

# i-D

## tristan pigott makes oil paintings for the instagram generation



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Artwork by Tristan Pigott

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You can immediately relate to the subjects of Tristan Pigott’s paintings. His portraits have a snapshot-ish quality, like scenes you might see on Instagram - of friends sitting on the subway (actually the Tube - Tristan lives in London), putting on makeup still half-dressed, or eating breakfast and looking slightly worse for wear. He captures awkward in-between moments that feel both everyday and surreal.

In *Big Softie*, one of the brand-new pieces he’s showing at a solo exhibition at London’s Cob Gallery this week, a guy sits waiting for his spaghetti to cook with his hand in his boxers. The painting’s one-dimensional ochre background seems to shift the sitter out of his kitchen and into a dreamworld. The image, like many of Tristan’s portraits, challenges

our ideas about what constitutes a suitable subject for an oil painting. Tristan’s MO - honed at Camberwell College of Arts in London - is to playfully undermine the self-importance we assume in documenting ourselves and each other.

But while he pokes fun at the stuffier tropes of figurative painting, Tristan has also shown his work at two of the UK’s most historic galleries this year. The *Cynic*, a portrait of his friend Josephine, was selected for the prestigious BP Portrait Award show at The National Portrait Gallery, and he presented work at the Royal Academy’s annual Summer Exhibition. That would be impressive for an artist of any age, but important side note: Tristan was born in 1990. NBD.

**Do you remember the first thing you ever painted?**

Not specifically. I just remember having to paint a lot of still lifes - deer skulls, boots - around the ages of eight to 12. I didn't do another still life for 12 years. My first since then was Save the Cacti earlier this year.

**Was there a certain point at which you realized you wanted to be an artist professionally?**

When the choice became either finger-spacing clothes hangers all day at a sportswear chain or taking painting seriously.

**Frank Stella spoke about learning to paint by imitating other painters. Who influenced you as you were developing your own style?**

A great thing about art schools today is that they don't impose any technical training, allowing students a shortcut to their own style. The painters I looked at in order to work out what I wanted to do were people like Hieronymus Bosch, Bronzino, Goya, John Currin and Ken Kiff.

**Can you tell me about the title of your new show, dead natural? What does that phrase mean to you?**

Colloquially, 'dead natural' refers to the act of being very normal. It's an ironic dig at the way sitters model and pose. It's also playing on the nature morte style of painting - which I made fun of in Lemon Peeler, in which items that had social symbolism, or were emblematic of wealth, are now being used in kitsch designs.

**If you had to name a favorite work from the show, what would it be?**

Contrary Mary. You've got the magazines in the bottom right corner, hinting at the lazy objectification of the female form, depicted by men in contemporary art. The aim was to focus on the human condition seen in the female protagonist in the 21st century. It's meant to take a general look at the history of western art, relating it to modern life and poking fun at how "the artist" interprets the female gaze in today's society.

**Do the situations you paint tend to be real ones you've observed?**

My aim with painting is to play with the seriousness and traditional views often attributed to figurative oil painting. Doing so by mocking the importance we place on image, giving the narcissism typically associated with portraiture a satirical undertone. Images are often only looked at for a few seconds, so it's important to be able to convey the narratives with immediacy relevant to the viewer. I often work from photographs, due to the freedom they allow. Though I think the most liberating way of painting is having no reference points at all.

**A lot of your figures appear against backgrounds with shifted perspectives or blocks of color. How does that affect the scenes in those images?**

The aim is to highlight the theatricality of the scenes. It's a play on the way figures are painted. With their faces layered up to create as much realism as possible, the background is layered up and sanded down drawing attention to the two-dimensionality of the painting. The hope is that the abstract backgrounds help put a focus on the psychological states of the characters depicted.

**How have things changed for you since showing your work at the Royal Academy and National Portrait Gallery?**

If anything, it's made me want to try different things, such as a recent installation I showed that included live flies and a Nokia 3310... I think it's great to show in these historic venues but the art that interests me is happening in the less traditional galleries. Rashid Johnson at Hauser and Wirth being an example, or Samara Scott at The Sunday Painter.

**What would be your dream commission as an artist?**

I would love to do a portrait of the pig head that David Cameron had relations with.

**'dead natural' is on show from November 6 to November 8 at Cob Gallery, London.**