Gabi*, a portrait of his partner Gabi Lardies. The judges felt this sensitive painting captures a moment in time and a casual, fleeting expression, rather than the 'held' pose more usual in formal portrait painting.

The winner of the **BP Travel Award 2017**, an annual prize to enable artists to work in a different environment on a project related to portraiture, was **Casper White** for his proposal to create works about music fans in clubs and concert venues in Berlin and Mallorca, representing an often youth-related subculture that is not traditionally recorded in portrait paintings. The prize of £6,000 is open to applications from any of this year's *BP Portrait Award*-exhibited artists, except the prize-winners.

First Prize

Benjamin Sullivan (10.05.1977) for *Breech!* (820 x 400mm, oil on canvas).

Grimsby-born, Benjamin Sullivan, who lives in Suffolk, gained a BA (Hons) in Drawing and Painting from Edinburgh College of Art. Benjamin's work has been seen regularly in the Royal Society of Portrait Painters exhibition and he has previously been selected twelve times for the *BP Portrait Award* in 2002 and between 2006 and 2016 when his portrait *Hugo* was awarded third prize. His portrait of the cosmologist and astrophysicist Professor Martin Rees was commissioned by the National Portrait Gallery in 2008.

Breech! depicts the artist's wife Virginia breastfeeding their eight-month-old daughter Edith, at a time when Sullivan says 'a sense of calm descended after the usual period of disarrangement that new parents face.' The artist wanted to celebrate the love that had come into their lives and reflect on the worrisome time the couple faced during Edith's birth. The painting was made over four to five weeks in the artist's studio when Edith's cooperation was forthcoming.

Second Prize

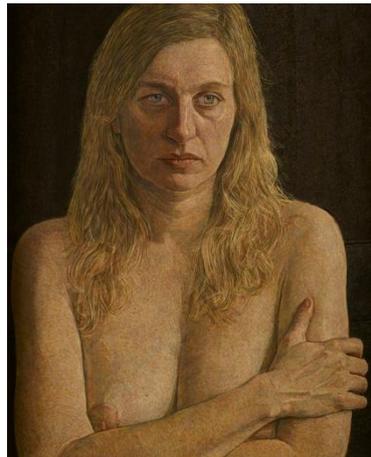


Thomas Ehretsmann (06.07.1974) for *Double Portrait* (300 x 400mm, Acrylic on board).

Born in Mulhouse France, Ehretsmann gained a degree in illustration from the Ecole des Arts Décoratifs, Strasbourg. His work as an illustrator has been featured in the *New Yorker*, *Rolling Stone* and *Elle Magazine*. His portrait *Vacuum 2* was selected for the *BP Portrait Award 2016* exhibition.

Double Portrait captures a moment when the artist was walking in the park with his wife, Caroline. Ehretsmann was struck by the light on Caroline's face which he said reminded him of the work of naturalist painters Jules Bastien-Lepage and Emile Friant. The artist used multiple layers of semi-transparent acrylic paint in order to mix a fragile instant with something more timeless, a technique often used in his art. The title, *Double Portrait*, suggest the passage from one state of being to another as Caroline was eight months pregnant at the time.

Third Prize



Emma by Antony Williams (c) Antony Williams

Antony Williams (23.06.1964) for *Emma* (690 x560mm, Egg tempera on board)

Antony Williams studied at Farnham College and Portsmouth University. An established portrait artist, his work has been seen in solo exhibitions in London and Madrid and included in the Royal Academy of Arts *Summer Exhibition*, the Royal Society of Portrait Painters Exhibitions and previously in *BP Portrait Award* exhibitions in 1995, 1998, 2005, 2007, 2010, 2014 and 2015. His portrait of Amartya Sen was commissioned for the National Portrait Gallery Collection.

Emma features Emma Bruce who had been modelling for Williams almost continuously for eleven years in his studio in Chertsey. The artist's relationship with the sitter has developed over the years from that of being someone who was modelling for a painting to someone who has become a friend. Williams wanted to portray some of her vulnerability, but also the determination in her character where she is shown naked but at the same time is preventing the viewer from seeing her completely.

BP Young Artist Award



Henry Christian-Slane (12.11.1990) for *Gabi* (250 x 200, Oil on board)

Born in New Zealand, 26 year old Henry Christian Slane, studied graphic design at Auckland University of Technology. This is the first time the artist and illustrator has been selected for the *BP Portrait Award* exhibition.

Gabi is a portrait of Christian-Slane's partner Gabi Lardies. The sitting took place at the artist's parents' house in Auckland, New Zealand. Christian-Slane liked how the light fell over the sitter's face and the contemplative but slightly frowning expression that resulted, which he tried to preserve throughout the painting process. The artist was aware of the difficulties of painting a portrait of someone he is so close to. Although confident that he had had an innate sense of her face and features, he was conscious of bias that couples have of each other's appearance; 'For me I think what resulted is a painting that balances being analytical and instinctual' says Christian-Slane.

Dr Nicholas Cullinan, Chair of the Judges and Director of the National Portrait Gallery, London, says: 'Many congratulations to our prize winning artists and all those selected for the exhibition. As always, it's been an enormous privilege to chair the judging panel and see firsthand some of the most exciting and innovative work being produced by artists of all ages, and from all over the world. The competition, recognised as the most prestigious in the field of portrait painting in the world, continues to attract the best practitioners of the genre. This year is no exception and I hope visitors will enjoy the diverse range of styles and sitters in the exhibition.'

Ms Des Violaris, Director UK Arts and Culture BP, says: 'Congratulations to Benjamin Sullivan and all of this year's prize winning artists. Every year the *BP Portrait Award* helps to encourage and inspire thousands of portrait artists to capture the stories of people from every walk of life and in all corners of the world. BP is proud to be supporting the *BP Portrait Award* for the twenty-eighth year, and we are delighted that it will continue through to 2022. Our aim in supporting the *Award*, and other cultural activities in the UK, is to bring to as wide an audience as possible the very best in arts and culture.'

2017 will mark the Portrait Award's 38th year at the National Portrait Gallery and 28th year of sponsorship by BP. The *BP Portrait Award*, one of the most important platforms for portrait painters, has a first prize of £30,000, making it one of the largest for any global arts competition. This highly successful annual event is aimed at encouraging artists over the age of eighteen to focus upon, and develop, the theme of portraiture in their work. The *BP Portrait Award 2017* exhibition will run at the National Portrait Gallery, London, from Thursday 22 June to Sunday 24 September 2017.

The prize winners and exhibition were selected by a judging panel chaired by **Dr Nicholas Cullinan**, Director, National Portrait Gallery. The full panel included **Camilla Hampshire**, Museums Manager and Cultural Lead, Royal Albert Memorial Museum and Art Gallery, Exeter; **Michael Landy**, artist; **Kirsty Wark**, broadcaster; **Sarah Howgate**, Senior Curator, Contemporary Collections, National Portrait Gallery; and **Des Violaris**, Director, UK Arts & Culture, BP.

To enter, artists were invited to upload a photograph of their finished painting to the *BP Portrait Award* website, which were considered by the judges in the first round of the competition. 218 entrants were successful in this round and invited to hand-deliver or courier their work to a venue in London for the second round of judging. From this 53 works were selected for the *BP Portrait Award 2017* exhibition.

The judging panel for the *BP Travel Award 2017* included **Rosie Broadley**, Collections Curator - 19th Century, National Portrait Gallery; **Clara Drummond**, winner of the *BP Portrait Award 2016* and **Des Violaris**, Director, UK Arts & Culture, BP.

BP TRAVEL AWARD 2016

The *BP Travel Award 2016* was won by Lithuanian artist Laura Guoke for her proposal to travel to refugee camps in Ritsona, Greece. On her travels, Guoke took sketches, photographs and film in order to create large-format portraits of the most vulnerable refugees from Syria and the volunteers helping them. Her aim was to show migrants as

people with names, faces and individual stories, using her work to convey personal themes which may otherwise be difficult to put into words. The resulting work will be displayed in the *BP Portrait Award 2017* exhibition.

CATALOGUE

A fully illustrated catalogue featuring all 53 selected works will accompany the exhibition. The catalogue also includes an essay by Stella Duffy, an illustrated interview with the *BP Travel Award 2016* winner and interviews with the shortlisted artists. The catalogue, priced at £9.99 will be published on the 22 June 2017.

TOUR

Royal Albert Memorial Museum and Art Gallery Exeter (4 October – 3 December 2017); Scottish National Portrait Gallery, Edinburgh (December 2017 – March 2018); Sunderland Museum and Winter Gardens (March – June 2018.)

BP PORTRAIT AWARD: NEXT GENERATION is an exciting project offering free opportunities for 14-21 year-olds to creatively engage with painted portraiture through the *BP Portrait Award*. For the eighth year, young people will be able to connect with past *BP Portrait Award*-winning artists, meet other young people interested in portraiture and create their own portraits through a series of programmes including Taster Sessions, Drop-in Drawing, three-day Summer Schools, the fifth after-hours Young People's Private View, an onsite display showcasing the project, and youth-generated digital content. *BP Portrait Award: Next Generation* has so far engaged over 3000 young people, onsite and regionally. More details of 2017 programmes www.npg.org.uk/bpNextgeneration

BP PORTRAIT AWARD 2017

OVERALL FIGURES Total entrants 2580 from 87 countries (UK Entries 1214, International Entries 1366)

EXHIBITION FIGURES (53 SELECTED FROM TOTAL ENTRY)

England (25), Spain (7), United States (6), France (2), Australia (2), Italy (2), Scotland (2), China (1), New Zealand (1), South Africa (1), Wales (1), Israel (1), Slovakia (1), Turkey (1)

BP PORTRAIT AWARD 2017

22 June - 24 September 2017 at the National Portrait Gallery, London www.npg.org.uk

Admission Free

npg.org.uk/BP or 020 7321 6600 #BPPortrait

Press View: Wednesday 21 June 2017 10.00-12.00

For further press information, please contact: Laura McKechnan, Senior Communications Manager, National Portrait Gallery, 020 7321 6620 lmckechnan@npg.org.uk

For images, please go to: <https://we.tl/bbb001wldf>

National Portrait Gallery, St Martin's Place WC2H 0HE, opening hours Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Saturday, Sunday: 10.00 – 18.00 (Gallery closure commences at 17.50) **Late Opening:** Thursday, Friday: 10.00 – 21.00 (Gallery closure commences at 8.50pm) **Nearest Underground:** Leicester Square/Charing Cross **General information:** 0207 306 0055 **Recorded information:** 020 7312 2463 **Website** www.npg.org.uk

Notes to Editors

BP support for UK Arts & Culture: In the UK, BP is a major supporter of the arts with a programme that spans over 50 years. BP's investment in long term partnerships with the British Museum, the National Portrait Gallery, the Royal Opera House, and the Royal Shakespeare Company represent one of the most significant long-term corporate investments in UK arts and culture www.bp.com/arts

LIST OF BP PORTRAIT AWARD 2017 EXHIBITED ARTISTS

Jorge Abbad-Jaime de Aragón	Khushna Sulaman-Butt
Rupert Alexander	Anastasia Kurakina
Anne Ben-Or	Gary Lawrence
Lukáš Betinský	Hannah Laws
John Borowicz	Ross McAuley
Noah Buchanan	Julian Merrow- Smith
Martyn Burdon	Jose Antonio Ochoa
John Burke	Mustafa Ozel
Sopio Chkhikvadze	Anastasia Pollard
Henry Christian-Slane	Laura Quinn Harris
Alan Coulson	Simón Ramírez Restrepo
Daniel Coves	Angela Repping
Rowanne Cowley	Jesús María Sáez de Vicuña Ochoa
Éva Csányi-Hurskin	Brian Sayers
Sinead Davies	Iñigo Sesma
Estelle Day	Brian Shields
Claire Eastgate	Anca-Luiza Sirbu
Thomas Ehretsmann	Paul P. Smith
Madeline Fenton	Emily Stainer
Maryam Foroozanfar	David Stanger
Silvestre Goikoetxea	Lucy Stopford
Fiona Graham-Mackay	Benjamin Sullivan
Raouf Haghighi	Richard Twose
Bao Han	Marco Ventura
Ania Hobson	Casper White
Hero Johnson	Antony Williams
Janne Kearney	