

PRESS RELEASE
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HUMPHREY OCEAN: Sometimes I wonder...

15 April – 28 May 2025

Vivienne Roberts Projects, 53 Hatton Garden, London EC1N 8HN

Vivienne Roberts Projects is delighted to present *Sometimes I wonder...*, a solo exhibition by esteemed British artist Humphrey Ocean RA. Bringing together a selection of portraits, alongside a striking landscape and a series of sculptural works, the exhibition offers a contemplative journey through Ocean's singular artistic vision.

A man very much of his generation - "post-war and new hope," as he describes himself - Ocean has spent decades refining his distinctive approach to portraiture. His works have a compelling presence, quietly drawing the viewer in. His early portrait of Philip Larkin (1984), in the National Portrait Gallery, was famously described by Nick Hornby as "unanswerable," its meticulous detail encapsulating the poet's essence. In contrast, his more recent series, *A handbook of modern life*, the work has evolve. These portraits embrace movement and tenderness, yet also an understated humour - not in the expressions of his solitary sitters, who remain in their own existential state of aloneness, but in the knowing gaze of the artist himself. It is a humour that is human, shared, and deeply empathetic.

The exhibition includes *Traffic*, a large-scale landscape in which a van is being followed along a motorway, lined by trees and lampposts still glowing in the early morning light. Achieving uncanny simplicity with minimal means, the painting leaves the viewer "hovering in the after-glow," as Ocean himself describes it.

Alongside these works is a painting of a chair, which he has transformed into a deeply personal subject. In his hands, a simple wing chair becomes a self-portrait - an exploration of presence and absence, memory and observation. The exhibition is further enriched by a surprising collection of small, simple sculptures, evoking ships and cars, that underscore Ocean's fascination with form and structure.

Sometimes I wonder... is not only an exhibition about portraiture, but about looking beyond the surface. Ocean's figures, landscapes, and objects each hold a hidden narrative, inviting the viewer to pause, reflect, and wonder.

About the Artist

Humphrey Ocean is a distinguished British painter. Between 1971 and 1973, he played bass with Kilburn and the High Roads before pursuing a career in visual art. Elected a Royal Academician in 2004, his career has encompassed a diverse range of projects, including an expedition to Northern Brazil with anthropologist Stephen Nugent, which resulted in their book *Big Mouth: The Amazon Speaks* (Fourth Estate, 1988). In 2016, he wrote and presented *The Essay* for BBC Radio 3, reflecting on Impington College, the only Gropius building in Britain.

His work is held in major public collections, including the British Council, British Museum, Victoria & Albert Museum, National Portrait Gallery, Imperial War Museum, National Galleries Scotland: Portrait, Government Art Collection, and The Whitworth, University of Manchester. Recent exhibitions include *That was close* (DKUK, Peckham, London, 2024)

and *Das Bild und sein Buch* (Christine König Chapter III, Vienna, 2024). He lives and works in London.

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