

PRESS RELEASE

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The New
Art Gallery
Walsall

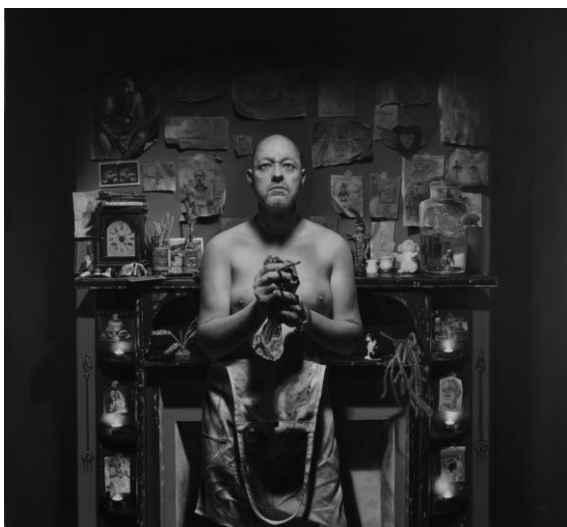
Andrew Tift

Immortalise

The New Art Gallery Walsall

25 May – 2 September 2018

Preview: Thursday 24 May, 6-8pm



Andrew Tift, *22 Years Later*, 2016, acrylic on canvas (diptych), each panel 140 x 155 cm each. Courtesy of the artist and Roberto Polo Gallery, Brussels

The New Art Gallery Walsall is delighted to present a major solo exhibition by Walsall artist Andrew Tift. The exhibition will bring together brand new works combined with selected works from the artist's past practice and will comprise paintings, drawings and for the first time, a series of photographs. Focusing around the genre of portraiture, it is a consciously eclectic show bringing together works ranging from more formal commissioned portraits to more experimental work, in which the artist has challenged himself, pushing the boundaries of portraiture.

Born in Bloxwich, Walsall in 1968, Andrew has lived locally ever since. As a young boy, he would amuse himself by copying album covers. This boyhood hobby was to develop into a passion and a vocation. He studied at Stafford College of Art and the University of Central England, Birmingham (now BCU). He has always been

fascinated by portraiture. Friends and family and even Max the dog are immortalised through his work, yet he also seeks out characters of interest from all walks of life. His subjects have included Native American Indians, Hippies, Vietnam veterans, Japanese motor industry workers, Black Country steelworkers, Mafia members, musicians and Cosplay punks. A chance encounter with members of the Kavern Motorcycle Club who he came across in his local pub, has resulted in a compelling and varied series of works. His talent has also attracted a series of important portrait commissions of personalities such as Tony Benn, Lord Carrington, Neil and Glenys Kinnock, Ken Livingstone, Cormac McCarthy and Eric Sykes commissioned by significant institutions including the National Portrait Gallery, London; the Smithsonian in Washington, USA and the Palace of Westminster.

Andrew Tift was seventeen years old in 1985 when he made his first ever visit to an art gallery. This was Walsall Museum & Art Gallery, which was then in Lichfield St, Walsall. His inaugural visit was inspired by a poster he saw on the Library windows. The poster featured a reproduction of Lucian Freud's *Portrait of Kitty* (1948-9), a bold and striking portrait of the artist's former wife. Kitty was also the daughter of renowned artist Jacob Epstein and his wife Kathleen Garman, the latter having gifted the celebrated Garman Ryan Collection to the people of Walsall in 1974, along with her friend, the artist Sally Ryan. A unique and personal collection containing an eclectic yet impressive range of works by artists such as Picasso, Braque, Goya, Monet, Degas, Renoir and of course Epstein and Freud, the collection was to continue to inspire Andrew's practice over the coming years.

Around twenty years later, Andrew was to visit Kitty at her home in rural Suffolk to create his own portraits, one of which pays direct homage to Freud's portrait by presenting the sitter in full profile. Another triptych of Kitty won the artist the BP Portrait Award in 2006 and was shown at the National Portrait Gallery, London. Both works were acquired for Walsall's Collections.

Possibly the most ambitious work in the exhibition, *22 Years Later* (2016) extends a dialogue from an earlier painting, *The Obscurity and Revelation of Andrew* (1994). The diptych explores a consistent theme within Andrew's work; the cycle

of life and the passing of time. A self-portrait of the artist becomes a death-like figure in a skeletal mask. In the background are a range of objects that trigger memories for Andrew and his family. These include a scan of his daughter Scarlett, the first photograph of her after birth, a soft toy and a drawing she made of her parents after walking in the woods. In reference to time passing, Andrew also includes his own wrist watch and a mantle clock acquired on his honeymoon. There is also a cactus given to him by his grandfather in 1990 which he has kept alive ever since. Snuffed candles provide a further reference to death. Like many of his works on this theme, it is inspired by great art from the past; in this instance James Ensor's self portrait *The Skeleton Painter* (1896) and Piero della Francesca's *The Baptism of Christ* (after 1437).

This exhibition provides a wonderful opportunity to explore the quality and range of Andrew's practice and to witness a journey that started with a chance encounter with a poster on Lichfield Street. Long may the journey continue.

A fully illustrated publication will accompany the exhibition with an essay by Charlotte Mullins and a foreword by Deborah Robinson (Head of Exhibitions) and Stephen Snoddy (Director).

An edited version of the exhibition will travel to Roberto Polo Gallery, Brussels.

Also launching on the preview evening, Mahtab Hussain: *Going back home to where I came from*.

ENDS

Note to Editors:

For further information and to obtain press images or to arrange photo calls and interviews, please contact Chris Wilkinson on 01922 654416

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Open Tuesday to Saturday 10am to 5pm, Sunday 12noon – 4pm.

Closed Mondays and Bank Holidays. Free admission.

The New Art Gallery Walsall is funded by revenue support from Walsall Council and the Arts Council England. For more information visit thenewartgallerywalsall.org.uk



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