

PRESS RELEASE

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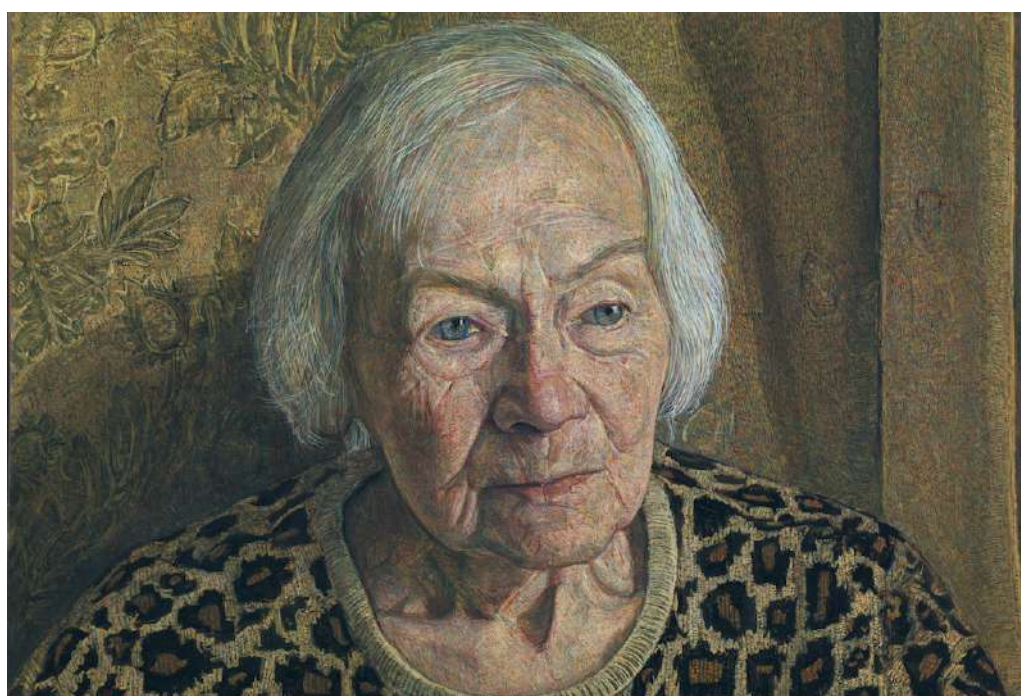
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Antony Williams: *In stillness – Life*

Portraits over time and the Margaret Robinson series

Messums London

14 September – 14 October 2022



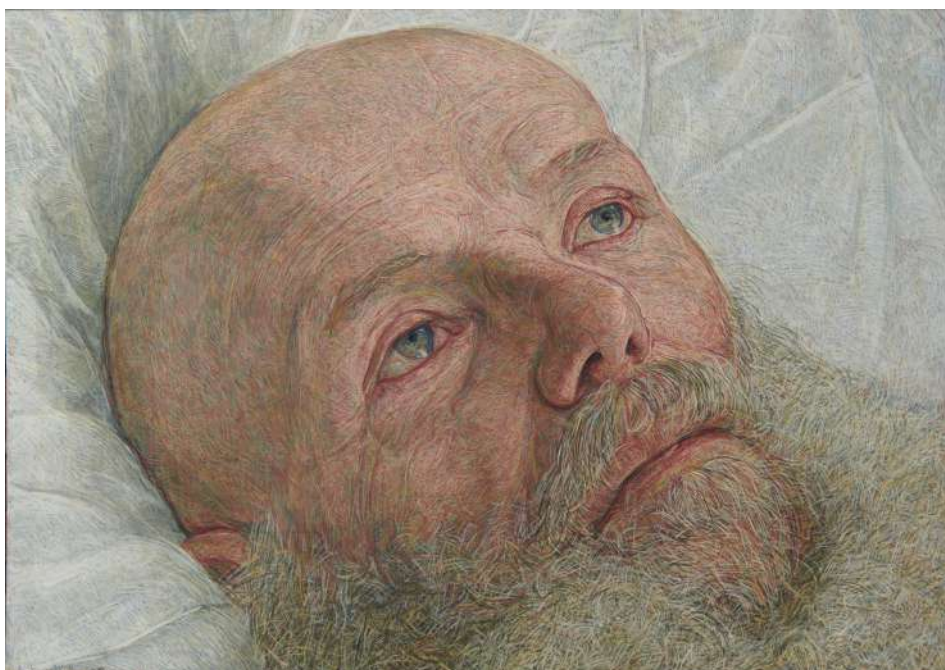
Antony Williams, *Margaret at ninety-six*, 2016

'Williams' art is as closely observed as the 1930s nudes of Stanley Spencer or the early work of Lucian Freud, with similar intensity – and, like Freud, Williams avoids working from photographs. The great strength of his work is that this exactitude of observation and technique still allows for complex emotional responses, with meaning being reserved and implicit.'

Ivor Braka

In stillness - Life presents portraits produced by leading contemporary figurative artist, Antony Williams, from 2000 until 2022. The exhibition will showcase two distinct series – portraits of his models over time and the portraits of his landlady Margaret Robinson. The series of paintings of Margaret Robinson, produced over a period of sixteen years, have been assembled from private collections for the exhibition and will be displayed together for the first time. Williams painted these portraits annually from 2000 when he moved his studio into her house, until her death in 2016. Painted in the exacting medium of egg tempera and directly from the model, with sittings taking place weekly or sometimes several times per week for long sessions, each portrait of Margaret was produced over an approximate six-month period.

Together with this series, portraits from 2009 until the present will be shown. These include a new group of intimate portraits painted by Williams over the last year featuring sitters that he has previously painted, for example 'Caroline' who he first painted in 1997 and 'John' in 2004, alongside a new model 'Alice' not previously painted. By painting models who have differing levels of familiarity, Williams continues to survey the effects of time and experience which he investigated in a similar way with the series of portraits of Margaret.



John, 2022, tempera on panel

Biography

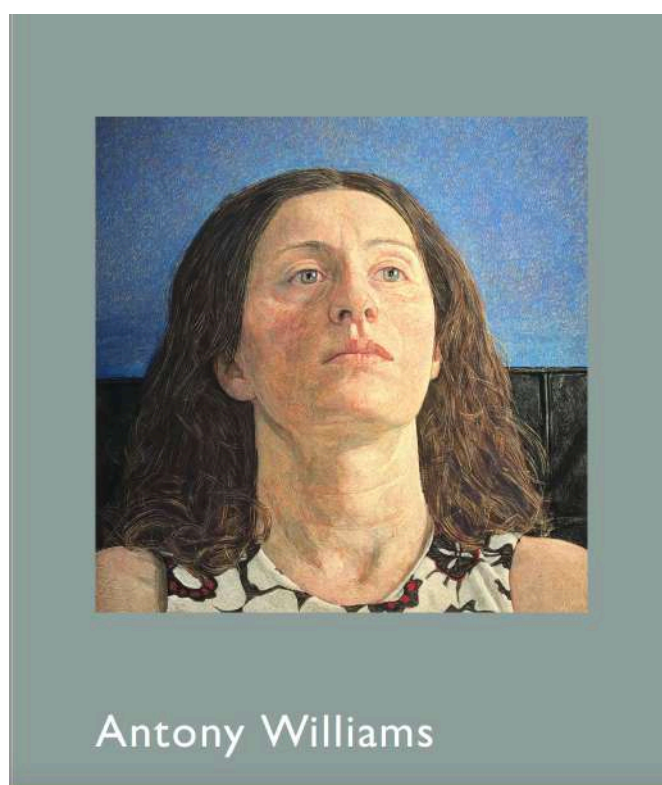
Williams trained at Farnham College of Art and Portsmouth University. He is Vice President of the Royal Society of Portrait Painters and is a member of the New English Art Club and the Pastel Society. His work is based on intense observation, particularly of human flesh, creating as a result, a heightened sense of realism. He works almost exclusively in tempera – a painstaking, exacting medium in which egg is used instead of linseed oil as the binding medium. While oil allows for a degree of flexibility and manipulation of the painted surface before it dries, this technique does not easily allow for alteration. It was this medium that Williams used for his remarkable portrait of the Queen in 1996. The painting elicited controversy, particularly in the depiction of the monarch's hands as Martin Gayford comments:

'Williams' still lifes and portraits – like much art – underline the passing of time and mortality. This was the reason no doubt why his fine portrait of the Queen caused controversy. Inevitably, his method, his close vision, revealed that that these were in fact the face and hands of an ageing woman. That is not how everybody chooses to think of the monarch. But as a work of art, and an exercise in sober, careful truth – telling like the best of his work – it was indeed, very impressive.'

Further portrait commissions by Williams include RT Hon Margaret Beckett MP, Sir Donald Sinden, Ömer Koç, Amartya Kumar Sen, Sir Alan Budd, Alex Bouzari, Kumar Sangakkara, Mahela Jayawardene, Sir Steve Cowley and Tristan Rees Roberts.

His work has been recognised with numerous awards and is held in notable public collections including the National Portrait Gallery; Royal Collection; House of Commons; MCC Lords; Garrick Club; Corpus Christi, Oxford; Trinity Hall, Cambridge; Queens College, Oxford and a number of significant private collections.

A fully illustrated publication accompanies the exhibition featuring essays by Paul Moorhouse and Dr Claudia Milburn, and an interview with the artist.



Antonia Looking Up, 2013, tempera on canvas

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MESSUMS LONDON is a 2,000 sq ft exhibition space on Cork Street behind the Royal Academy. It hosts a rolling programme of exhibitions for our contemporary artists and is home to our photography department.