



antony williams

1
Physalis and Sea Holly
tempera on panel
20 x 28 cms 7 x 11 ins.



antony williams

2019

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Antony Williams

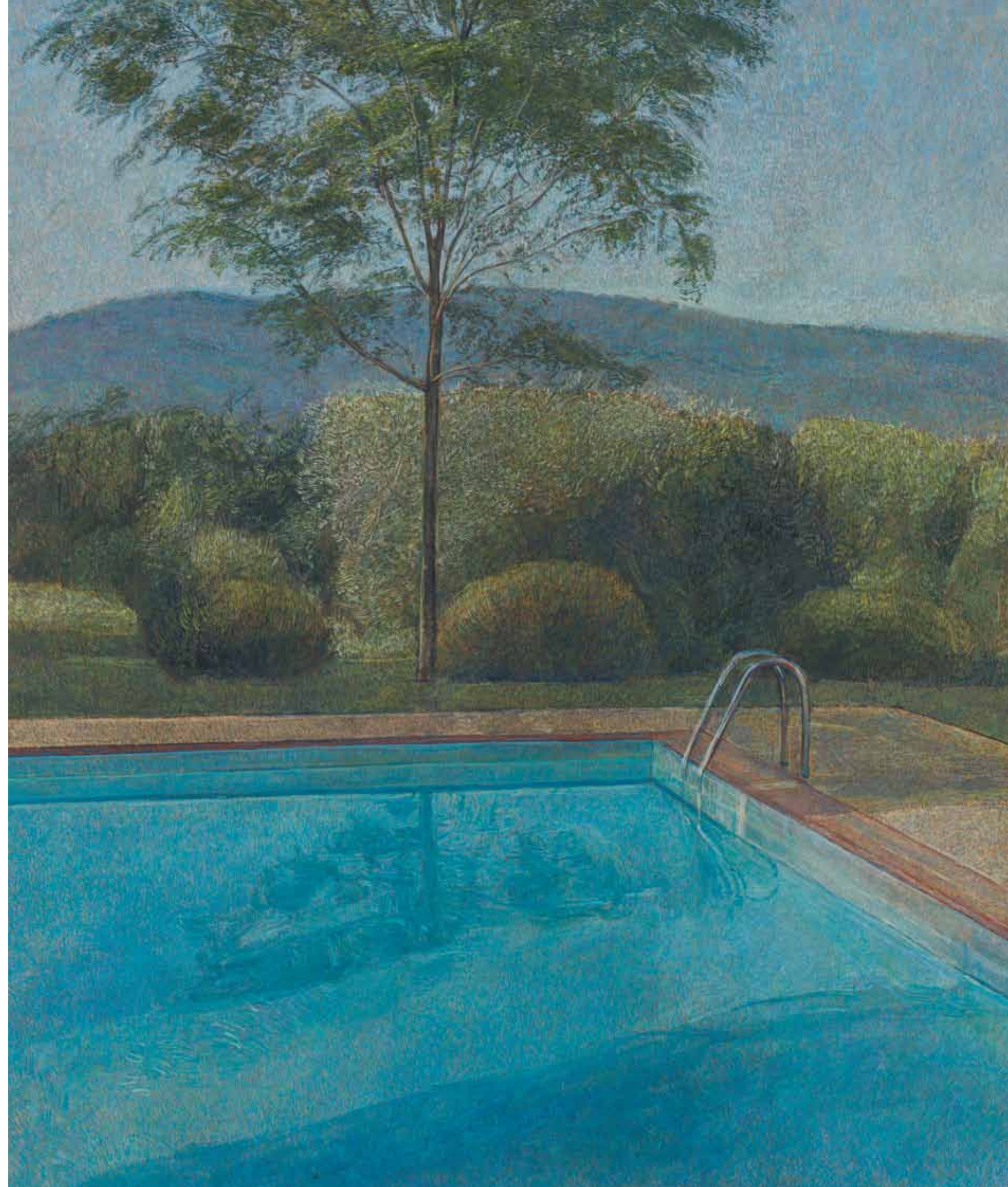
Antony Williams' most recent painting, *Umbrian Swimming Pool*, is like a collision between David Hockney and the early Italian Renaissance master, Piero della Francesca. In the 1960s and '70s Hockney virtually appropriated the swimming pool as his signature subject. His paintings, in scintillating pop colours, with light bouncing off shimmering water in Los Angeles and Provence, helped make him famous. But it is more than the same subject matter that strikes you here. Because in Williams' painting there's also something of that same quality of unease that infiltrates Hockney's *Portrait of an Artist (Pool with Two Figures)* – his 1972 painting that only late last year broke the auction record for a work by a living artist. Though Williams' much sparer painting is completely devoid of figures, it contains a similar brooding impression of slight discomfort as we wait – expectantly – for a swimmer to break the gentle film of water and rupture the careful sense of order the pool conveys.

And of course Williams' swimming is really nothing quite like Hockney's. It is Piero della Francesca who makes the difference. He delivers the precision to *Umbrian Swimming Pool* – the sense of design, the perspective, the very real aura of a hot Italian landscape, and the technique – egg tempera. To a British audience, Piero della Francesca's best-known painting is surely *The Baptism of Christ* in the National Gallery. Painted in around 1440, it too uses the age-old method of mixing pigment with water and egg yolk. Tempera is a very precise, very time-consuming way of working, and one that was increasingly superseded later in the fifteenth century by oil paints. (Indeed, many of Piero della Francesca's subsequent paintings were made using oils.) It is a technique, though, to which Williams is wholly devoted, as he meticulously covers his panel with endless tiny brushstrokes.

2

**Umbrian
Swimming Pool**

tempera on panel
112 x 95 cms
44 x 37½ ins



3

Miranda

tempera on panel

41 x 34 cms 16 x 13½ ins

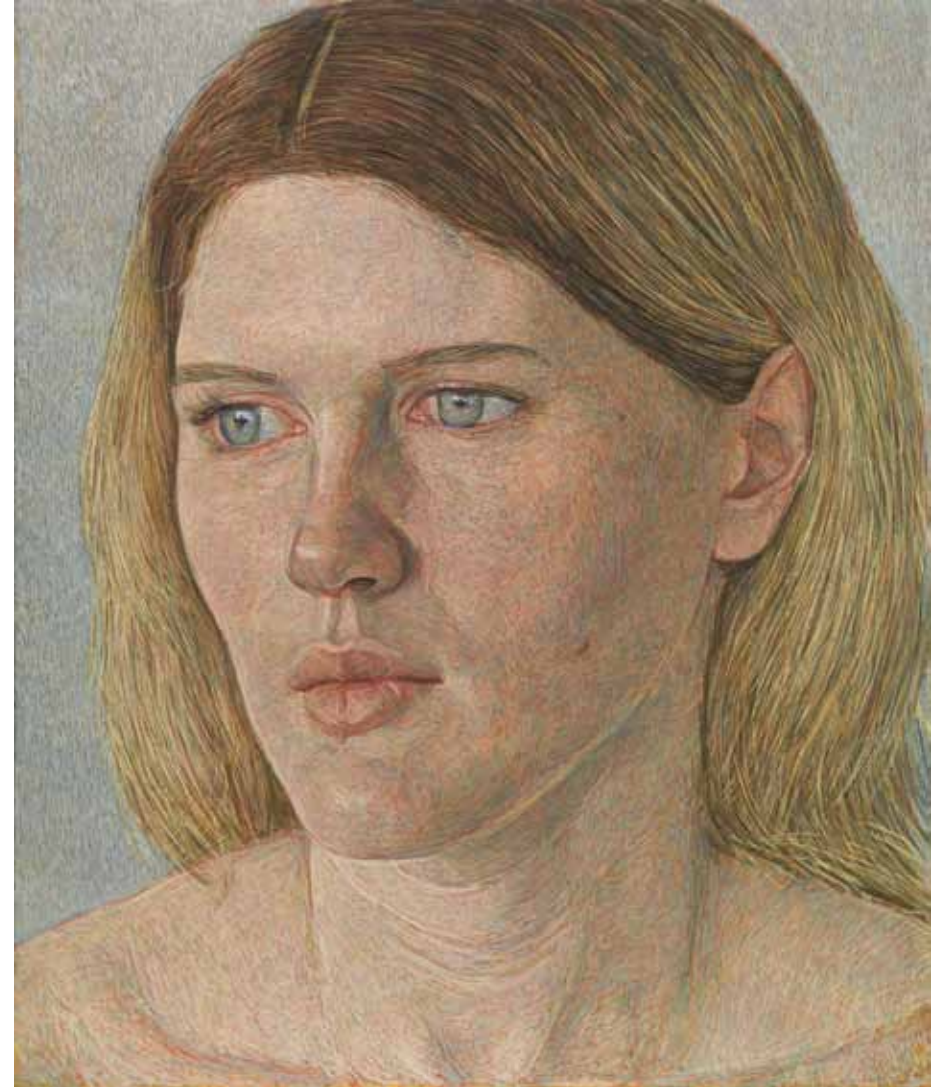


Figure Lying by Water

tempera on panel

137 x 109 cms 54 x 43 ins

He started using tempera in the early 1990s, and it's the medium in which he made his remarkable portrait of the Queen in 1996 – a painting that, despite the controversy it caused (particularly in his representation of Her Majesty's fingers), helped launch his career.

Tempera forces the artist to work slowly. Piero della Francesca, like Williams, worked slowly, and both painters maintain the same constancy of careful technique across the whole of their panel. This helps to create a lot of their heightened sense of reality. As in Williams' *Umbrian Swimming Pool*, a tree dominates della Francesca's *Baptism*, each of its many leaves painted in the same careful, scrupulous detail. And both works focus on the symbolic importance of water. Yet the figures that crowd della Francesca's scene are absent from Williams' work. Once again, looking at his painting, we simply wait, expectantly, for something – anything – to break the sense of heat and stillness.

This feeling of something uncertain about to happen – or that might just have happened – is characteristic of much of Williams' recent work. At least three of his new paintings, *Figure Lying by Water*, *Figure at Gracious Pond* and *Beyond the Pines*, are based on his exploration of the landscape around Chobham Common, near his home in Surrey. Williams has lived all his life in the county, and from a young age holidayed by the Wey and the Thames with his widowed mother and his four young siblings, playing in the water meadows and among the wooden shacks that once lined the rivers. It is these early memories, and the experience of paternal loss, that perhaps resonate as echoes in these waterside works.

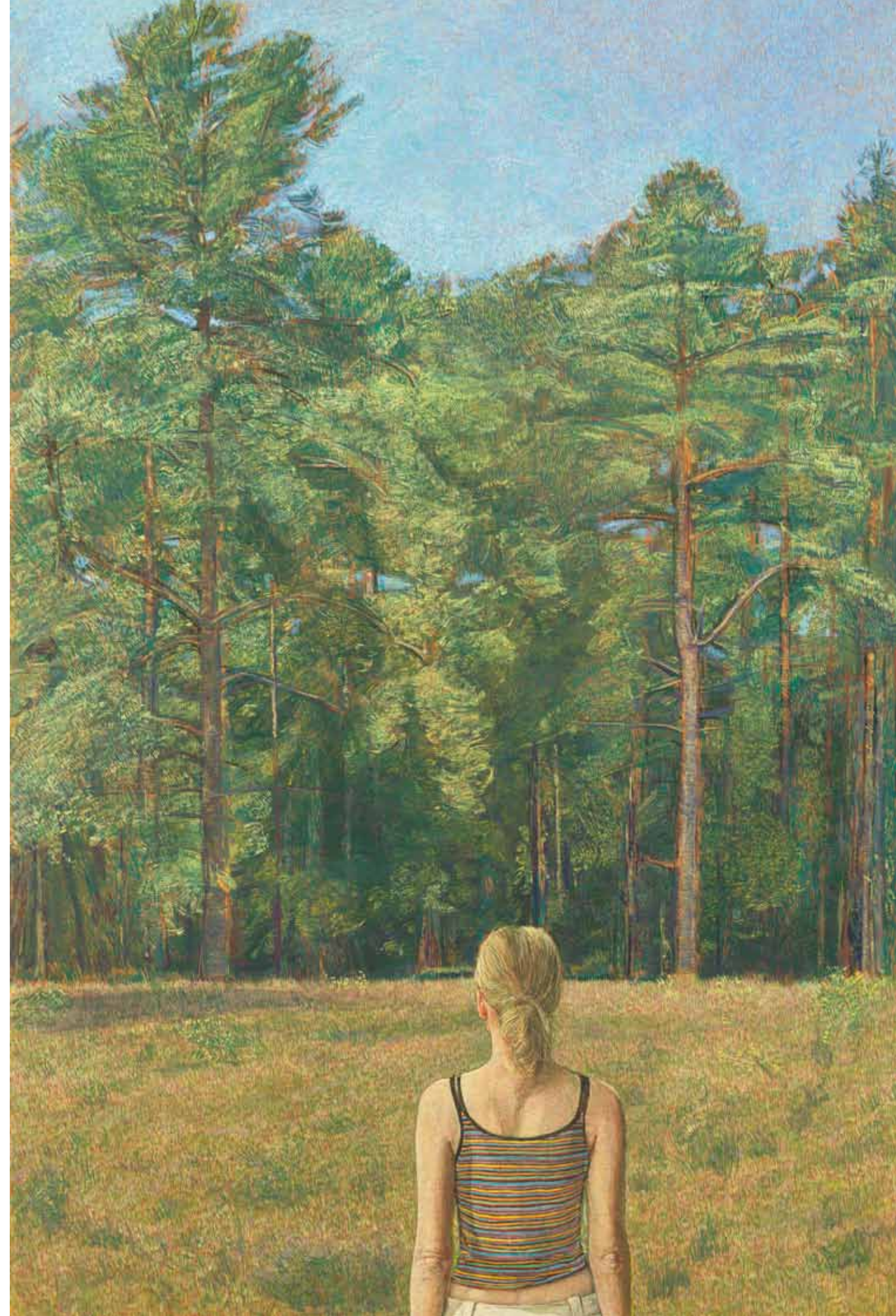


5

Beyond the Pines

tempera on panel

109 x 74 cms 42 ⁷/₈ x 29 ¹/₈ ins

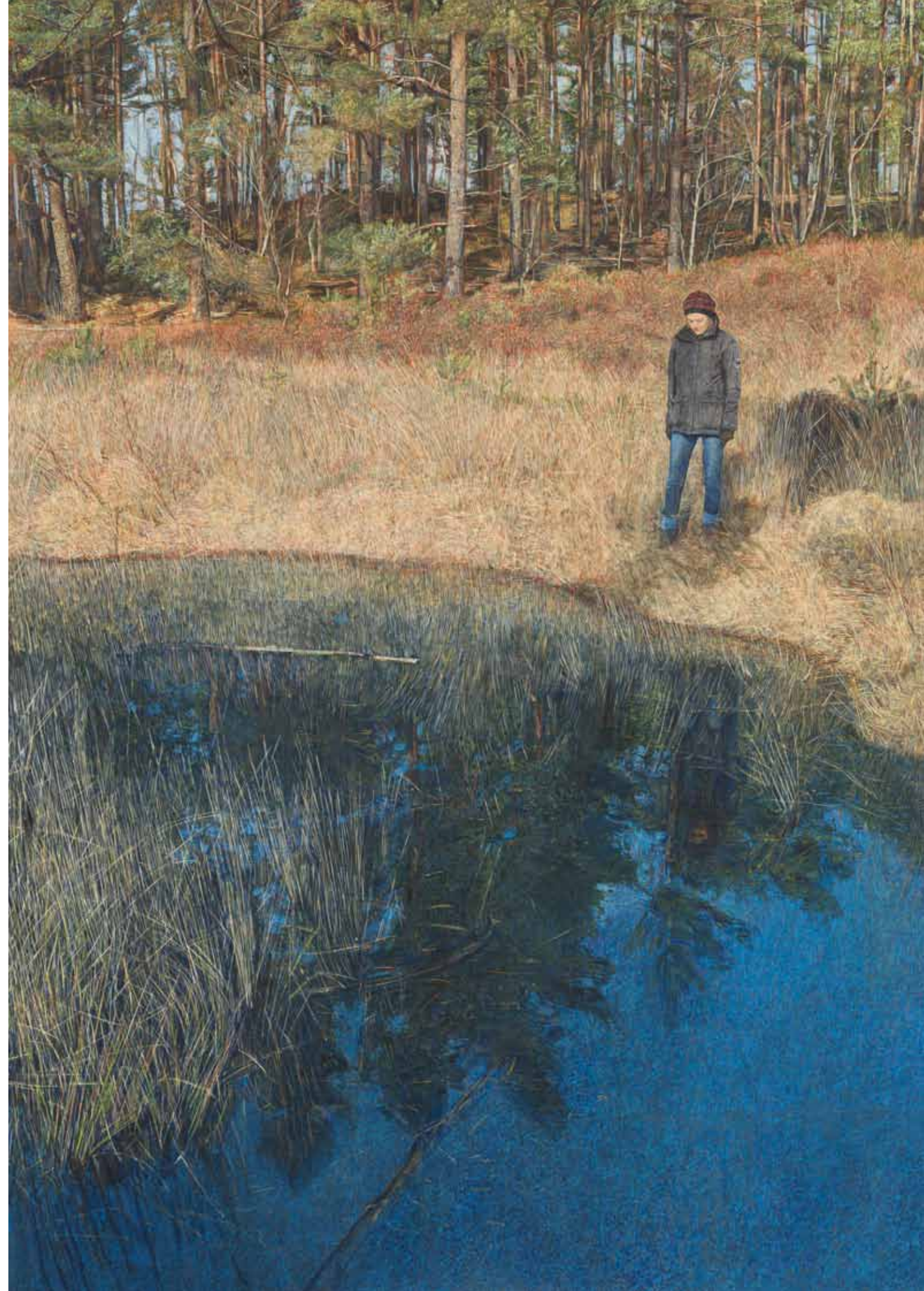


6

Figure at Gracious Pond

tempera on panel

142 x 100 cms 56 x 39½ ins



View from Platts Eyot

tempera on panel

69 x 89 cms 27 x 35 ins

There is also something maybe significant in the artist's recent change of studio. For many years he worked in a rented room in a large house on the High Street in Chertsey. But following the death of his landlady, Margaret Robinson, whom he had painted assiduously, annually, for sixteen years, he had to find a new place to paint. By good fortune this led him to Platt's Eyot, a large island on the Thames near Hampton, on the fringes of south London. A location for many decades of boatbuilding, its sheds and warehouses now stand empty and derelict – or are reused for an odd array of small businesses. It is a slightly eerie, abandoned place, one that perfectly suits Williams's isolated way of working.

His subjects and life models visit him there, to have their portraits painted. In *View from Platts Eyot*, one of his regular female models stares out of the studio window in still concentration, looking towards the far bank of the river, at a scene where, unsettlingly, nothing appears to be happening. If there is no-one visiting him, Williams works on a still life of his plastic dinosaurs – toys that also perhaps unwittingly hark back to his childhood. But Williams emphasizes that whilst he intends the sense of mystery that imbues many of his paintings, an actual sense of story is not important to them. They are left open to interpretation. He is conscious that people will bring a different narrative, a different experience or emotion to their own encounter with one of his works. It is just one of the things that makes them so appealing, so successful.

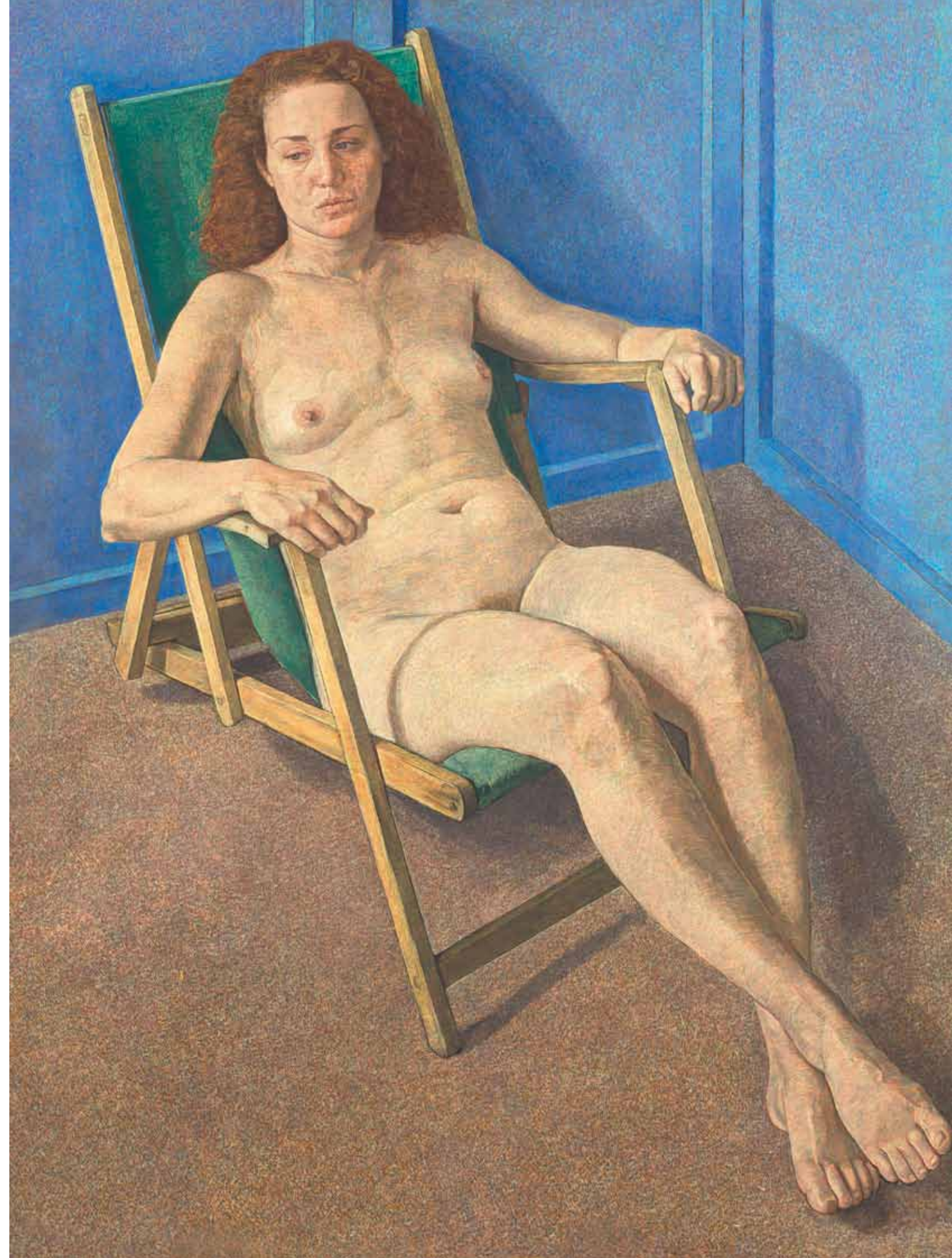


8

Eli in Theo's Deck Chair

tempera on panel

183 x 137 cms 72 x 54 ins



Everything he paints is created using a multitude of tiny gestural marks, displaying the infinite patience of his semi-pointillist technique. And what goes on beneath the surface paint is just as important as the lines that go on top – there is a lot of trial and error involved in creating each of these paintings. In the late 1980s through to the early mid 90s he was working like David Bomberg and Frank Auerbach, making large gestural views of London and the Lakes in thick charcoal and oil paint. Something of those powerful gestures still lingers in his work, though now each is writ incredibly small in an infinity of tiny strokes.

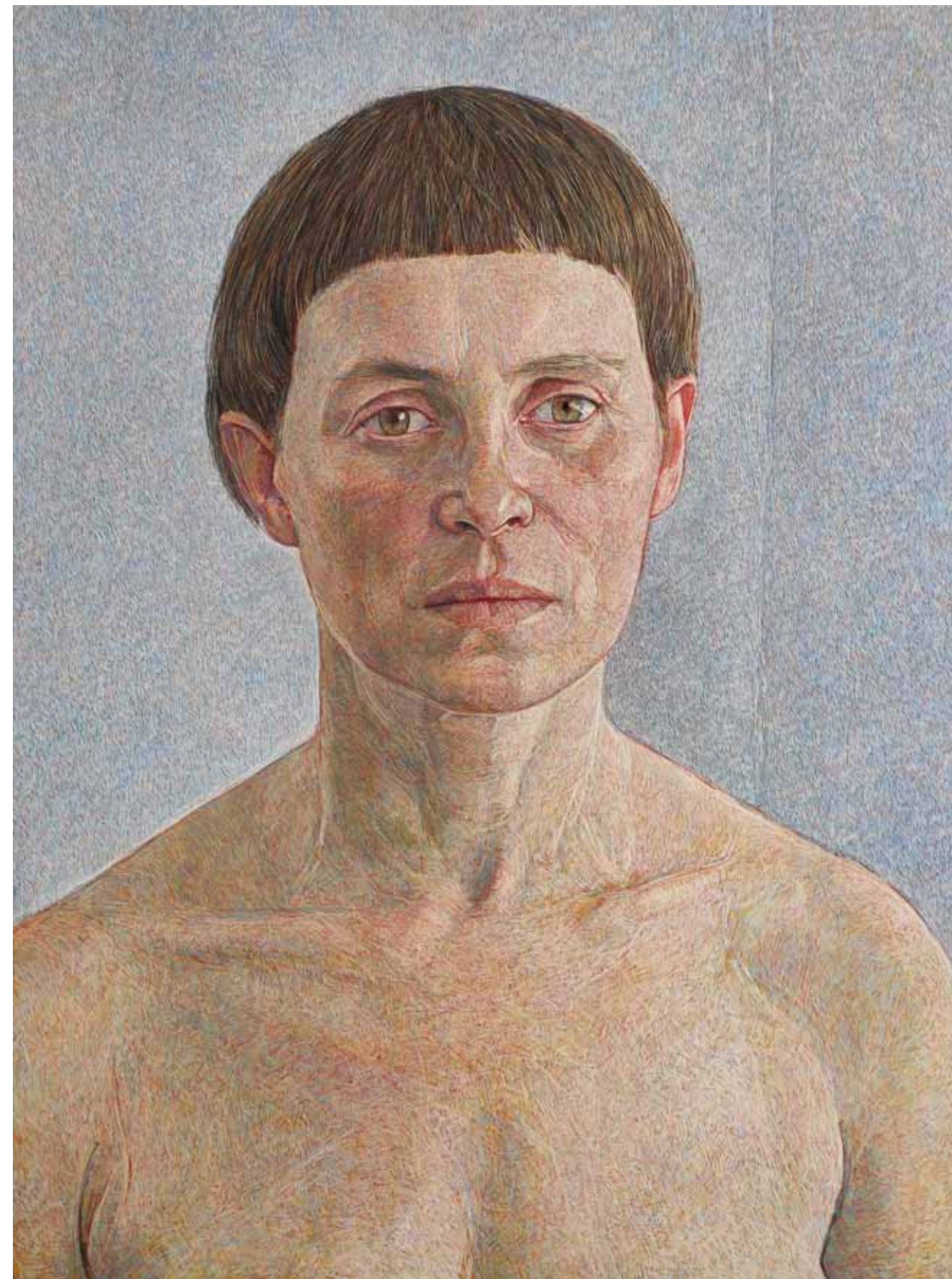
It is this same process of almost endless mark making that lends the instantly eye-catching power to his portraits. We seem to see the actual flesh beneath the skin, and the veins within the flesh, and even the water in a sitter's rheumy eyes. And here again we encounter the collision of old with new, as Lucian Freud seems to meet the early Flemish portraiture of Jan van Eyck – both painters that Williams greatly admires.

He clearly loves the careful process of painting – thrives on it, even. Tempera, as he explains, 'is more akin to pencil drawing. Lean and economical, it is not so expressive as oils, it limits you in some ways, and I like that limiting factor, of working within its possibilities. It's like a straitjacket that has focused me.' This attention to the endless brushstrokes, always careful adjusting, modifying, looking, gives him the sense that he is doing something that no-one else is quite doing. It is a technique that has brought him considerable success and recognition. His portraits are in the collections of the National Portrait Gallery, the House of Commons, Lord's Cricket Ground and the Royal Society of Portrait Painters. Through patient hard work and a distinctive vision, it is a success that has been well and justly won.

David Boyd Haycock

April 2019

Author and curator



10

Swimming Pool with Figure

tempera on panel

108 x 145 cms 42½ x 57 ins

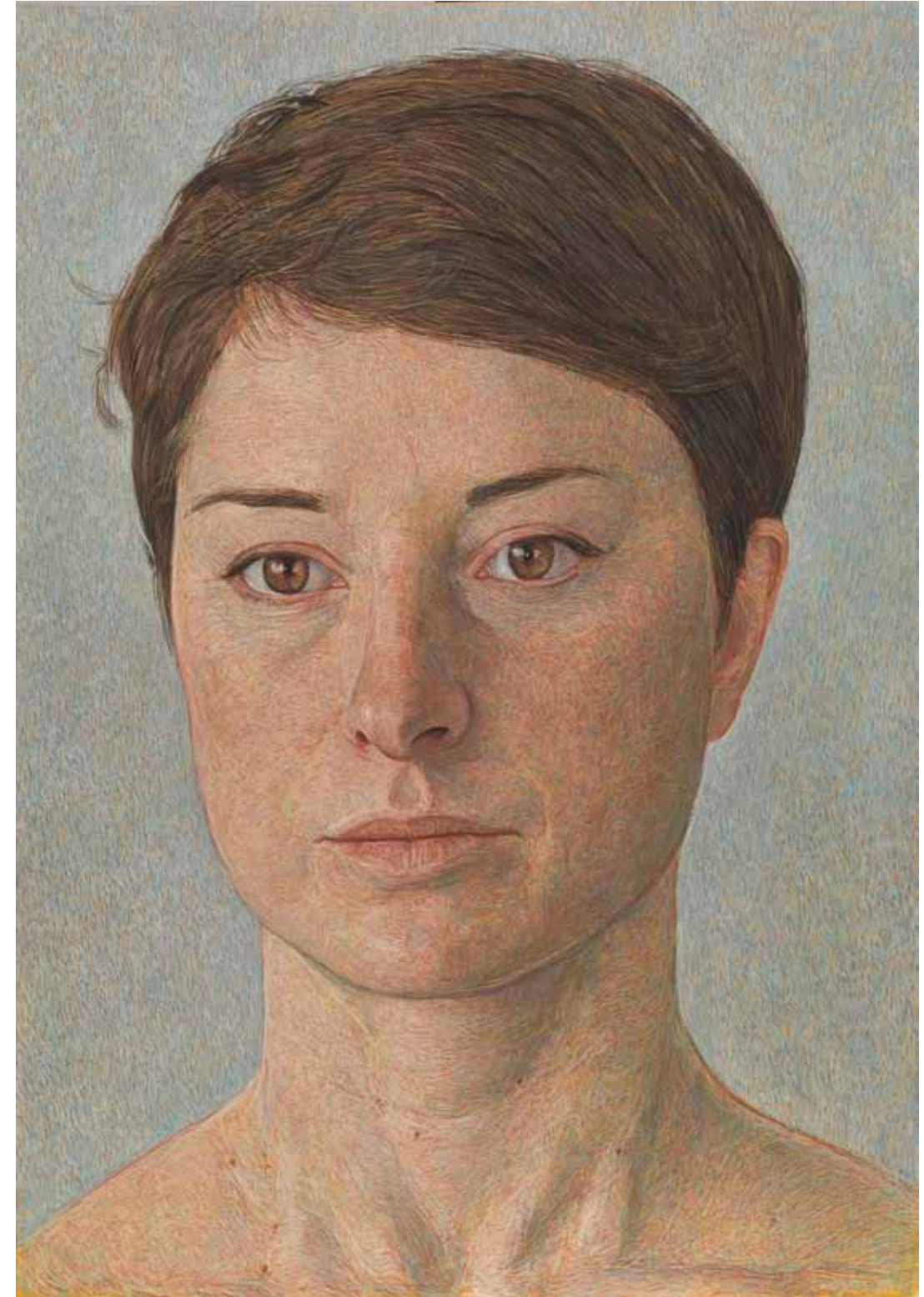


11

Chiara

tempera on panel

57 x 40 cms 22½ x 15½ ins



12

Chertsey 562368

tempera on panel

97 x 137 cms 38¼ x 53⅞ ins



13

Sea Cadet

tempera on panel

49 x 43 cms 19¹/₄ x 16³/₄ ins



14

Manko

tempera on panel

53 x 66 cms 21 x 26 ins



15

Antonia with Clenched Hand

tempera on panel

80 x 94 cms 31½ x 37 ins

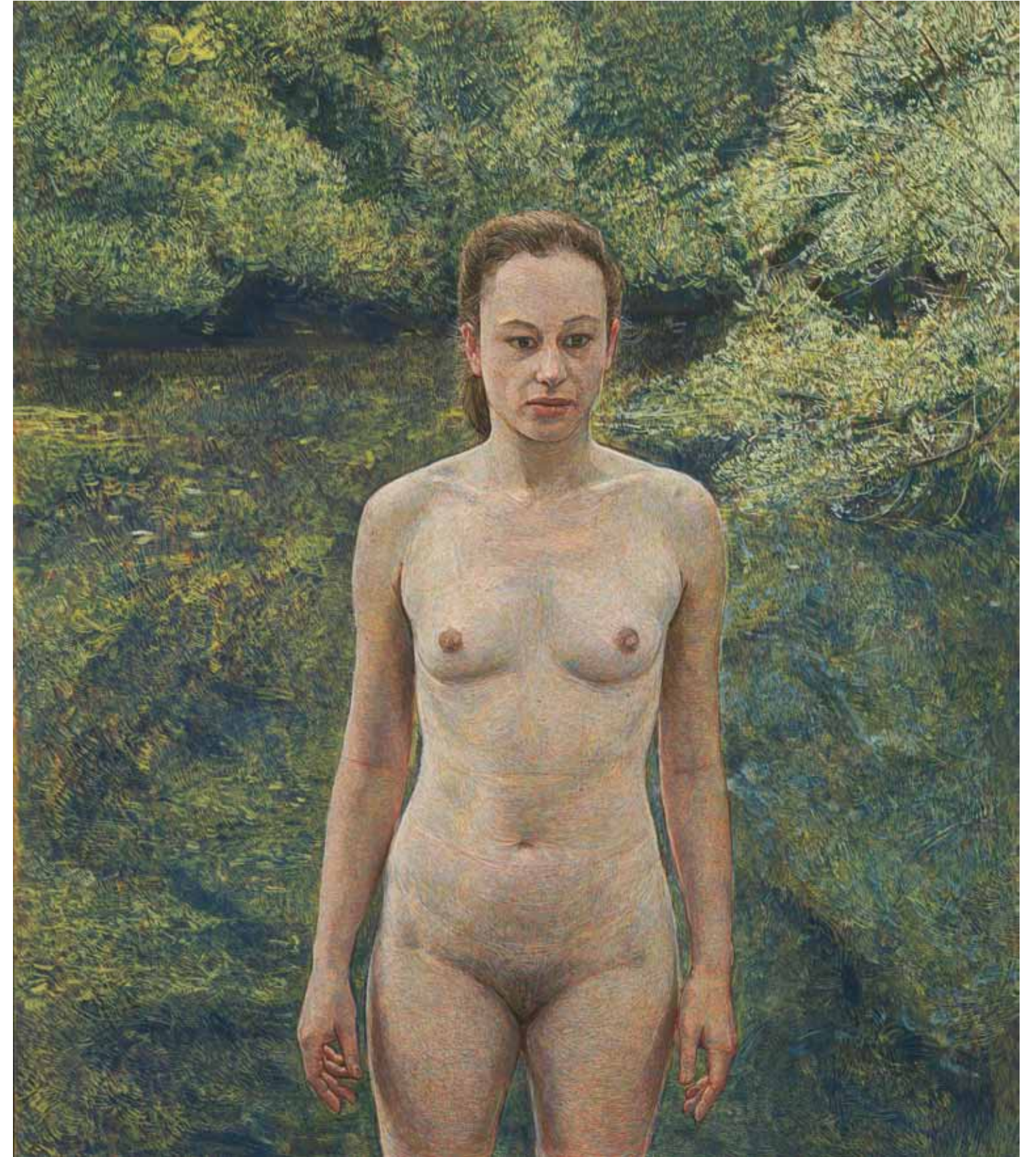


16

Nude with Pond

tempera on panel

58 x 51 cms 23 x 20 ins

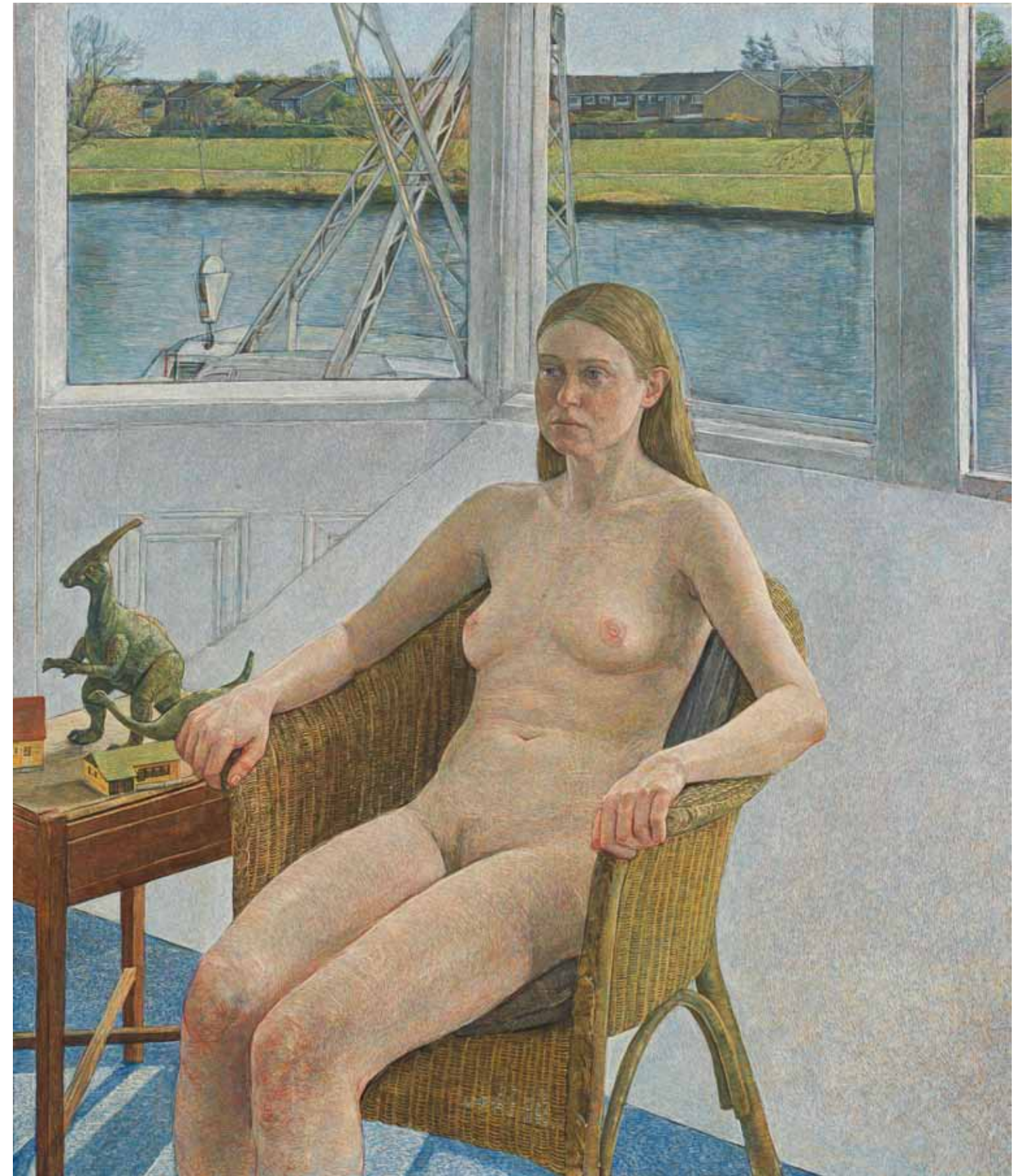


17

Nude with River and Still Life

tempera on panel

89 x 69 cms 35 x 27 ins

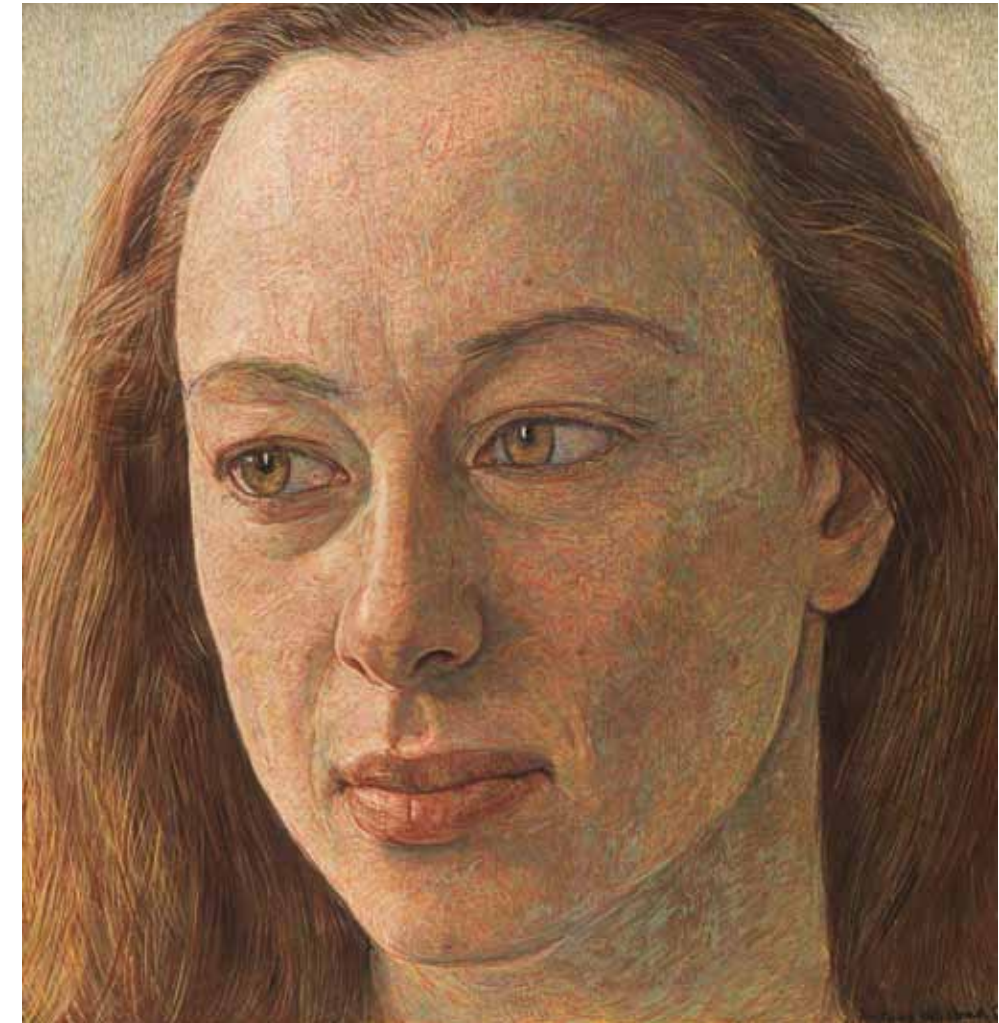


18

Natasha

tempera on panel

32 x 31 cms 12⁵/₈ x 12¹/₄ ins

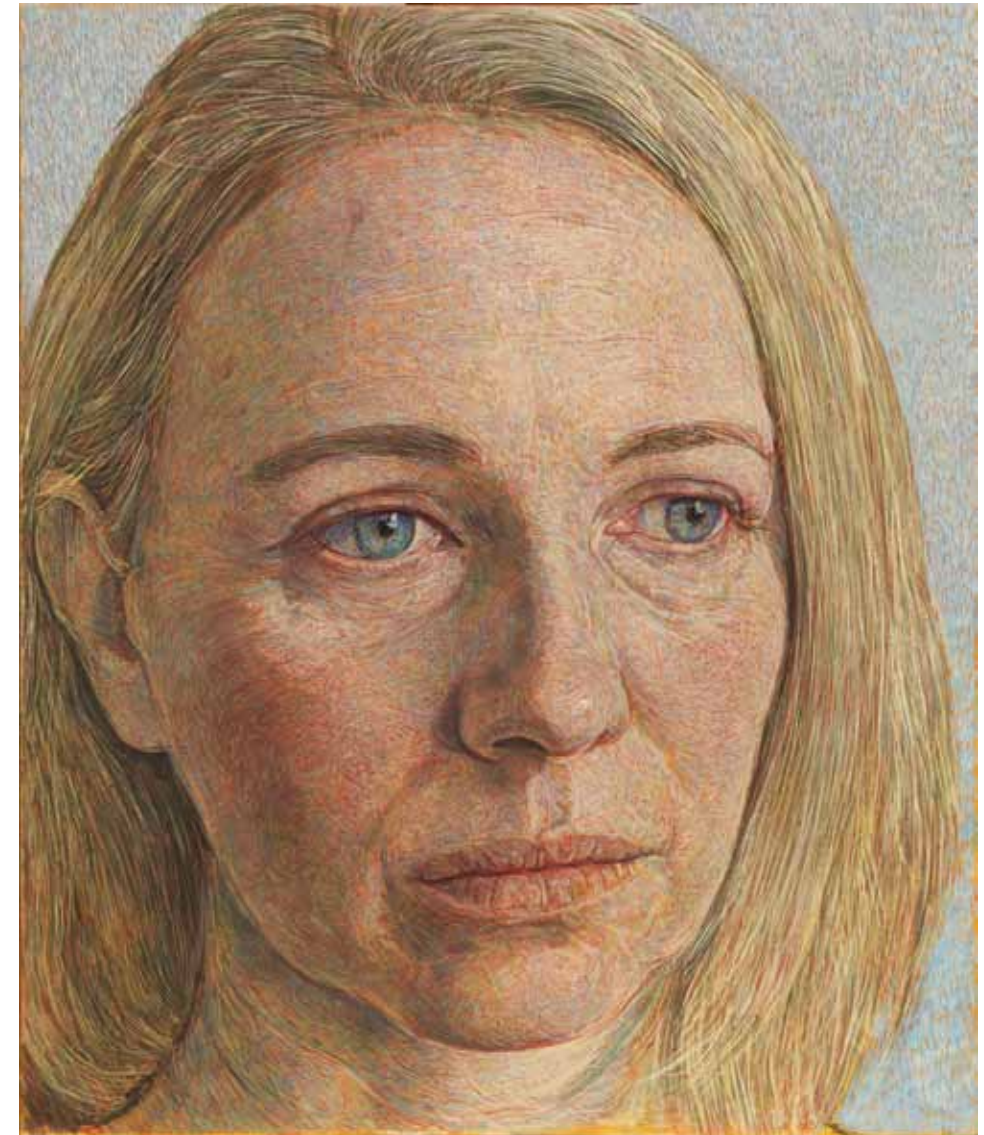


19

Anastasia

tempera on panel

34 x 29 cms 13½ x 11½ ins



20

Sheepskin and Cactus

tempera on panel

53 x 74 cms 21 x 29 ins

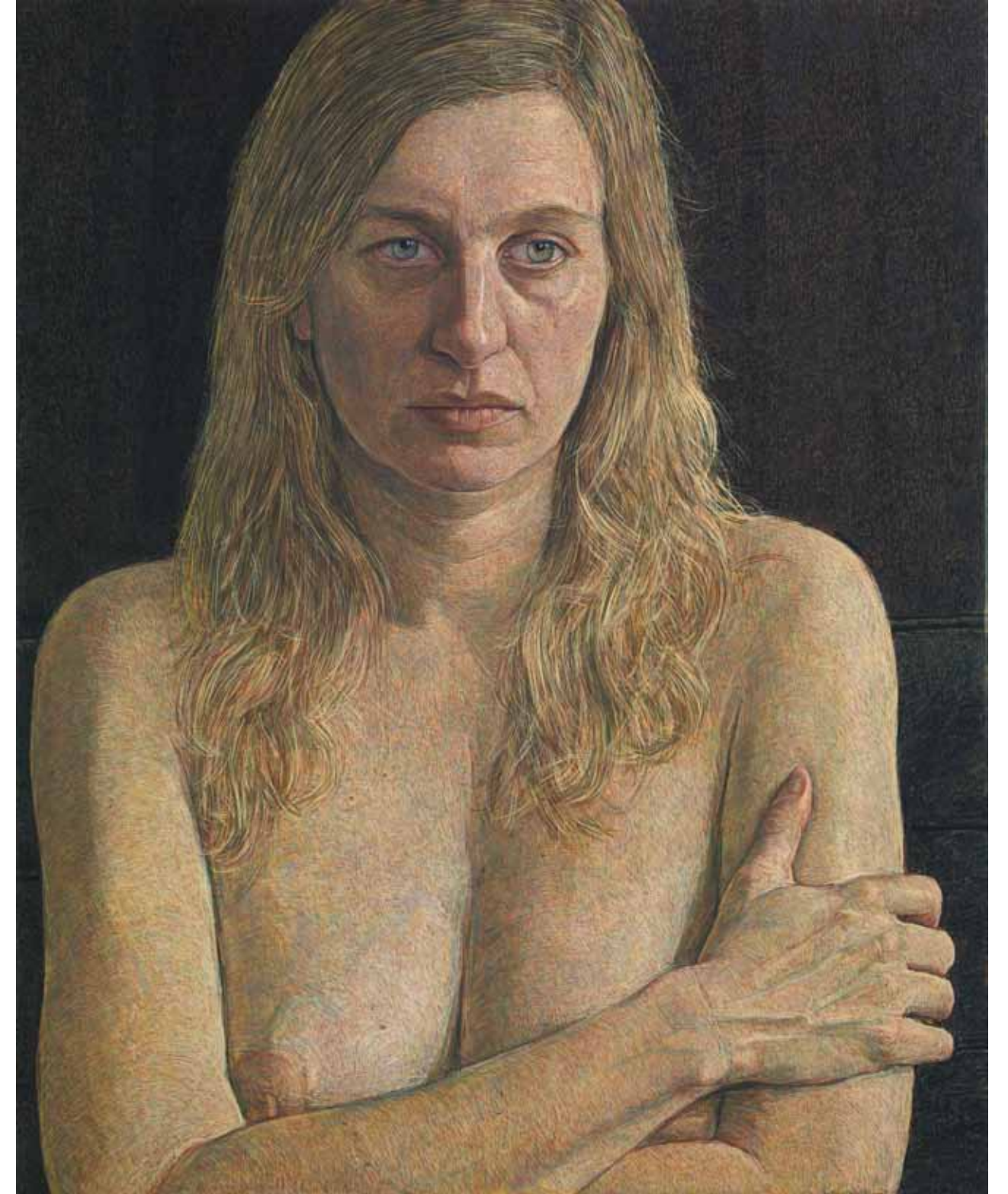


21

Emma

tempera on panel

69 x 56 cms 27¹/₈ x 22 ins

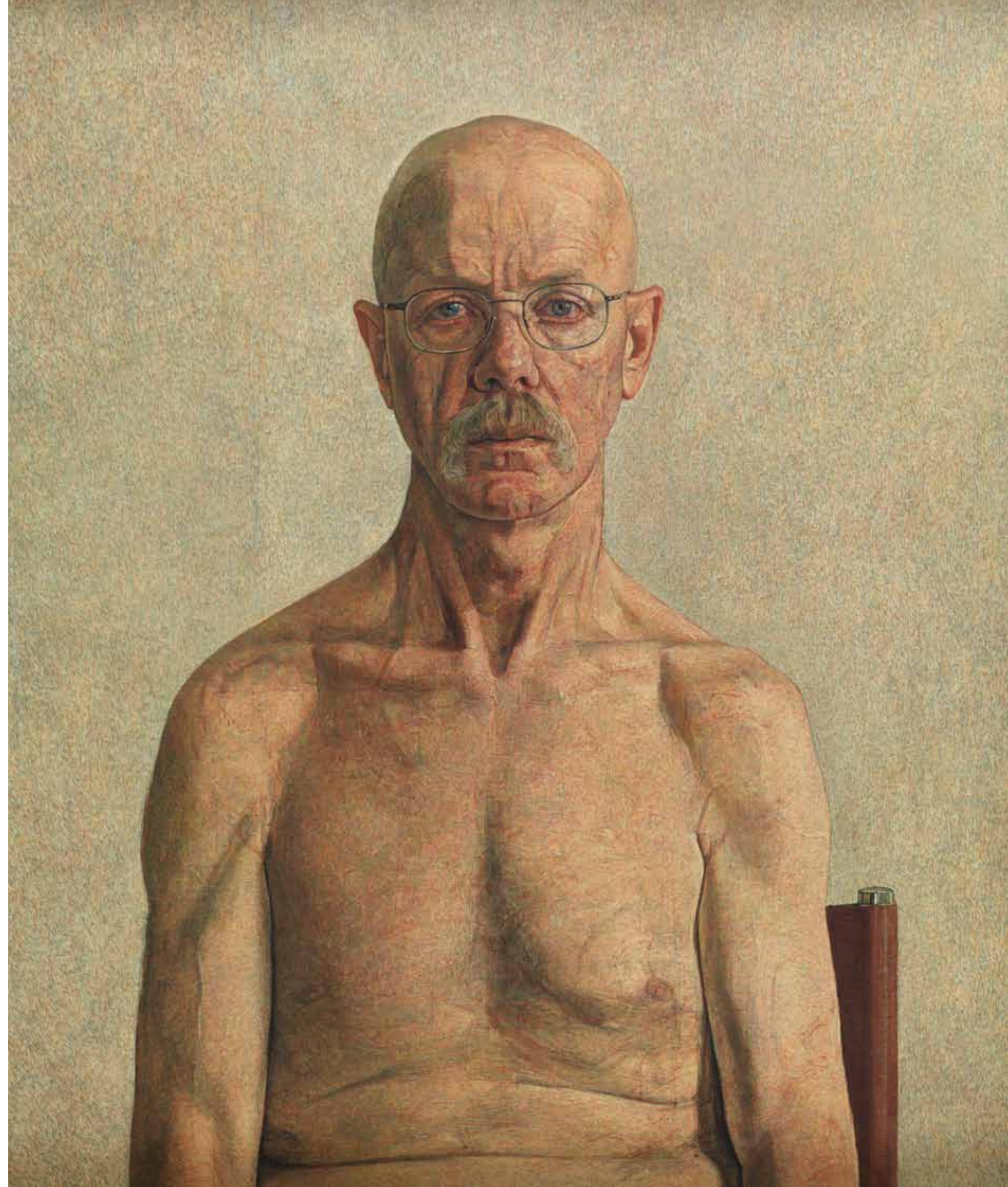


22

John III

tempera on panel

106 x 92 cms 41⁵/₈ x 36¹/₄ ins





Education:
Farnham College and Portsmouth University.

Solo Exhibitions:
Albemarle Gallery, London 1997
Sala Pares, Barcelona 1999
Messum’s, London 2000
Galeria Leandro Navarro, Madrid 2001
Petley Fine Art, London 2004
Messum’s, London 2009
Artur Ramon Gallery 2009
Messum’s, London 2013
Brian Sinfield Gallery, Burford 2014
Messum’s, London 2016
Messum’s, London 2019

Awards:
Carroll Foundation Award 1991, 1995
Discerning Eye Award for Still Life 1998
Lynn Painter-Stainers Prize 2007, Runner-Up Prize
Arts Club Prize 2004, 2008
Changing Faces Prize 2010
Ondaatje Award 1995, 2012
Lynn Painter-Stainers Prize 2012, Winner
BP Portrait Award, 2017, Third Prize

Memberships:
New English Art Club (elected 2007)
Royal Society of Portrait Painters (elected 1996)
Pastel Society (elected 2007)

Antony Williams RP PS NEAC

Commissions:
HRH The Queen; RT Hon Margaret Beckett MP; Sir Donald Sinden; Ömer Koç; Amartya Kumar Sen; Sir Alan Budd; Kumar Sangakkara; Mahela Jayawardene

Collections:
Viscount Portland; Elaine and Melvin Merians; House of Commons; Garrick Club; National Portrait Gallery; Royal Society of Portrait Painters; Queen’s College Oxford; Private Collections in England, Rep. of Ireland and USA; The Royal Collection; Ömer Koç; The MCC

Group Exhibitions:
Royal Society of British Artists 1991
Mercury Gallery, London 1994
Laing Art Competition Exhibition, Mall Galleries, London 1995
Waterman Fine Art, London 1995, 1996
Hunting Art Prize Exhibition, Royal College of Art 1998
The School of London and Their Friends (The Collection of Elaine and Melvin Merians) Yale Centre for British Art: New Haven, Connecticut 2000
Discerning Eye, Mall Galleries, London 1996, 1998, 2002
Great Britons, Treasures from the National Portrait Gallery, London at the National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Inst., Washington, DC, 2007
Artonomy, Drawing Exhibition, Truro 2007
Royal Society of Portrait Painters, Self – Portraits Exhibition, 2 Temple Place, London 2007
Pastels Today, Southampton City Art Gallery 2008
Threadneedle Figurative Prize, Mall Galleries, London 2008, 2012
Royal Academy of Arts, London:
Summer Exhibition 1992, 1995, 1996, 1998, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2007, 2010, 2011, 2014
New English Art Club, Mall Galleries, London 1992, 2007–2010, 2013, 2015
Lynn Painter – Stainers Prize, London 2007, 2012, 2015
D-Day Portraits, Queen’s Gallery, Buckingham Palace, 2015
Ruth Borchard Self Portrait Prize, 2015
D-Day Portraits, Palace of Holyroodhouse, 2015–2016
Royal Society of Portrait Painters Exhibition, Mall Galleries, London 1991, 1992, 1995–2016
BP Portrait Award Exhibition, National Portrait Gallery, London 1995, 1998, 2005, 2007, 2010, 2014, 2015, 2017
Pastel Society, Mall Galleries, London 1996, 2000, 2008–2018

Selected Bibliography:
Sarah Boseley, ‘Queen- Warts and All’, The Guardian, May 1996
W F Deedes, ‘Portrait Captures Queen’s Troubles’, Daily Telegraph, May 1996
Nigel Reynolds, ‘Are these Really the Queen’s hands?’, Daily Telegraph, May 1996
Martin Gayford, The Spectator, November 1997
Martin Gayford, ‘Are our Portrait Painters all Fingers and Thumbs?’ Daily Telegraph, October 1997
David Lee, Art Review, November 1997
Martin Gayford, Catalogue Introduction, Albemarle Gallery, October 1997
Antony J Lester, Antique Collecting, September 1998
Julian Halsby, The Artist, May 1999
Nicholas Usherwood, Galleries, December 2000
Martin Gayford, Catalogue Introduction, Messums, November 2000
Laura Gascoigne, ‘Portrait of an Inner Self’, Artist & Illustrators, December 2000
Brian Sewell, Catalogue Introduction, Petley Fine Art, November 2004
Brian Sewell, ‘How Ugly Can the Faces Get?’, Evening Standard, June 2007
Oliver Lange, The Artist, March 2008
Artist and Illustrator, interview with Steve Pill, 2012
A Brush with Royalty: Portraits of the Queen by Members of the Royal Society of Portrait Painters. The Telegraph, Annabel Freyburg, April 2012
Artist and Illustrator, Fresh Paint Section, Katie McCabe, 2016
BP Portrait Award Shortlist Offers Up an All-Female Line Up, Guardian, April 2017
Tatler Magazine, Keep History Alive: Portraiture in the Selfie Age, Annabel Sampson, February 2019



23
Reclining Nude on Camp Bed
tempera on panel
97 x 107 cms 38 x 42 ins

24

Physalis and Seed Heads

tempera on panel

19 x 29 cms 7 x 11 ins.





25

Lemon Tree

tempera on panel

47 x 46 cms 18½ x 18 ins

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