adonna turns coy on nudity

op icon Madonna, happy to bare all in her raunchy videos spear naked in her own graphy book, is altoless happy about two il paintings that depict the nude.

McLaurin Gallery in Scotland, was the ly venue for the ing of the two nude and portraits by Scotleading contemporary Peter Howson.

e reaction from her hasn't been good," the er told *Reuters* in an iew.

nink they're frightened

at she'll think."

Howson exhibition
be split between the
urin Gallery north of
English border and
ore hip Flowers CenGallery in London
April 18.

her-of-two Madonna fan and collector of on's work and the have met several, though the nudes are ents of the painter's

nation.

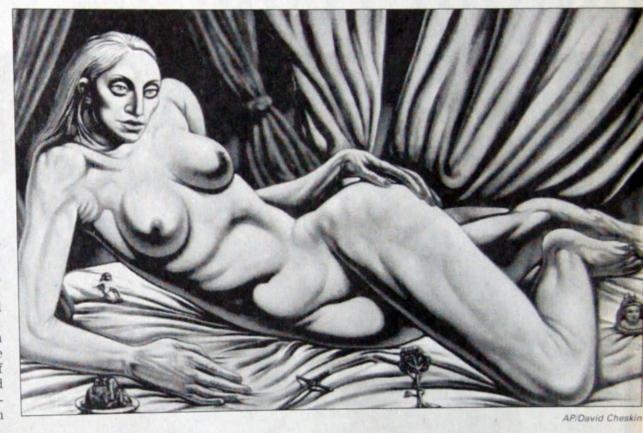
vson has sent Madonna vitation to the exhibibut her spokesman ned to say whether the r would attend.

his part, Howson
o fan of Madonna's
c — "my musical
s are Bach and Mozart"
ut he has spent the
10 years working on
two images of the
ear-old London resiwho is married
British film director

British film director Ritchie.

obody knows the true onna, not even herself," Howson. "The thing strikes you about her strength, but there is a weakness underneath that."

e first painting depicts singer squatting, with a l graveyard at her her arms lifted skyl, her body a mass



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

John Joseph

Reuters

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."