

## BP PORTRAIT AWARD

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**The conservative nature of the selection has become predictable**

**EVENT REVIEW BY JAY SHUKLA.  
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Just as this prestigious annual competition can be relied on to deliver a crowd-pleasing touring exhibition, the conservative nature of the selection has become equally predictable. There's talent in abundance of course, but you'll find precious few risks being taken, least of all by the judges, whose predilection towards straightforward, front-on photorealism has led to uninspiring winners in both the general and young artist categories. In all honesty, the technical and compositional similarity of much of the work is disappointing, but thankfully there is some genuine imagination to be found here. Emmanouil Bitsakis's compact double portrait exerts a strange hold over the viewer, suggesting both the sinister and the sublime, whilst its unusual formal qualities seem even more delightful when juxtaposed with the prosaic efforts with which it shares wall space. Other pictures that leap off the wall include Man Staring by Maryanne Aytoun-Ellis, her spontaneous, liquid brushstrokes producing an image of monumental presence that stands in contrast to the rather laboured feel of much of the other work. The exhibition is worth taking in just to see Miriam Escofet's show-stopping portrait of her father Jose Escofet - an image that proves mastery of technique need not necessarily predicate dreary realism. It's a lesson that the judges of this competition would do well to learn. [Jay Shukla]

### MORE INFO

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Scottish National Portrait Gallery, Edinburgh until 27 April. Free

### ON THE WEB

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[www.npg.org.uk/live/bp/](http://www.npg.org.uk/live/bp/)