

# Madonna turns coy on nudity

Pop icon Madonna, happy to bare all in her raunchy videos, appear naked in her own photography book, is altogether less happy about two oil paintings that depict the nude.

McLaurin Gallery in Scotland, was the only venue for the showing of the two nude Madonna portraits by Scottish leading contemporary Peter Howson.

The reaction from her fans hasn't been good," the artist told Reuters in an interview.

"I think they're frightened at what she'll think."

Howson's exhibition is split between the McLaurin Gallery north of the English border and the more hip Flowers Centre Gallery in London on April 18.

Her-of-two Madonna fans and collector of Howson's work and the artist have met several times, though the nudes are not parts of the painter's oeuvre.

Howson has sent Madonna an invitation to the exhibition but her spokesman declined to say whether she would attend.

In his part, Howson is a fan of Madonna's music — "my musical heroes are Bach and Mozart" — but he has spent the last 10 years working on two images of the 37-year-old London resident who is married to British film director John Ritchie.

"Nobody knows the true Madonna, not even herself,"

Howson says. "The thing that strikes you about her is her strength, but there is a weakness underneath that."

The first painting depicts the singer squatting, with a large graveyard at her feet, her arms lifted skyward, her body a mass



AP/David Cheskin

A nude portrait of pop icon Madonna by artist Peter Howson. It is part of his exhibition of his latest works at the McLaurin Galleries in Ayr, Scotland. Howson said he painted the nude portrait from imagination after the singer declined to pose for him.

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Reuters  
London

of writhing flesh.

The second image is a representation of the naked Mrs Ritchie on a bed surrounded by five images: Mary, the mother of God; the biblical character Salome; the Jewish heroine, Esther; Eve, the first woman; and the Athenian courtesan Thais.

Howson won fame in the 1980s as one of the "New Glasgow Boys" and his paintings earned him international acclaim. During the Balkans conflict he was the official British war artist, traveling to Kosovo and Bosnia, where he came under fire.

A reformed alcoholic and drug addict, Howson has for

the greater part of his 44 years lived the archetypal artist's life.

"You have to use yourself in your art, but that can be destructive and it can kill you. It's like walking a tightrope," he said. "Now I don't live the life I used to. I thought my art would get worse, but it has got better. I have more ideas and my mind is clearer, so there is more quality control."

The exhibition tracks the depths into which Howson plunged before he went into rehabilitation — an experience he describes as more "boot camp" than "trendy clinic".

His lowest point came two years ago when he was so out of control that he was unable to negotiate the three steps up to the kitchen in his flat. Now he attends church regularly.

"My life has completely

turned around. I feel incredible now and I've also got my visions back which I used to have as a child," said Howson, a sufferer of Asperger's syndrome, a form of autism that manifests itself most obviously by obsessional behavior.

Despite being at the forefront of British contemporary art, Howson has little time for his conceptual contemporaries, such as Martin Creed and original bad boy of BritArt Damien Hirst.

"All this conceptual art is rubbish and those artists who do that are being irresponsible. They're putting the public off art by their stupidity.

"I would like art to be respected and deal with real things — war and poverty, things that are meaningful. Not switching a light on and off, or putting sharks in formaldehyde."