

Daryl Austin: Fictions by Wendy Walker, 2014

The element of surprise often plays an intriguing part in the work of Daryl Austin. Who can forget the extraordinary series of naked portraits of regulars from his local pub the Grace Emily in his 2008 exhibition at Greenaway Art Gallery. These slightly larger than life-sized, colour paintings were followed in 2009 by the tiny charcoal and pencil works on paper of *Europa*. The most recent strand of his practice – first unveiled in last year's *Fictions* – involves, to use his words; ' a collusive collision and fusion of painterly and photographic imagery. These works question our faith in the veracity of both the painted portrait and photography. Faces are reconfigured and recomposed, backgrounds shift, landscapes and objects appear or fade away.'

In such a way, Austin not only reworks, but also reanimates his historical photographic imagery – a kind of repurposing – supplying the works with fictional locations. The paintings are full of skewed details and disconcertingly the subjects' eyes (sometimes mismatched, like their clothing) confront the gaze of the viewer.

In an interesting twist, not anticipated by the artist (it was Austin's turn to be surprised), viewers have projected their own narratives onto the images, telling him their connection with the places or people supposedly depicted. Austin says that with the paintings 'I got the feeling I wanted; a strange and sad disquiet, a sweet creepiness.'

Wendy Walker, May 2014