British Contemporary Figurative Painting
Julien Delagrange, Contemporary Art Issue
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ART
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British Contemporary Figurative Painting

Best 25 Figurative Painters of the United Kingdom

Collage of portraits of the 25 most important living figurative painters from the United Kingdom.

Featured artists:
David Hockney / Peter Doig / Glenn Brown / Lynette Yiadom-Boakye / Chris Ofili / Jenny Saville / Mark Alexander / Nigel Cooke / Kaye Donachie / Ged Quinn / Wolfe von Lenkiewicz / Caroline Walker / James White / Paul Winstanley / Clare Woods / Gillian Carnegie / Ken Currie / Laura Lancaster / Justin Mortimer / Christopher Orr / Richard Patterson / Jonathan Wateridge / Richard Wathen / Alison Watt / Stuart Pearson Wright

It is fair to say the United Kingdom has always had a strong affinity towards painting and art in general. As a result, when it comes to art it is no surprise to ascertain the rich history, heritage and connection rooted in the DNA of Britain. Think of the 18th century Grand Tours, artists such as J. M. W. Turner or John Constable, the dazzling collection of the British Museum or the democratic policy towards the availability and accessibility of this collection and heritage for the British people.

In fact, one must not travel too far in time to discover the prolific importance of the United Kingdom in the art world. When it comes to figurative painting in recent art history, there have been several British painters whom are of vital importance for the renewed interest in figurative painting in the 70s and 80s of the previous century, as well as for figurative painters today.

The protagonists I am referring to are the main representatives of the so called *School of London.* The term was initiated in the 70s by the American R.B. Kitaj (1932-2007) to describe a specific group of London-based painters on the occasion of an exhibition at the Hayward Gallery in London which consisted of exclusively figurative drawings and paintings. In an era dominated by abstract, conceptual and minimal art, the figurative pursuit of the artists in question was controversial, contested, but also immersive and inspiring.[1]

From left to right Timothy Behrens, Lucian Freud, Francis Bacon, Frank Auerbach and Michael Andrews at Wheeler's restaurant, Soho, 1963. Photograph: The John Deakin Archive/Getty Images.

Today, these main representatives of the *School of London* are one by one the most important (figurative) painters of our recent past, such as Francis Bacon, Lucian Freud, Frank Auerbach and David Hockney. For instance, the impulses of the *School of London* co-initiated with Neo-Expressionism of the 80s and 90s, as well as the general trend of *New European Painting*. Even today, the current international wave of *New Figurative Painting* is marked by these iconic figures.

However, for this article we aren't aiming to offer a retrospective overview of the British canon of recent art history and painting. In fact, we aim to present a relevant sketch of the current landscape of contemporary figurative painters. Doing so, an objective, argued, measurable and thus reasoned selection of the top 25 living British painters originated.

Note: Hence the art world is continuously subject to change, the top 25 list is not to be interpreted as a ranking but as a cross section of the most influential and important artists based on the following criteria: the career trend, Artfacts ranking, (established) representation, included in shows at major/relevant institutions and galleries, participations in biennials, reviewed by distuingished art publications, featured in important public and private collections and specific career highlights.

18/25: Laura Lancaster (b. 1979)

Portrait of Laura Lancaster. Photo: Chronicle Live.

Laura Lancaster, born in Hartlepool, England. Lives and works in Newcastle, England. Lancaster makes paintings from found images such as photographs and stills from films.

The works of the British painter are characterized by the balance of figuration and abstraction. The abstraction of the brushstrokes often takes over the image, however the figuration remains present and functions as a guideline for the composition, resulting in a dreamlike vision.[19]

An anthology of Lancaster's oeuvre:

Laura Lancaster, *Postponement*, 2020. Acrylic on linen – 24 × 30 cm. Courtesy WORKPLACE.

Laura Lancaster, *Untitled*, 2014. Acrylic on linen – 50 × 40 cm. Courtesy WORKPLACE.

Laura Lancaster, *Head*, 2017. Oil and acrylic on canvas – 100 × 80 cm. Courtesy WORKPLACE.