

Interview: Bryan Ferry

“I can't imagine life without art around me”

The Roxy Music founder on being taught by Richard Hamilton, his love of British artists and viewing at speed

Bryan Ferry came to prominence in the 1970s with his band Roxy Music. He has also had a successful solo career. He tours extensively with the reformed Roxy Music as lead singer and contributes to both the artistic direction of the stage shows and the design of his album covers. He trained as an artist at Newcastle University and has collected art since the 1970s.

The Art Newspaper: Did you have any art in your house as a child?

Bryan Ferry: No, we didn't have any at all that I can think of. It was a very small house. It was an art-free zone.

TAN: What was the first work of art that really made an impression on you?

BF: In sixth form at school I became interested in becoming an artist. I wasn't a natural draughtsman or anything like that, but I became consumed by the whole thing. Discovering one artist who would lead to

strong connection with Newcastle University, where I went to art school, and New York. My friend Mark Lancaster went to work for Andy Warhol and my other friend, Tim Head, went to work for Claes Oldenburg. Of course, Richard Hamilton was there.

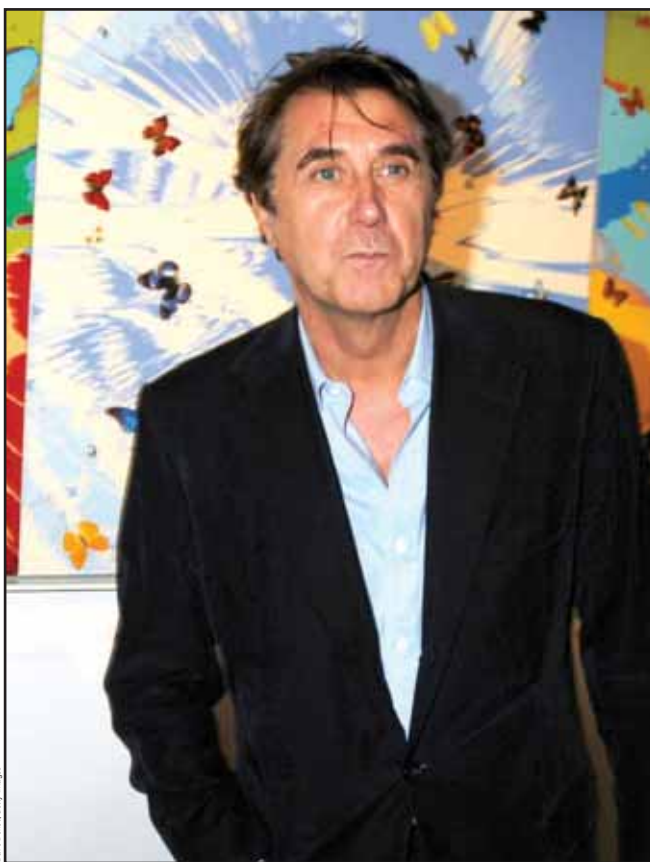
TAN: What was Hamilton like as a teacher?

BF: One was in awe of him because he was such a great artist. I have works of his but I acquired them later. I just loved his art and thought he was so intellectual, so interesting and so cool, all the things I wanted to be. He really led by example, giving very interesting talks a few times a week, when he analysed what people had done. The rest of the time you had the impression he was up in his studio getting on with his own work, the Solomon Guggenheim pieces and also working on the *The Large Glass* [Hamilton's 1965-66 reconstruction of Marcel Duchamp's *The Bride Stripped Bare by her Bachelors, Even (The Large Glass)*, 1915-23]. He was a great man doing great art and we were just trying to be young apprentices, learning how to do it. Suddenly I was in this building with a load of other interesting artists. It was a fantastic time for me to grow up very fast. You sensed you were learning without it being forced on you.

TAN: What was the first work you bought?

BF: It was quite some time later, around 1976, and was a Duncan Grant still-life.

TAN: What attracts you to British art?



Art is the drug: Ferry framed by Hirst

BF: At a certain point at art school I read [Sir John] Rothenstein's *Modern English Painters* and found Augustus John, Sickert, and the Bloomsbury group, Nevinson, and Wyndham Lewis. You talk about them all in the same breath but they are very different people individually. Wyndham Lewis couldn't stand the Bloomsbury group so it's quite fun to have them all

facing each other in my house in Sussex. When I'd made some success out of music I thought: "I've got a house and need pictures for it"—British art was undervalued then. There are odd bits here in London that are quite different. I have a lovely picture by Cecily Brown, and Jennifer Bartlett, and there's a few Stephen Buckleys, who I love. I've got some beautiful

drawings by Richard Hamilton, a [James] Rosenquist, a Warhol *Mao*, some Man Ray and an Eve Arnold Marilyn Monroe. Sometimes it's the picture that interests you rather than the person—for instance, a portrait by Augustus John of Wyndham Lewis which is really beautiful, or Sickert's painting of Gwen Ffrangcon-Davies called *Gwen Again* [early 1930s]. That's probably the biggest picture I've got because they tend not to be that big. I do like Gursky and Struth, the scale of them and the meticulous way they work. And Glenn Brown. But I don't own any.

TAN: Your forthcoming album has artistic references...

BF: The album's called *Olympia* because every day I see the big *Olympia* sign when I drive into work. *Olympia* obviously made me think of Manet's *Olympia* [1863], one of the great paintings of the 19th century, which was very modern and controversial; I wanted someone who would pull that off visually for the album cover. I thought Kate Moss was the perfect person and it turned out that she was a big fan, and said: "I've always wanted to be a Roxy cover girl." Kate, of course, as well as being incredibly glamorous, is a muse for many artists, as was Marilyn Monroe.

TAN: What would you say are the main things that have changed in the art world since you were student in the 1960s?

BF: Well it's completely different. It's so in the public eye now, there are so many shows on, there's just so much

activity. Commercial dealers—such as Larry Gagosian—are doing really interesting shows all the time. People like Damien (Hirst) and Tracey Emin have elevated the profile of the art world so much, so has the Frieze Art Fair. And who knows, if it had been like it is now maybe I wouldn't have moved into music. Maybe the calling was there for me. I've very much enjoyed applying whatever visual skills I have to the things we do, like album covers and stage presentations. When I go on tour I always try to go into the local art gallery. Sometimes you want to absorb rather than give out all the time. I don't spend hours; I'm a bit of an expert at "speed viewing". So at Frieze I go around quite fast and stop when I see something that really catches my attention. Last time I went it was Mat Collishaw.

I can't imagine life without art around me. If I'm in a room I haven't been in for a while I can sit and look at a picture. I'd hate to be constantly changing my collection. I'm not that sort of person. Because if I acquire something it usually finds a place in my life. So I tend to be quite conservative in that sense. Once I get something, I don't normally want to part with it. ■

Interview by Jean Wainwright

□ Bryan Ferry's new album "Olympia" will be released on Virgin Records on 25 October. The download single, "Heartache by Numbers", will also be available on the same day. The album features musical contributions from Nile Rodgers, Scissor Sisters, Flea and Jonny Greenwood, among others. It also sees Bryan Ferry reunited on record with artist, activist and former Roxy Music bandmate Brian Eno.

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another period, you'd suddenly find you'd exhausted all the possibilities of Paris, and then you'd move to New York and think "Oh my God!", discovering Jackson Pollock, Andy Warhol and all the other people. There was quite a



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Anselm Kiefer (b. 1945), "die Ungeborenen" (detail), photograph, collage with lead and fabric, 123 x 60 cm, € 100,000 – 150,000, auction 24 November 2010