



INTERVIEW THE LORDS AND LADIES ON THE NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY WALLS HAVE BEEN JOINED BY A HOUSEWIFE, WRITES CHRISTIAN McLAUGHLIN

A DESPERATE housewife now hangs on the walls of the National Portrait Gallery.

The portrait of Battersea resident Katy Munroe, entitled *Katy Does It While Baking A Cake*, is the crowning glory of self-taught Chelsea artist Morgan Penn.

It took two months to complete, and is one of only 50 portraits to be chosen from 3,000 entries in this year's BP Portrait Awards.

Penn, 39, of Beaufort Street, Chelsea, said: "I'm buzzing. I always had high hopes for my portraits, but this has all gone a bit bananas."

"Half a million people will see the Katy portrait. I was really sweating because the cut-off age for the awards has always been 40 and I thought this was my last chance to make the cut. Then I found out the rules had changed and anyone, from any country, of any age can enter. Submissions jumped from 1,000 to 3,000, which made it an even greater achievement."

Munroe, 39, of Analt Road, Battersea, said: "I had so much fun larking around with Morgan. All of his work has a tongue-in-cheek element and my husband has been fully supportive."

"I am a housewife and mother, but 'desperate' could not be further from the truth. I am delighted for Morgan that after all these years of hard work his talent is being recognised."

Penn, who has been painting full-time for four years, taught himself by studying art books at Chelsea Library as well as work by other British artists such as Michael J Austen, Andrew James and comic book art.

He said: "In Torquay where I was brought up you'd be beaten up if you said you were an artist. I studied fashion, then became an art director designing CD covers for bands such as Take That. I only decided to go for it with painting because I thought I could do better than a lot of portraits I

saw at previous BP awards. The commissions then started. I did the winning portrait of Adrian Edmondson (*The Young Ones*) on *Star Portraits* on the BBC. Bob Mortimer's wife contacted me and we created a surprise portrait of him and his sons for his birthday. Next was Jamiroquai. We were going to do a portrait with Kylie on his lap but because of the rumours linking them in the press, calendar girl Jodie Oram sat in instead.

"And my portrait of the Millwall FC Bushwackers (*England Expects*) was also recently chosen for the Royal Society of Portrait Painters exhibition at the Mall Galleries, Trafalgar Square.

"I entered three of my pieces and threw in the hooligans' portrait at the last moment almost as a joke. I had visions of appalled judges spitting their tea out, but it was the first work of mine they accepted since my first attempt in 1995."

Penn is now working on a portrait of his grandparents, Lynn and Alan, who passed away last year. Penn said: "They came up from Devon to see my first painting in the Royal Society exhibition in 1995. It's a shame they haven't been able to see the exhibition now at the National Portrait Gallery but I am going to enter their portrait in next year's BP Awards as a small tribute to their memory."

● BP Portrait Awards, National Portrait Gallery, St Martin's Place, off Trafalgar Square, to September 16. 020 7312 2463, www.npg.org.uk

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BOB'S YOUR UNCLE: Morgan Penn's portrait of writer Bob Mortimer and his sons, and inset above, Morgan on the front of our weekly London Review arts and entertainment section

'I HAD VISIONS OF JUDGES SPITTING THEIR TEA OUT'



ART AS LIFE: Goldsmiths degree show artist Luisa Mota with actress Julie Seebacher, from the London School of Physical Theatre, providing a dramatic effect to Luisa's exhibit



MUG SHOTS: Georgia Ciancimino
PICTURES BY CHRISTIAN McLAUGHLIN

SOLID GOLDEN GIRLS

The mania that surrounds art college degree shows this time of year is in now full swing. And no show is more hyped than that of Goldsmiths in south London. It is the art college behind household names such as Damien Hirst and Bridget Riley, to name a couple. Two of the most promising students at this year's degree show, painter Georgia Ciancimino and mixed media artist Luisa Mota, tell Christian McLaughlin about their journey to the art world's scholastic bigtime

GEORGIA CIANCIMINO, 25

GEORGIA is a London-born artist living in Pimlico Road, Chelsea.

She said: "To be honest, I never wanted to go to art school."

"Both my parents are artists, my father a painter and my mother a sculptor and potter. I was pretty much born into it, but I always saw art schools as a waste of time and generally pretty pretentious places."

"Nonetheless I started at Parsons School of Design and Art in Paris in 2001 and within two years I had a breakdown."

"I didn't think I was capable of becoming an artist and couldn't imagine ever being able to support myself financially. The people around me encouraged me to continue but I decided to come back to London, start again, and be near my father after he suffered a heart attack."

"I wanted to start a business to provide commercially viable installation spaces for artists of all descriptions."

"I believe art is an essential part of life because it allows us to communicate and reflect on society, as well as helping us understand we are not alone."

"Goldsmiths seemed like the place to meet the right kind of people to launch the business while getting the best art education."

"After three years I don't regret it at all. I had held back in the past but I've grown the confidence now to give art a serious shot."

"Painting calms me down and makes me happy, it's my therapy. I would never forgive myself if I got suited and

booted straight after six years bouncing between art colleges.

My degree piece is called *Where I'm Calling From*. It's 20 images of people very close to me that I painted during 20 consecutive days.

"I sat from 10am to 5pm copying the images from photographs on to my laptop."

"The project was inspired as a response to modern critics' claims that painting, as a result of the invention of the camera, is dead. I challenged this by combining the very antiquated style of oil painting with the modern, factory-style process of painters like Luc Tuymans and Gerhart Richter."

"They make distant and cold paintings and try as much as possible to adopt the style of a machine. My images are born from poses that could only be captured by a camera (a machine), but instead of replicating the lifeless images on my computer screen I try to inject colour and personality back into the portrait."

"It helps knowing and loving the people I'm painting, especially considering I've had to stare at them morning until night!"

LUISA MOTA, 23

LUISA is a Portugal-born artist living in Kensington Church Street, Notting Hill.

She said: "I met an amazing art teacher, Nettie Burnett, in Porto when I was 15."

"She allowed me to do whatever I wanted. I could peel chips of paint off the wall, stick them on to paper and draw on them if I wanted. No restrictions."

"The freedom to express myself is what eventually led me to Goldsmiths. It is one of the few art colleges that shares the same mentality."

"The work I submitted for the degree show is an installation piece called *Cactus*. On the wall are images from a performance piece that I previously photographed, and strewn around the floor are all of the actors that are in the photographs above them."

"The original performance piece was totally improvisational. We used a mirror and barbed wire to create the confusing perspective that you now see in the photographs."

"I am obsessed by timelessness and spacelessness and make sense of the piece intuitively. The photos suggest continuity and movement, but in reality it is not alive."

"The actors here today are alive, but less so perhaps than the photographs because they are not doing anything. But that is merely an observation, a suggestion for something to consider."

"I don't want to rationalise it too much. I am not influenced by reason, and my ambition as an artist is simply to trigger the imagination of the spectator."

"Luckily, the reaction to the installation has been much better than I expected. It's been quite a ride, and now it's time for a week's holiday. I'll stick in London until Christmas to see how it goes, but if not then New York is my next step."



FACING UP: Georgia Ciancimino