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England is the only advanced, industrialized country that I can think of where portraiture and postwar painting have become nearly interchangeable. One cannot think of painting in postwar England without recognizing the work of Michael Andrews (1928-1995), Frank Auerbach (born 1931), Francis Bacon (1909-1992), Lucien Freud (1922-2011), David Hockney (born 1937), Leon Kossoff (1926-2019), and Euan Uglow (1932-2000), all of whom are known for portraits that required the sitter to pose for hours. With the possible exception of Howard Hodgkin, no single English abstract artist has attained anything comparable to the status achieved by Freud or Hockney. (Donâ€™t think of such as a Mr and Mrs E. J. P. (1969-1973) and a DH in Hollywood (1980-1984) suggest that some of Hodgkin's paintings are meant to be seen as portraits, no matter how abstracted their imagery might be?) The fact that portraiture is an important component of England's long-held perceptions of its artistic achievement and postwar painting is something I want to examine. In 1976, the American artist R.B. Kitaj organized an exhibition, Human Clay, at London's Hayward Gallery. Kitaj got the title from W.H. Auden's poem "Letter to Lord Byron" (1937), which contains the stanza: "The artist's subject is the human clay, And landscape but a background to a torso; All Cézanne's apples I would give away For one small Goya of 'Dancer According to Kitaj', his friend Hockney (the æœœDH in the Hodgkin painting) liked to quote this passage. And yet, reading the show's catalogue essay, it seems likely that Kitaj implicitly agreed with Auden's hierarchy that the human figure was art's greatest subject, and that the main function of landscape and still lifes was to be a backdrop, a down-to-earth 'so what'." This is what Kitaj had to say about painting the figure. "I don't listen to the fools who say either that pictures of people can be of no consequence or that painting is finished. There is much to be done. It matters what men of good will want to do with their lives. 'Painting' and 'pictures of people' are synonymous for Kitaj. It was also in this catalogue essay that he defined 'the School of London.' This is how he described its members: "The bottom line is that there are artistic personalities in this small island more unique and strong and I think numerous than anywhere in the world outside America. There is something about Kitaj's emphasis on artistic personalities that disturbs me. Is it wrong to think that there is something misguided about his stress on celebrity, particularly since the ones he is calling attention are portrait painters? One of the fascinating things about the 'School of London' is how its members - except for Kitaj, the American interloper and inventor of the term - have attained a secure place in English history. If I am to believe the official chronicles, there has never been a rebellion against these artists nor any comment about their focus on portraiture, at least by English artists of the same generation, born between World War I and World War II, during what Auden called the 'Age of Anxiety.' " The best-known artists are the ones who wedded the Expressionism, which had challenged Regionalism and Cc focusing on the end of history, art, and painting. The affection is because of two paintings that were largely overl portrait painting to be one of the crowning achievements (December 9, 2020), in his paintings, including two that w Gothenburg, Sweden, where he was preparing for a solo individual - which itself is a meaningful part of the works collaged directly onto the canvas. One section is an open irregular rectangle, signifying a head; the second section Tillyer causes a number of things to happen. He calls atte painterly nor does it achieve any of the dramatic effects the portraiture. Tillyer's conceptual gesture exposes to the masterpiece tradition and a sign of the artist's important it must be done in the masterpiece tradition. Surrounding artist's personalities and their signature sty normally associate with portraiture and its emphasis on st

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signature styles or characterizations, to resemblance, and to the m, and Color Field painting challenge their predecessor, Abstract ed artists challenge all of these implicitly conservative narratives of many English artists to acknowledge any criticism of this deep he summer of 1978 - after Human Clay claimed figurative and escribed in an email as "an off-the-shelf garden product" l Shoulders (Lattice) (both 1978). The paintings were done in esh, 29 1/8 x 25 5/8 inches While the titles do not single out an rthogonal. Tillyer cut the mesh into two sections, which he , suggesting a frame in both works, while the other section is an ost portraits. By collaging the wire mesh onto the canvas, e paint from smoothly coating the surface, so the artwork is not frame, which can be seen as an ironic commentary on the art of he artist wishes, and that this freedom is an essential component i class and lineage, as well as the belief that for a portrait to be tablishment? They can be seen as a direct critique of the cult ings, beginning with the format, Tillyer undermines everything we ting, and summons associations with self-taught art and Art Brut. Additionally, it suggests an imprisoning enclosure, not unlike that of the historical assumptions about portraiture from which Tillyer needed to disentangle. More than being the incisive works of an outlier, Tillyer's two featureless portraits made of wide, straightforward brushstrokes sever the bond between the artist's signature style and the sitter. By doing so, the artist comments on the hierarchical construction of English society, the gaps between the much photographed and gossiped about royalty (both real and invented), the faceless commoners, and all those existing on the rungs in between. By turning the head into an anonymous, abstract shape, Tillyer removes all traces of the flattery, decorative details, and painterly flourishes that are considered integral to portraiture. By de-emphasizing the individual, he calls into question the hallowed tradition of English portrait painting, its long lineage of notable artists and subjects, and the special bonds between them. The addition of the featureless subject is a reminder of all the nameless and forgotten people who have contributed to England's well-being. I cannot help but think that Tillyer is being implicitly critical of the portraits of Lucien Freud, Frank Auerbach, Francis Bacon, David Hockney, and even Howard Hodgkin, each of whom gained wide attention during the period in which Tillyer made his paintings. The flat insistence of Tillyer's brushstrokes underscores his desire to clear a space for his work without resorting to a signature style or personal marks. At the same time, his rejection of what Kitaj dubbed the "School of London" and its focus on portraiture, figuration, and personality offers a clue as to why the London art establishment has never fully embraced him. They like it when their boys and girls are æœœrebels" as long as they behave correctly and take the right path. Hearing the phrase "Kung Flu" used to describe COVID-19 reminded me to reread a poem, "Constance Bennett" by Robert Hershon, which was included in his chapbook Freeze Frame (Pressed Wafer, 2015). Constance Bennett That's the bitch who hit Richard Barthelme in the face with a whip; my father always said when he saw her face on the screen He never forgave or forgot or entertained reality even when it was her obituary flashing briefly across the news The scene Hershon's father cannot forgive is from the pre-code film Son of the Gods (1930), starring Bennett and Barthelme, and directed by Frank Lloyd, who is best known for Mutiny on the Bounty (1935), starring Charles Laughton and Clark Gable. In the film, Sam Lee (played by Barthelme) is Chinese, but can pass for white. He hides the fact that he is æœœa dirty yellow Chinaman" when he meets Allana Wagner (played by Bennett). When Wagner discovers Lee is Chinese (which Barthelme isn't, by the way, but I won't say more on that here) she begins beating Lee across the face with her riding crop. Watching that scene of vicious humiliation, I realized that I was watching America's collective hatred of the Chinese rolled into an entertaining scene, embodied by Bennett who later be starred with Cary Grant in Topper (1937) and Hopper Takes a Trip (1939), and I did not hold her responsible. Rereading the poem made me go back to other books by Hershon that I had on my shelf and wonder why he is not better known. For one thing, he seems to have seen every film ever made, but, more importantly, he remembers all the scenes. What other poet could have written a poem titled "Myrna Loy in Real Life" that opens with the lines: "Myrna Loy never lewd with Harold Lloyd She never lay with Turhan Bey and never lied To Alan Ladd. She was locked in the can with Richard Loo, true, and once allowed Ed and Lowe" but to k fact: As casual an affair as this poem first seems, it is clear that Hershon is especially attentive to sound (lewd/Lloyd, lay/Bey, lied/Ladd) and wordplay (can/Loo). There is nothing casual about his work. Hershon was born in Brooklyn in 1936. He was one of the founders of Hanging Loose Press in 1966, which started out as a magazine (and is still going strong) and later began publishing books. According to its website, the press has published more than 220 books, including first books by these authors: Sherman Alexie, Kimiko Hahn, D. Nurkse, Jack Agâ€™os, Cathy Park Hong, Eula Biss, Joanna Fuhrman, Hayan Charara, Maggie Nelson, Indran Amirthanayagam, R. Zamora Linow, and Beth Bosworth. Is there another poet in America who has championed such a racially diverse group of poets, who has, as they say, put their money where their mouth is? Hershon writes a plain-speaking poetry that originated with William Carlos Williams. His subject is his daily life. In his most recent book, End of the Business Day (Hanging Loose, 2019), he deals with getting old, as well as with memories that arise, often without warning, with age, as in the book's title work, "Evenly Blood." The poem is waiting to have his blood drawn, which we learn only after reading this passage: "My father, who was afraid of my mother's craziness, of her screaming and paranoid delirium, told my sister and me that we had to deal with her that she was our responsibility because we were blood relations and he wasn't. He had merely been married to her for fifty-five years, just passing through. But he was my blood relative and I carry the inheritance in a dented bucket. For all its transience and narrative drive, this is not confessional poetry. It is too nuanced for that, too alert to shifts in tone, to what is

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