

Tale of three portraits

(Monday 18 June 2007)

EXHIBITION: BP Portrait Award 2007

National Portrait Gallery, London WC2

CONTRAST, in this 60-picture show, two of the shortlisted portraits with Ana Maria Micu's Self Portrait and three ways of seeing women's beauty emerge.

Micu's self-portrait is painted from inside out, from the young woman's watchful soul, then outside over her naked shoulder, its lustrous contours hunched over her chest to guard it from a light whose source you can't see.

But you can see the very edge of her right eye's lens and the vertical tendon ascending the dark left side of her neck.

On the other hand is shortlisted Tamara by Johann Andersson, looking seductively at you, very blonde, gentian-blue-eyed, tiny-breasted, edged by soft focus and, says the artist, trying to challenge ideas of voyeurism. He does not quite succeed.

Then there is shortlisted Zuzana in Paris Studio by Hynek Martinec, which is more the scatty blonde with rabbit teeth and freckles. Her enormous shades reflect the artist's studio, fortunately, minus the young man himself.

His workspace interests him more than his sitter's soul - his girlfriend's, as a matter of fact.

Exhibition runs until September 16.

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