

7 June 2019

Dear Nick,

It was a pleasure and a privilege to be asked to sit as a judge for this year's BP Portrait Award. I was impressed by and so enjoyed witnessing the care, rigour and humour displayed by you and my fellow judges. History has taught us the relevance of portraiture – the depiction of an individual can reveal so much about our shared present. Wouldn't our lives and times be so much poorer without the likes of Holbein, Frans Hals and Hockney?

However, I feel that I must express my discomfort about continuing to have BP as the sponsor of the award. There might have once been a case for partnering with BP, but it's clear to me that that moment has passed.

The evidence that our planet is rapidly changing - sparking mass extinctions, rising sea-levels, extreme weather and collapsing ecosystems - is undeniable. And BP is actively exacerbating that crisis, with no plan to stop producing massive amounts of fossil fuels for decades to come. I understand that BP's investments in renewable energies are a tiny proportion of its total investment - less than 3%; that it continues to explore for and bring into production vast new reserves of oil and gas; and that the total emissions from its operations continue to rise. While all this remains the case, the company is firmly part of the problem, not the solution.

I know how difficult fundraising is and how valuable an ongoing relationship with a major corporate sponsor can be. But in the case of BP, I feel that this is outweighed by the need to act urgently on the climate crisis we are now facing. Because this is such a high-profile sponsorship deal, I don't think it's possible to be neutral. Either we distance ourselves from one of the world's biggest fossil fuel producers and embrace the challenge of decarbonising, or we continue to give legitimacy to BP and its business activities that are seriously exacerbating the problem.

Recognising that we are in a climate emergency means taking steps that we might not have planned for and, for me, refusing to launder the oil industry's image is a step that the art world now needs to take. None of us are morally pure in this situation, but that doesn't mean we don't have a responsibility to try to do what's right.

I am very aware that there is a real squeeze on both public and private sources of funding for the arts at the moment, something that is a genuine concern both for artists and galleries. The art world needs to have a much bigger conversation about funding models, perpetual growth and what role large arts institutions should play in society. But in this instance, I think we need to follow our consciences, and it's clear to me that the time to act on climate change is now.

At a minimum, no corporate funder should compromise our artistic integrity. I therefore urge you, as a first step, to no longer allow a BP employee to sit on the award's judging panel. There should be no role

for an oil company in the artistic decisions of any cultural organisation, and especially not in determining the winner of the world's leading portrait award.

This is the 30th year of BP sponsoring the Portrait Award, and I would argue that 30 years is enough. As the impacts of climate change become increasingly apparent, the Gallery will look more and more out of step by hosting an oil-branded art prize. Continuing to promote BP as the climate crisis intensifies will do unacceptable damage to the NPG's reputation, relationships and public trust. I urge you to commit now to finding an alternative.

I want to see an art sector that rises to the unprecedented challenge of climate change, and believe the National Portrait Gallery can be at the forefront if it steps up and makes the right decisions now.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a series of loops and curves, characteristic of Gary Hume's signature.

Gary Hume