

Alec Soth's Archived Blog

March 8, 2007

Rego & Hare

Filed under: [portraiture](#) — alecsothblog @ 2:29 pm

Playwright David Hare chose Paula Rego to paint his portrait for the National Portrait Gallery. Hare was going to choose Lucien Freud but “didn’t want to be stark-bollock naked lying next to a whippet.” Rego is a genius, but this was an unusual choice. Rego mostly paints women. Robert Hughes has called her “the best painter of women’s experience alive today.” Moreover, Rego normally doesn’t accept portrait commissions. Her wild mix of mythology, sexuality and magic realism don’t seem suited for the task.

Nevertheless, Rego took on the Hare commission:



Hare wasn’t thrilled with the result. “I looked mad as a hatter,” he said, “It isn’t a portrait of someone I’d necessarily want to meet – or at least be very close to. I was very shocked when I saw it. It’s very distressing. It’s a portrait of someone in a great deal of distress.”

Rego disagreed. “On the contrary! It’s an affectionate picture, a picture of a man of the theatre. It’s not at all shocking. He just looks handsome. He’s thinking, he’s introspective.”

11 Comments

1. i am so very appreciative for the doors that you have opened for me. i will work for two hours then search rego.

see david hare's comments about bush post 9/11 in the guardian i think. he is a wordsmith and described a dry drunk with anger surging through his viens and no friday night to blow it off (this a poor substitute). they are as brilliant a portrait of bush as rego's is of hare.

again thanks

Comment by aem — March 8, 2007 @ [3:34 pm](#)

2. This goes back to the previous conversation about photographic portraits and what we want to see in the image. It also brings up the important question of whether a portrait should be "reality" (can those air quotes be larger?) or just a illustration of how the subject wants to be seen, as in the case of most gov't sponsored portraits (just look at roman sculpture and the idealized depictions of their rulers)

I think if Rego said he wanted something in particular, she would have turned it down flat.

Comment by [Patti Hallock](#) — March 8, 2007 @ [4:24 pm](#)

3. Are you suggesting that Rego did not "seem suited for the task" because of Hares opinion of the painting, or because of yours?

Comment by [Ross](#) — March 8, 2007 @ [5:13 pm](#)

4. I like the portrait. And Rego is one of my favorite artists. It was just an odd choice given her normal subject matter.

Comment by [Alec Soth](#) — March 8, 2007 @ [5:27 pm](#)

5. I don't think she is a bad choice for a playwright, but a male one...maybe. I don't know Hare well enough to know if this portrait is more representative than he would admit, but I still think it is rather nice.

If I ever commissioned a painting of myself I would like it to show me in a great deal of distress.

Comment by [Ross](#) — March 8, 2007 @ [5:57 pm](#)

6. That Hare would be at all surprised or distressed at the result is downright weird – he chose her knowing her work and her ways.

The portrait isn't particularly unflattering; if anything her treatment of her subject is somewhat gentler than in other instances. Consider, for instance *Olga*.

Comment by [Jen Bekman](#) — March 8, 2007 @ [6:11 pm](#)

7. Oh boy, do I wish I was ever in the position where I would be able to have Lucian Freud as a painter for a portrait (and I would *not* turn it down)... But that portrait is great!

Comment by [JM Colberg](#) — March 8, 2007 @ [11:32 pm](#)

8. Dear Alec,

I've been reading your blog for awhile now and I am a big fan of your work. "Niagara" is just amazing and inspiring. I am a portuguese musician and a part-time photographer and your pictures are some of the best I've ever seen, something to look up for.

After reading this entry, I thought I should add some information on the discussion...Rego, who's also portuguese, doesn't usually accept portrait commissions, but she did the official portrait of our president 2 years ago, which some criticized as being a "deformed" vision of the man. The president loved it and so did I, also a great admirer of her work.

You can see it here <http://www.publico.clix.pt/getimage.asp?tb=IMAGENS&id=160066>

Keep up the good work,

David

Comment by [David Fonseca](#) — March 8, 2007 @ [11:54 pm](#)

9. this playwright should only be flattered//regoisego//vivalaportugal!!

Comment by [stargazer](#) — March 9, 2007 @ [3:01 am](#)

10. No link? [The Guardian article](#). I'll check it out in person next week... hard to tell anything from a few pixels.

Comment by [rob](#) — March 9, 2007 @ [4:07 am](#)

11. Sunday morning used to be the newspaper and coffee.
Now, Sunday morning is the blog of Alec Soth!
Much more informative and a brilliant mind fuel for the day.
Thanks Alec for all of this, really.

Comment by [jami saunders](#) — March 11, 2007 @ [11:32 am](#)

