

# BP TRAVEL AWARD 2017

Each year exhibitors are invited to submit a proposal for the BP Travel Award. The aim of this award is to give an artist the opportunity to experience working in a different environment in Britain or abroad, and on a project related to portraiture. The artist's work is then shown as part of the following year's BP Portrait Award exhibition and tour.

## THE JUDGES

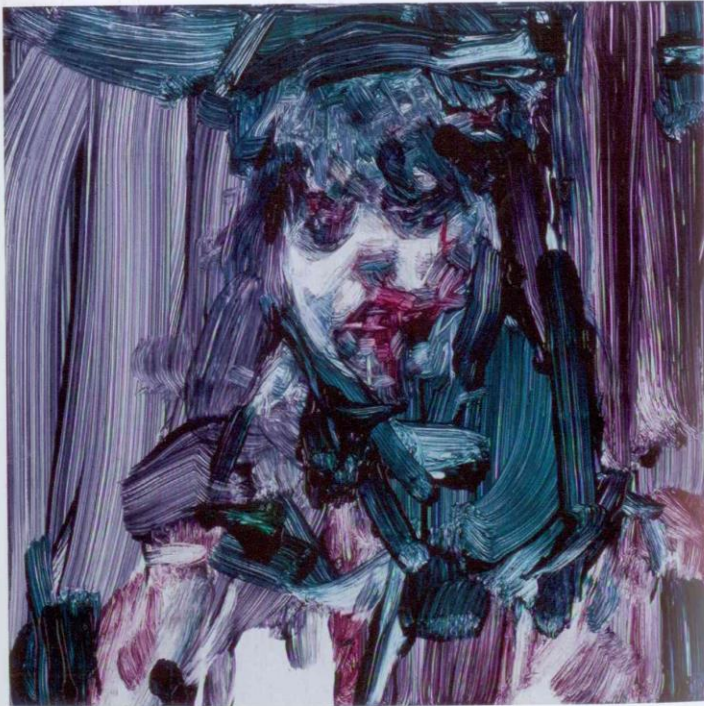
Clara Drummond  
Artist and winner of  
2016 BP Portrait Award

Rosie Broadley  
Collections Curator,  
National Portrait Gallery

Des Violaris  
Director, UK Arts & Culture, BP

## The Prizewinner 2017

Casper White, who received £6,000 for his proposal to create works about music fans in the clubs and concert venues of Berlin and Mallorca.



It Just Feels Gross  
by Casper White, 2018  
Oil on zinc, 200 x 200mm

## PORTRAITS FROM THE CLUB SCENE IN EUROPE

Casper White

Casper White received the 2017 BP Travel Award after impressing the judges with his proposal to paint the portraits of young people attending clubs, concerts and gigs throughout Europe. The artist wanted to explore a youth subculture not traditionally recorded in painting: a person losing themselves dancing in a nightclub; a fan staring up at a band from the front of the crowd.

Born in the former coal-mining town of Maesteg in the South Wales Valleys, White gained a BA (Hons) in Fine Art at Cardiff School of Art and Design followed by an MA in Fine Art (Contemporary Dialogues) at the University of Wales Trinity Saint David, Lampeter. His interest in portraiture initially derived from painting family members, then developed during life drawing classes he attended on an Erasmus programme at Accademia di Belle Arti Lorenzo da Viterbo in central Italy. Aged 36, he is closely involved with an artist-led curatorial project in Cardiff called LLE, and has also had his work featured in group exhibitions in London and Manchester.

White's previous portraiture has focused on his family and his friends in the Cardiff art scene, while a recent series of oil paintings depicted young adults on their mobile phones. As an



occasional musician and regular gig-goer, White saw the Travel Award as an opportunity to mine his interests in the 'unseen places and times' inhabited by youth culture, while taking a Sickert-like look at the way audience and performance coexist.

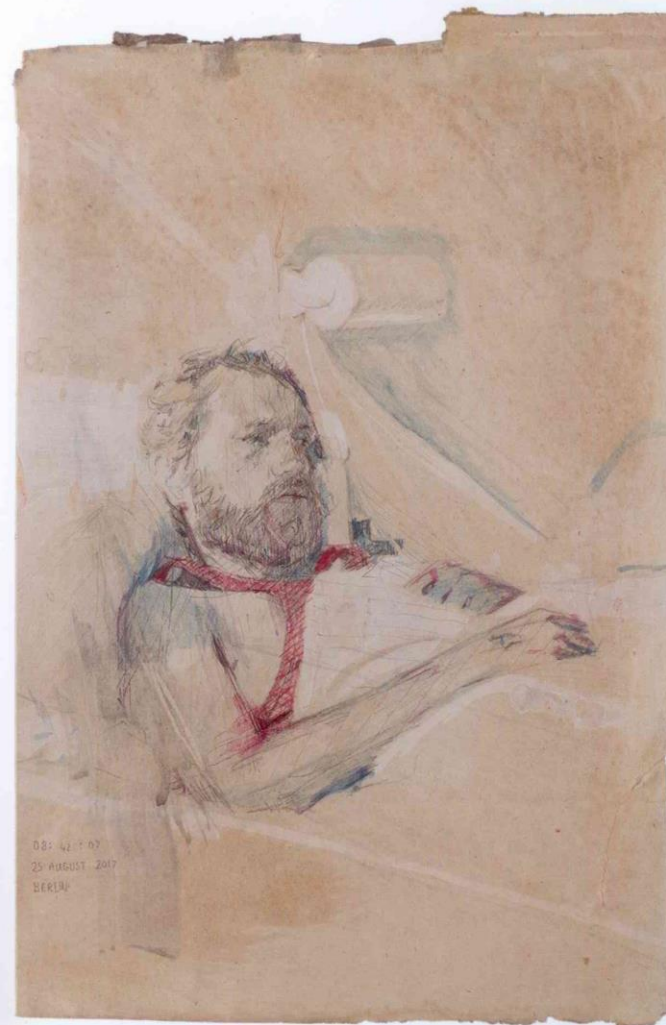
'A portrait is traditionally made of the star, the performer, but I wished to invert this, turning my focus around to the person engaged as a fan,' explains White. 'These people are fully immersed in the experience and the wider lifestyle. I hoped to capture this moment in an authentic way as I feel these people are inadequately documented, especially within portrait painting. I'm interested in the careless abandon these environments foster; the euphoria of the experience.'

To begin the project, White first travelled to Berlin and Leipzig with four of his friends, all artists or musicians, spending two weeks in Germany, experiencing the nightlife at rock concerts and techno clubs, before later visiting Mallorca where he sampled the island's club and gig cultures. 'I felt Berlin could offer a broad view of clubs and music venues mostly frequented by locals, while the Balearic Islands would give

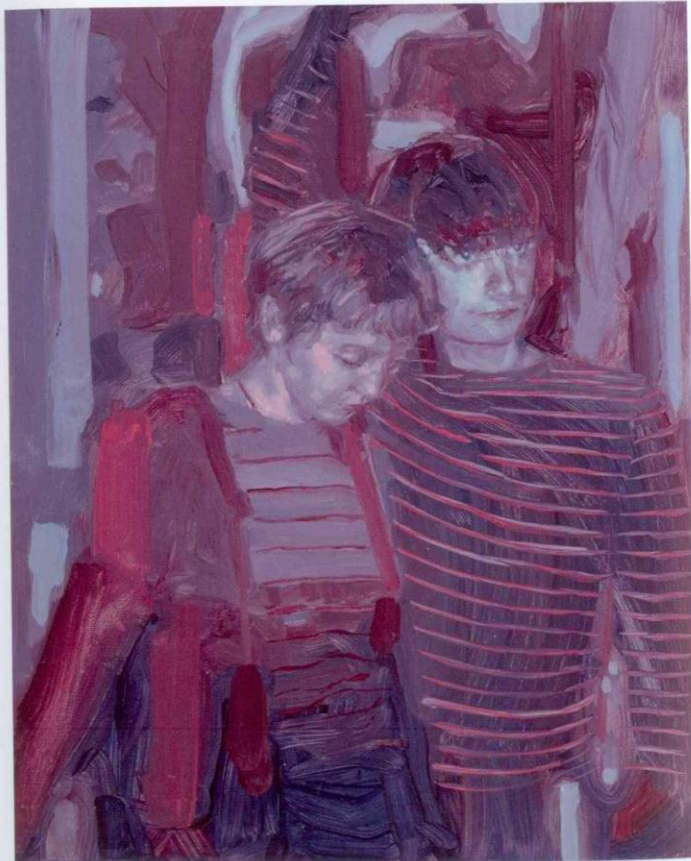
a different angle. The islands are full of so-called super-clubs which attract people from all over Europe on what seem like modern-day pilgrimages.'

One of his earliest choices was to portray his own friends in the finished works rather than asking strangers to pose for him. 'As a studio painter the idea of having to go out and find a model is quite daunting, even in Cardiff, let alone Leipzig or Berlin,' he says. 'I did not want to approach random people in clubs, so I asked my friends to come along as my models to diffuse any sense of voyeuristic undertones.'

Deciding to paint the portraits back at his studio, White used the club nights as a recce to assemble as much information and reference material as he could. In his visits to Berlin clubs, bouncers forcefully informed him that smartphones and cameras were forbidden, leading him to experiment instead with different techniques to record the venues' mood, ambience and lighting – including using watercolours on surfaces pre-prepared with dark paint to minimise the attention he would attract in low-light environments. 'I found myself making gestural works recording colours and contrasts, and studies that conveyed atmosphere,' he explains.



Next Day (Owain)  
by Casper White, 2018  
Pencil and watercolour on found paper, 250 x 160mm



Have to Warm up to the Feel of it (Mabli and George)  
by Casper White, 2018  
Oil on canvas, 500 x 400mm

'These sketches in the clubs were hard-fought, but became influencers in gesture and mood when I returned to the studio.'

In order to fully capture his surroundings, White says it was also important that he immersed himself in the clubbing and bar experience: 'We were out every night. Nothing too wild, but I soon discovered that drawing, drinking and dancing is hard work and don't necessarily work well together.'

While in Germany, White also began drawing his friends during their hangovers from the night before, using various found objects, from gig flyers to old record sleeves, to use as surfaces for the works. A pencil and watercolour portrait of his musician friend Owain, entitled *Next Day*, was made on a found piece of paper after the group had been to the Pop-Kultur festival in the German capital.

'We had a great night and ended up back at our hostel,' says White. 'In the morning, people were tired, hungover and open to being drawn in this state. The portrait of Owain seems timeless; it reminds me of a Toulouse-Lautrec drawing and made me reconsider Ingres drawings

I have seen. Portraying these intimate moments was one of the most exciting parts of my stay in Berlin.'

On his return to Wales, White determined to make his large-scale portraits as intimate as his pencil drawings. 'That became a focus,' he says. 'You'd expect most clubs to be a throng of people, but despite the crowds, you can still enjoy a relatively intimate space. I wanted to recreate that intimacy rather than paint big groups of people.'

White worked on the portraits while listening to various tracks he'd heard at the clubs in a bid to replicate the experience, rigging up disco lights and spotlights in his studio to re-establish the club vibe (most of the paintings' titles are taken from this music). Calling upon his fellow clubbers and friends to pose again, he initially reconsidered the sketches as oil-on-canvas paintings, including a study of friends George and Mabli entitled *Have to Warm Up to the Feel of it*.

'This painting involved using a very limited palette, mainly purples,' says White. 'In dark surroundings, the flesh can become devoid of the skin's usual tones and tints – similar to the marble of classical sculpture. In clubs,





Next Day (Mabl)  
by Casper White, 2018  
Pencil on found record sleeve, 260 x 260mm

the light is often at such high contrast that shadow and light areas are at the very extremes visually.'

For other works, White opted for varnished stainless steel, zinc and copper surfaces, which he felt were more suited to capturing light and movement. He'd previously used zinc as the surface for his entry in the 2017 BP Portrait Award, a picture of his nephew Jack that was selected for exhibition, and he attempted to refine this technique with his new paintings.

*Into a Light (Mabl)* is a large-scale oil painting on stainless steel. The portrait is a build-up of marks in reds and blues, and the face contains no flesh tones. 'The stripes are, in a way, more detailed than the face,' says White. 'Stripes reappear in a lot of the work produced during this period, suggesting the body but also implying movement. Within this work, you can also see some of the gestural marks taken from the initial sketches I made in the clubs in Berlin.

'I found that when I painted on metallic surfaces, the light was reflected off areas that I left unpainted,' he adds. 'Here, the

light moves across the painting, the work mutates and changes, giving an element of movement within the work. In the past, I have been interested in portraying people's features, but with this project, I have tried pushing my painting to articulate something else as well as likeness to a sitter.'

Having now finished several portraits from his time in Germany, and continuing to complete the Mallorca section, White believes the Travel Award is likely to constitute the first step in an ongoing project that examines what it is to portray people outside the constraints of a traditional sitting.

'These images portray things that are happening most weekends around the world, and I hope the viewer can find a few interesting passages of paint,' he says. 'I do not want to hang the most pristine finished work, nor the most attractive, but I hope this is an exciting collection of drawings, paintings, detritus and debris – one that is a fair record of an interesting period of research.'

Interview by Richard McClure



Into a Light (Mabil)  
by Casper White, 2018  
Stainless steel, 1250 x 1250mm

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank all the artists who decided to enter the 2018 competition. My many congratulations are offered to all the artists in the exhibition and in particular to the prizewinners, Miriam Escofet, Felicia Forte and Zhu Tongyao, and to Ania Hobson, the winner of the prize for a younger painter.

My sincerest thanks to my fellow judges: Dr Caroline Bressey, Rosie Broadley, Glenn Brown, Rosie Millard and Des Violaris. They were both insightful and observant regarding the task at hand and it was delightful to work with them all. I would also like to thank the judges of the BP Travel Award: Rosie Broadley, Clara Drummond and Des Violaris. My thanks to Rosie Broadley for her insightful essay. I am very grateful to Kara Green, Richard McClure, Christopher Tinker and Tijana Todorinovic for their editorial work, Richard Ardagh Studio for

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Nicholas Cullinan  
Director, National Portrait Gallery

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**BP  
TRAVEL  
AWARD  
2017**

THE TRAVEL AWARDS ARE AN ANNUAL CELEBRATION OF THE BEST TRAVEL WRITING IN THE WORLD. THE AWARDS ARE DIVIDED INTO SEVERAL CATEGORIES, INCLUDING BEST TRAVEL BOOK, BEST TRAVEL BLOG, BEST TRAVEL WEBSITE, BEST TRAVEL VIDEO, BEST TRAVEL PODCAST, BEST TRAVEL PHOTOGRAPHY, BEST TRAVEL JOURNAL, BEST TRAVEL GUIDE, BEST TRAVEL APP, BEST TRAVEL VLOG, BEST TRAVEL PODCAST, BEST TRAVEL PHOTOGRAPHY, BEST TRAVEL JOURNAL, BEST TRAVEL GUIDE, BEST TRAVEL APP, BEST TRAVEL VLOG.

