

'Exhibition of Resistance to Big Oil & the Corporate Hijacking of 'the Arts': street protest & gallery report, June 16th 2004

London Rising Tide and friends were on hand on Wednesday night to greet visitors to a (very) private view of finalists of the BP-sponsored National Portrait Award. Earlier they had made their way from BP HQ in St. James' Square, many carrying artworks revealing a true portrait of an oil company. There most set up across the street (after one arrest outside the gallery and strong police orders to cross over), leafleted passers-by and checked out the live sounds of David Rovics and the Rub through the renewably-powered bike sound system and enjoyed the early evening smog.



As the great, the good and the occasionally struggling queued to pass security and pass into the hallowed National Portrait Gallery portals to hang with the exhibits and quaff fine wines, they were assailed by an intimidating array of NPG guestlist handlers, NPG security, BP security, sub-contracted-to-BP-security and sub-contracted-to-BP Met Police. Dodging between all that lot handing out thought-provoking, non-judgemental (to poor artists) leaflets were various art-not-oil folk.



One joker in pinstrip suit, polka dot tie, end-of-the-world explosive red shirt, BP baseball cap and face painted to reflect the 2 faces of BP (ie. greenwashed vs. actual) was wearing a picture frame around his face, handing out leaflets, entertaining and/or infuriating the authorities and having his picture taken by bemused Singaporean and Californian tourists. He invited these last to take his picture with the conveniently on-hand police photographer, who grinned thinly and bore the imposition while sadly refusing to trade his 'police photographer' cap with the joker's own prized BP cap.



At least three potential private view schmoozers were so impressed by the anti-BP arguments that they refused to cross the climate chaos picket line and spent the evening instead at the newly squatted and fitted with oily-and-other-art gallery at 50 Chalk Farm Road, NW1. Others visited afterwards. This space was filled with art-with-attitude, activist types as well as passing punters answering the call of 'come get your free culture' from a 5 year old lad sitting on the shoulders of a 6 foot friend. Others were intrigued by the bright yellow 'oil fuels war' banner set up outside, (opposite a Safeway petrol station as it is, with Texaco up the road (where sympathetic Sri Lankans work) and Esso just a few yards in the opposite direction.



BP: Sponsoring Climate Chaos