

# Rob and Nick Carter

## Dark Factory Portraits



**Now showing at RNat5A**, Bathurst Street, London W2 2SD

Rob and Nick Carter are delighted to present *Dark Factory Portraits*, their most technically pioneering project yet.

The Carters are known for their creative and playful engagement with digital-age technologies. Their new series of paintings have their genesis in a series of reports on the future of work. According to a 2013 study by researchers at Oxford University and consulting firm Deloitte, 35% of UK jobs are liable to be fully automated by the mid 2030s. The future for artists is relatively secure according to projections, because the more a job relies on a combination of empathy, creative thinking, social intelligence and advanced levels of manual dexterity, the safer it is from the reach of the machine.

Nevertheless, the question intrigued Rob and Nick Carter. Could a machine become a painter, for example? And more than that, could it convey not just form, but that most intangible of human qualities: personality?

As far back as the invention of the power loom in the late 1700s, there have been periodic panics about automation making workers redundant. And reports of the death of painting by the likes of French 19<sup>th</sup> century painter Paul Delaroche on first seeing a daguerreotype have shown themselves to be greatly exaggerated. In practice, mechanisation and innovation have widened the creative field, with new technologies carving out a place alongside existing ones and presenting new opportunities rather than threats to art and culture.

Recent experiments with AI artists in the conception of original works of art have shown that technology is still far from entering artistic discourse on an equal footing with human artists. The Carters focused their enquiries on execution: presented with a pre-existing photograph, how accomplished a painted portrait can current technology be pushed to achieve?

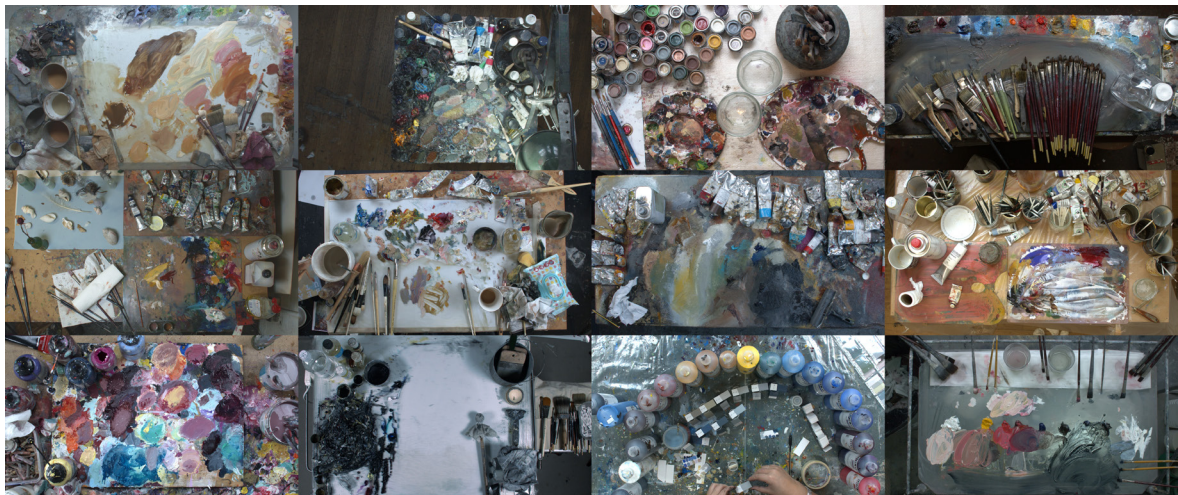
Rob and Nick Carter  
RNI268  
**Yinka Shonibare**  
**Robot Painting**  
**Painting time: 46:27:30**  
**Stroke count: 11,404**  
**8–10 January 2020**  
Acrylic on wooden board  
122 × 122 cm | 48 × 48 in

Working with a team of cutting-edge software programmers and visual effects specialists, they set out to explore how far and how fast algorithms and moving parts could progress towards a new creative paradigm. Central to this conversation was the artists' desire to use technology to execute their own ideas, and paint in a style of their choice. Over months of iterations, they worked with the programmers to layer the code so that the robot could paint both loosely and to a very high level of detail where necessary, executing portraits to a consistent style envisioned by the artists. The outcome of three years of advanced research is set to unsettle, provoke and inspire.

Taking their title from 'lights-out manufacturing', where factories can function in the dark because robotic systems do not need to 'see' what they're doing, the resulting portraits of celebrated artists such as Frida Kahlo, Andy Warhol, Yoko Ono and Damien Hirst are set to be not only revolutionary works of art, but among the first cultural artefacts of a dawning age.

*Dark Factory Portraits* were first shown at Ben Brown Fine Arts in 2020 before the start of Covid restrictions. Having moved to RNat5A on 30 July 2020, they are now on display to the public.

Rob and Nick Carter  
RN1201  
**Painters Palette**, 2018–19  
5 hour 20 minute 12-channel  
looped video installation  
169.2 × 388.4 cm (66<sup>5</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 152<sup>7</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in.)  
edition of 3 + 2 APs



Caroline Walker  
Katherine Tulloh  
Susie Hamilton

Jonathan Yeo  
Flora Yukhnovich  
Will Ayres

Geraldine Swayne  
Jake Wood Evans  
Ben Johnson

Hugo Wilson  
Neil Gall  
Charming Baker

The technical ingenuity of the robot arm and underlying algorithm is complemented by *Painters Palette*, a new video work recording 12 artists' work-stations over several hours of a studio day. Filmed directly from above and with only the artists' working hands captured in the shot, it traces the highly physical, intuitive and distinctive cadences of artistic thought in action, as they dab, mix and coax the pigments to their will. The painters work in a variety of media, ranging from oil to acrylic, watercolour and enamel, and were drawn widely from Rob and Nick Carter's circle of friends, including Jonathan Yeo and rising stars Flora Yukhnovich and Caroline Walker. As a counterpoint to the *Dark Factory Portraits*, *Painters Palette* is a joyful and compelling celebration of the dexterity of the human hand and the virtuosity of the brain.