

## Art Not Oil, 2004-13: the story so far



As both a *Rising Tide UK* campaign and a national *Rising Tide* group, *Art Not Oil* mobilised against Big Oil cultural sponsorship since 2004. As of 2013, it is now a coalition of autonomous groups united around this aim and sharing our resources as the *Art Not Oil Coalition*. See the [Member Groups page](#) for details of those member organisations. This is the story of how we got this far...

When we first dipped our toe into unknown curatorial waters in 2004, we had little idea of the breadth and breathtaking quality of a great deal (though definitely not all) of London's – and the world's – politicised and ecologised art. What we did know was that it would be dead boring just to say 'no to oil sponsorship' (and 'no to capitalism, while you're at it') without somehow bringing our own (with any luck) luminous, chaotic, disrespectful creativity to the party...

This story is perhaps best begun in 2000, when a coalition of international groups and individuals gathered in The Hague with the intention of disrupting the (what it saw as) dangerously corporatised UN-climate negotiations, and also of kickstarting a global direct action-based movement for climate justice. Soon after that, London Rising Tide (LRT) came to be, being a post-oil, post-capitalism, of wishful thinkers. LRT decided that direct action-favouring bunch based in Carbon Town, BP would be of the myriad climate criminals the company was threatening to the primary target. After all, pipelines through Azerbaijan, build enormous gas and oil inspirationally diverse **alliance** had Georgia and Turkey), and an plans. Gradually, taunted by posters come together to fight those sponsorship of the National Portrait in the tube flaunting BP's inspired by the invaluable research Gallery's Portrait Award, and analysis of PLATFORM, LRT started to focus on oil sponsorship.



(Image by [Stig](#))

LRT began to zone in on the companies and institutions satelliting around the mothership that is BP. The theory goes like this: BP is Britain's biggest company. It's well-resourced, well-respected and its employees are mostly ridiculously loyal (considering the amount of lay-offs they've had to put up with). Those that orbit around it, though, are often smaller, more vulnerable either economically or in terms of public relations, and its employees are more liable to be receptive to our worldview (especially if we present it accessibly and non-judgementally).



London Rising Tide at the NPG, June 2003, (note natty banner-matching picture frames!)

Lead banner at LRT's 'Carnival Against Oil Wars and Climate Chaos', RFH, 24.4.03



The Royal Festival Hall rebranded, (2005)

LRT 'celebrated' BP's Annual

General Meeting (AGM) in 2003, held at the Royal Festival Hall, by calling a 'Carnival Against Oil Wars and Climate Chaos' and alternative AGM alongside the Thames. Several concerned members of the public also entered the meeting in order to make absolutely sure their concerns hadn't been swamped by the mile high tide of greenwash that had engulfed the Oil Festival Hall (OFH) for the day.

The main event of 2004 was 'Greenwash or Us: the 1st Annual Exhibition of Resistance to Big Oil and the Corporate Hijacking of 'the Arts''. This was a squatted Camden storefront, transformed into an 'art not oil' exhibition of paintings, photographs and sculptures to coincide with the Portrait Award exhibition, held at the National Portrait Gallery (NPG) in June.

**Greenwash Or Us**  
Exhibition of Resistance  
**June 14th - 21st 2004**

Monday 14th 7pm  
Press & public preview of 'art not oil' work  
Tuesday 15th 8pm  
Unravelling the carbon web  
Wednesday 16th 4pm  
'Greenwash or Us' street party  
from BP HQ (1 St James' Square SW1)  
to private view of Portrait Award finalists set  
(NPG, St Martin's Lane WC2) inc. David Rovics set  
Thursday 17th 7pm  
Affected communities night: speakers, films & slides  
from West Papua, Scotland, Colombia, Nigeria...  
Friday 18th  
Live music night  
Saturday 19th/Sunday 20th  
Your event here?  
Monday 21st - summer solstice  
Award winner announced at big NPG party,  
our closing do & DIY portraiture, paint a postcard  
of solidarity, food-not-fossil-fuels, radio,  
street & park events and joyous chaos!

Details, updates & gaps filled in:  
[www.londonrisingtide.org.uk](http://www.londonrisingtide.org.uk)

LRT, part of the Rising Tide UK network, takes creative action to combat the root causes of climate chaos and to help build movements for social & ecological justice.  
Tel: 07969 786770 - london@risingtide.org.uk,  
c/o 62 Fieldgate Street, London E1 1ES.  
See also [burningplanet.net](http://burningplanet.net), [risingtide.org.uk](http://risingtide.org.uk), [nonewoil.org](http://nonewoil.org) & [www.agp.org](http://www.agp.org)

*50 Chalk Farm Rd, NW1*

Let's mobilise our creativity  
to kick the corporations out  
of the galleries, museums, operas  
and Planet Earth !!!

**ACCORDING TO A RECENT PENTAGON REPORT, GLOBAL WARMING NOW PRESENTS A GREATER THREAT TO HUMAN LIFE THAN GLOBAL TERRORISM. SO WHY ARE WE STILL GOING TO ART GALLERIES SPONSORED BY OIL COMPANIES?**

**oil & art**  
DON'T MIX

**GREENWASH OR US**  
THE 1ST ANNUAL EXHIBITION OF RESISTANCE TO BIG OIL AND THE CORPORATE HIJACKING OF 'THE ARTS'

the first Art Not Oil leaflet, (designed by [UHC](#))

As well as collaborating with local people to run the thriving Camden space well into the autumn with an exhibition, infopoint, cinema, party and workshop events, in June 2004 there was also a blockade of the front entrance on the night of the ceremony to announce the winner of the Portrait Award:

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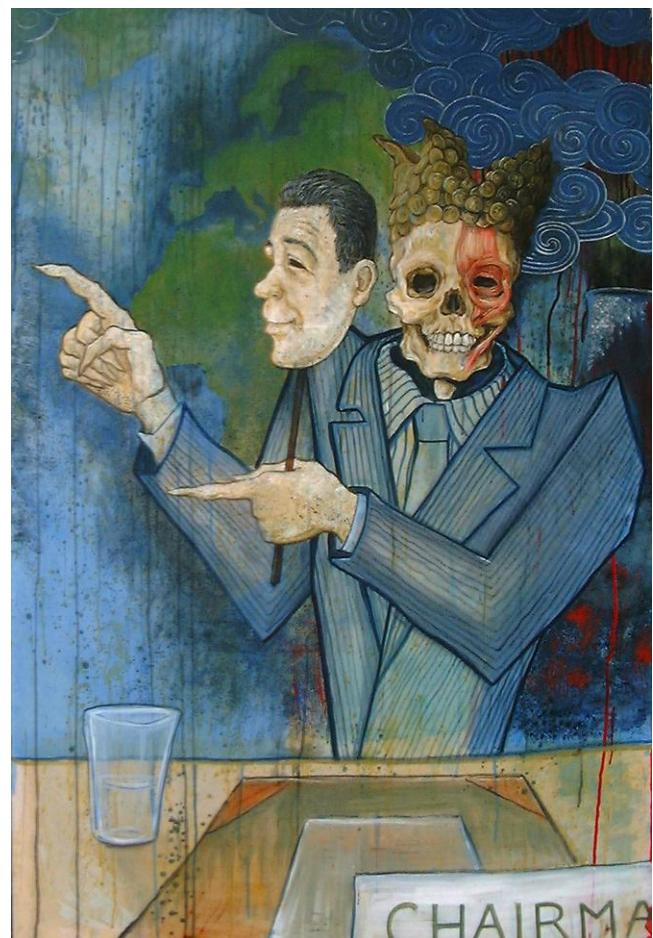


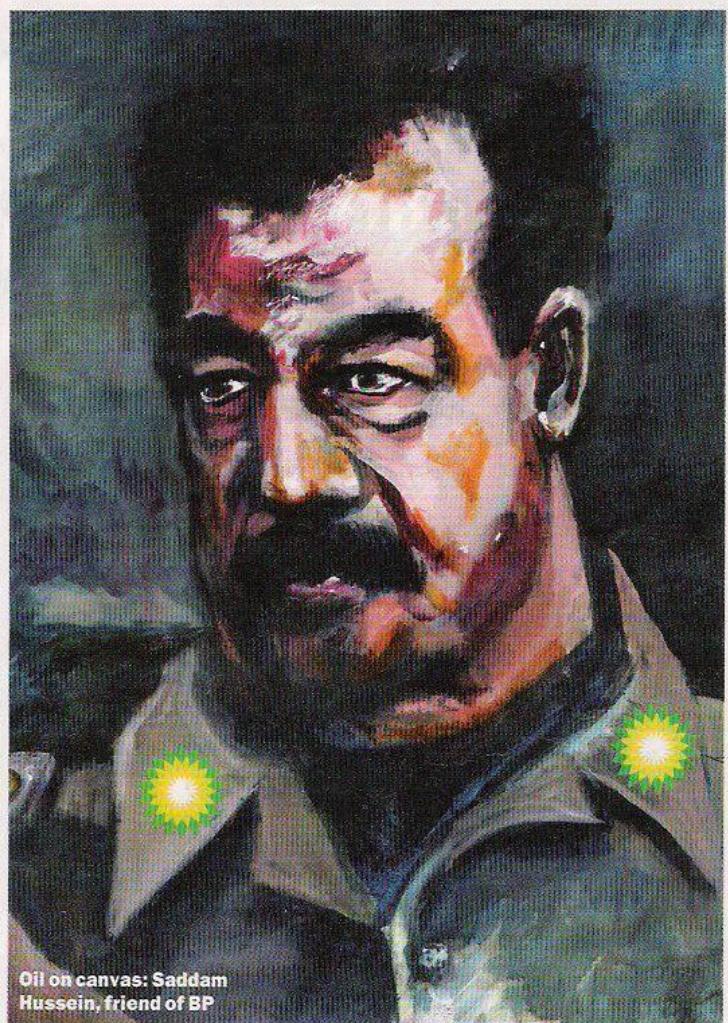
The art establishment cold-shouldered the Chalk Farm exhibition, but that didn't prevent it from being a real success, thanks to the creativity and hard work of London's grassroots scene. Not only was it a real community resource, several amazing art works were lent to the exhibition or made especially for it. Media coverage was (conspiratorially?) sporadic,

apart from a very tasty piece in the *Financial Times* which signed off with this paragraph: 'Pride of place goes to a portrait showing [then BP-boss] Lord Browne's "benign mask" slipping to reveal "a satanic look". Organisers claimed the artwork "paints a true portrait of an oil company".'

Right: portrait of Lord Browne by Fiona Richmond, as mentioned in the FT

On September 21st 2004, LRT was present with banner and critical leaflets at an evening reception for teachers at the Science Museum's BP-sponsored 'Energy – Fuelling the Future' exhibition. (As one might expect, the exhibition contained plenty of propaganda about our supposed 'energy needs'.) During these years there were also banner-led visits to Tate Britain and the British Museum, where we danced the "This is private property, you know" tango with a host of security guards and other personnel, often finding favour with those who stopped to take a leaflet.





**Oil on canvas: Saddam Hussein, friend of BP**

There is little research into ketamine's long-term effects, but too large a dose can lead to users experiencing a loss of feeling, sight and sound, often referred to as a 'K-hole'. 'It's okay if you take it in small doses, but when people see a white powder they think about doing coke-sized lines, and then they can become seriously confused or comatose,' says

Gary Sutton from drugs charity Release. He says

ketamine's popularity is also linked with the recent upsurge of the free party and squat scene where the drug is easily and cheaply available.

'A K-hole feels like you've gone under. You can't move, you can't talk, you don't know if you are upside down or right way up. But it does wear off and I've never heard of anyone dying from it,' says Kate.

The Home Office will complete its consultation on ketamine's legal status this month and it is expected it will be

## No-oil painting

'Our event is designed to paint a truer portrait of BP than the caring image manufactured by the BP Portrait Award,' says Sam Harkin of London Rising Tide, organisers of this year's Art not Oil event. The exhibition is being held to coincide with the annual BP Portrait Award run by the National Portrait Gallery and includes paintings, photos, sculpture and other work that aims to highlight the role of oil companies in fuelling environmental destruction. 'Rising Tide? That extreme left-wing organisation?' said a spokesperson for BP when asked about Art not Oil. Their claims are without basis and are of no concern to us.'

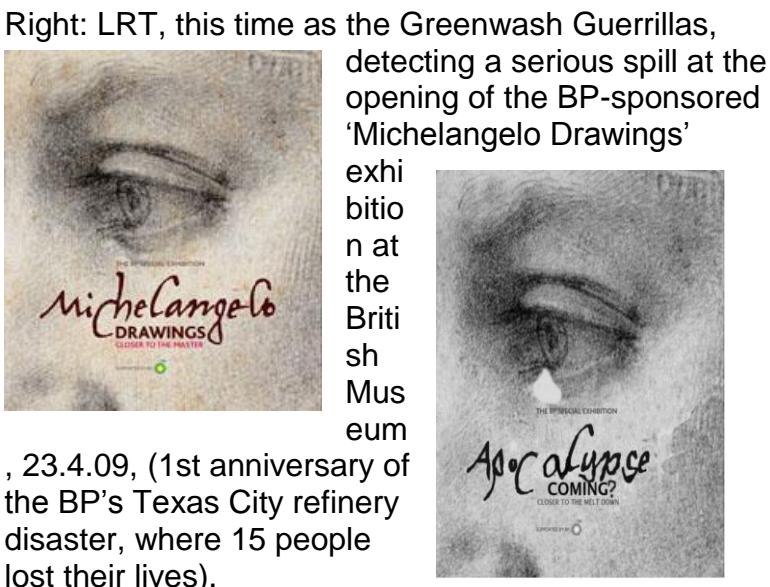
*Make up your own mind at: Art not Oil, Institute for Autonomy, 76-78 Gower*

Left: James Self's portrait 'Saddam' heads this piece from a 2005 Time Out (left). The painting was one of two politically charged submissions to the BP Portrait Award. Needless to say, neither was selected. (The fact that one of the judges is almost always BP's Director of UK Arts and Culture can hardly increase the likelihood of there being a portrait with an anti-corporate or fossil fuel-related theme selected for exhibition.)

Always alongside this protest activity – the visits to galleries, museums and opera houses, the postcards, stickers, press releases and courteous (though almost entirely unacknowledged) emails to bosses and employees of sponsored institutions, the strong connection between conscious art and a rapidly emerging radical movement for climate justice in the UK personified initially by Rising Tide, and also by Climate Camp and Plane Stupid...always alongside this was the patient gathering of artworks on the website. Making art out of climate chaos, wars for oil, the struggle for justice and the search for solutions is tough – quite often it struggles to transcend the desire simply to spell out the trouble we're in on so many levels.



London Rising Tide visits Tate Britain,  
c. 2006





all over the world to submit their own, and also sees activists, curators, alternative media outlets and others come to us to find art that suits their need. Always in that situation, we artist his or absolute work, which we when they pay them for the

So some of the submissions don't make it, and some of the over 375 pieces gathered on the website's ten galleries are patently more powerful than others. But gradually, over the years, the galleries have become a repository of strong, engaged, passionate work, which has attracted artists from

point them back to the herself, who retains copyright over his or her hope is some consolation discover we aren't able to privilege of including it!



Art Not Oil's 2005 exhibition takes shape outside the NPG on Portrait Award ceremony night; it later went on to tour London and beyond.

### **Art Not Oil 2005-6: the wanderlust years...**



Headline from the East London Advertiser, 18.7.05

2005 and 2006 were Art Not Oil's wanderlust years, as the exhibition travelled all over the UK, including a squatted social centre in London's west end, a students' union in Edinburgh (to coincide with the anti-G8 mobilisations of June 2005), a community arts centre in Bethnal Green, the first Climate Camp at Drax in Yorkshire, and even a reclaimed fish market in Northampton. The exhibition also tailed the BP Portrait Award, turning up on the NPG's doorstep on the evening of its awards ceremony in 2005, then following it on its own tours, popping up in Newcastle, Edinburgh (again, this time triggering a terrific piece in Glasgow's *Sunday Herald*)

## Art pumps up pressure on oil giants

OIL company BP sponsors several high profile art events across the capital but there's one in the East End they will be steering clear of.

Art Not Oil in Bethnal Green is a direct challenge to the oil industry's attempt to use art for its own PR purposes.

Sam Harken, who organised the exhibition for the environmental group London Rising Tide, said that the art establishment and oil companies were far too cosy.

He cited a BP sponsored National Gallery exhibition about Russian art which was visited by President Putin and Tony Blair and coincided with the signing of a lucrative oil deal.

London Rising Tide claim that climate chaos is set to have a catastrophic effect on all of us, while hitting the poorest hardest. It believes that oil is a curse that also fuels war, poverty and environmental destruction.

The exhibition Art Not Oil

encourages artists to create work which explores the damage that companies like BP, Shell and Exxon are doing to the planet.

Art Not Oil 2005 is an exhibition that includes paintings, photos, sculpture and other work that addresses issues like climate chaos, shiny corporate public relations and the concept that 'profit is king'. The show runs until August 28 at Oxford House in Derbyshire Street, Bethnal Green.

and even the oily heartland

that is Aberdeen.

The 2006 ceremony was greeted by Greenwash Guerrillas, some in suitably greenwash-spattered business attire, resulting in the memorable *Evening Standard* headline 'Protest at oil sponsor mars art awards', (right), though still no

acknowledgement by Brian Sewell, or any other art critic, of the fact that an arts sponsor was triggering concerted protest.



Above: Life imitating..?  
London Rising Tide and friends  
at the BP Portrait Award ceremony, June 2006

Right: *Evening Standard*, June 2006

# Protest at oil sponsor mars art awards

DEMONSTRATORS interrupted a prestigious art awards ceremony with a protest over oil giant BP's sponsorship of the event.

Activists gathered outside the BP Portrait Award 2006 at the National Portrait Gallery, claiming that the company's practices overseas damage the environment.

Art Not Oil campaigner Rebecca Johnson said: "This event is a complete green-wash. It's keeping a system going that allows people to think that the oil companies are doing a positive thing by sponsoring this event, but it's bad because it's really just putting a spin on the bad things they are doing."

Inside the gallery, the winner of the 2006 portrait award joked about the length of time it had taken for him to be successful.

Andrew Tift was praised for his triptych portrait of Kitty Garman, Lucian Freud's first wife, whom he befriended in his native Walsall. He has exhibited in the awards for the past 14 years and has even been shortlisted twice, but has narrowly missed out on every occasion.

Speaking at the awards, held last night at the National Portrait Gallery, he said: "I'm delighted, 14 years is a long time to wait. I will have to tell Kitty when I see her. Although, to be honest, she's so used to bigger and better artists that this will be water off a duck's back. But I'm sure

**GEORGINA LITTLEJOHN**

she'll be pleased all the same." The annual BP Portrait Award showcases the best in contemporary portrait painting anywhere in the world. It encourages young artists to focus on using and developing the theme of portraiture in their work.

Now in its 27th year at the National Portrait Gallery, it has been sponsored by BP for 17 years. This year, the competition received a record 1,113 entries, compared with 1,082 last year. In total, 56 portraits — 44 from the UK and 12 from abroad — have been selected for display at the gallery.

Presenting the awards to the winner and runners-up was former Roxy Music singer Bryan Ferry, an art lover and supporter of the National Portrait Gallery. He said: "I hadn't seen any of Andrew's work until tonight but it's very good. Technically, it's very well done and it's a very strong portrait. I think that you get more out of a painting than you do a photograph."

The second prize winner was Rafael Rodriguez Cruz, for his oil on canvas portrait, Model 1. Cruz, 29, lives and works in Mexico where he studies architecture and fine art. The third prize went to Angela Reilly for her self-portrait. Reilly, 40, from Glasgow, exhibits frequently in Edinburgh and London.



Winner: Andrew Tift with his triptych of Lucian Freud's first wife Kitty Garman

The sojourns of the Art Not Oil exhibition were usually made in a rented van, with the art strapped down in the back, but not tightly enough to prevent the weary driver occasionally hearing the agonising sound of paintings tumbling sideways at an unanticipated red light or two. The fossil-fuelled nature of this touring, and the stresses on a small team of unpaid Art Not Oil volunteers, meant that it was destined

to be short-lived. Also, the group which had initiated the project – London Rising Tide - was becoming increasingly involved in the ever-growing Climate Camp process, and we mustn't forget the emergence of something known – temporarily at least – as the Shell Wildlife Photographer of the Year Award...

Above: 'Brian in a Traffic Jam' by [Eva Ronnevig](#), part of the 2006 exhibition

## Shell's Wild Lie: a victory at last

For people attempting to transform the status quo for the better, there's often a balance to be struck between what fires the heart, and what engages the brain. When LRT heard that the new sponsor of the Natural History Museum's Wildlife Photographer of the Year Award was to be Shell, there was a collision between indignation and strategic opportunism.

So we got to it:

\* We teamed up with [Friends of the Earth](#) (FOE) to bring excellent campaigners from Shell-affected communities in Russia, the Philippines, USA and South Africa to the UK for a tour, for press coverage (which failed to materialise) and a hoped-for meeting which NHM boss Michael Dixon refused to agree to. They were also refused entry to the NHM for an event where members meet the photographers, to which they had tickets. (FOE also instituted some invaluable Freedom of Information requests which revealed that the NHM had carried out internal research into the possible negative reputational impacts of accepting Shell sponsorship. While warning that there might be dissent, the report said that such dissent wouldn't reach the same levels as the period in the 1990s when Shell was hit with a double whammy of bad press as a result of its complicity in the execution of Ken Saro-Wiwa and its decision to dispose of the Brent Spar oil platform in the North Sea.)

\* We set up [shelloiledwildlife.org.uk](http://shelloiledwildlife.org.uk), which is still live though showing its age somewhat.

\* We went into the Museum, donned wildlife costumes, and wandered around asking tricky questions about Shell and wildlife and generally (though not always successfully) attempting not to scare the children. Outside, a huge banner reading 'Warning: Shell Hell in Operation' was unfurled (see *photo below*), as a 'Shell executive' tried to unruffle feathers and the animals staged an impromptu die-in, to the bemusement of security and the overwhelming support of visitors.



the touring Shell exhibition there in December 2007, when an activist also entered the private opening ceremony and delivered a speech as a far-from apologetic Shell executive to an audience that took some time to realise it had been lovingly fooled.



\* Later in the year, 10 singers sang a song called 'Shell Sells Suicide' in front of the dinosaur in the Museum's main hall, or did at least until they were gradually dragged out by security guards. (The same song was sung to Shell's directors at its Annual General Meeting in 2008, and [in the foyer](#) of the Shell-sponsored National Theatre in January 2009).

\* We created a counter-exhibition, which we called '[Shell's Wild Lie](#)' (SWL), of photographs which we hoped served as powerful testimony to the impacts of Shell (particularly in Nigeria), as well as the oil industry more generally.

We took SWL to the Museum on several occasions (*right*), and sent it round the country, so that it surfaced for example outside Bristol Gallery on the opening of



Right: polar bear die-in by Bristol Rising Tide and friends, opening of touring Wildlife Photographer exhibition, Bristol Museum, December 2007

Perhaps SWL's finest moment came when in November 9th 2007, Aberystwyth Arts Centre finished hosting the 2007 Shell exhibition, and on November 10th, (the 12th anniversary of the execution of Ken Saro-Wiwa and 8 other activists opposing Shell in Nigeria), the Centre began showing the counter-exhibition. The fact that a brave arts centre curator was willing to offer space to our exhibition could well be one of the moments when the NHM started seriously to think twice about renewing the Shell contract.



 Canolfan y Celfyddydau  
Aberystwyth  
Arts Centre

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Oriel 2

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[November Tachwedd](#)

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Exhibition: Gallery 1 / Arddangosfa: Oriel 1

  
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06 Oct Hyd - 10 Nov Tac  
Exhibition: Gallery 2 / Arddangosfa: Oriel 2

  
[Shell's Wild Lie / Natur Gelwyddog Shell](#) 10 Nov Tac - 17 Nov Tac  
Exhibition: Cafe Gallery / Arddangosfa: Oriel y Caffi

  
[Small Print Big Impression](#)  
17 Nov Tac - 12 Jan Ion  
Exhibition: Gallery 2 / Arddangosfa: Oriel 2

Aberystwyth Arts Centre website, November 2007

\* we produced a series of powerful stickers and postcards (easily slippable into the

exhibition catalogue on sale in the Museum's own bookshop);

\* we flooded the internet with press releases, youtube clips and texts with wish-fulfilment-drenched titles like 'Oil industry sponsorship to become endangered species in 2007?' and 'Songs of freedom at opening of Shell Wildlife Photographer Abomination'.

\* like Friends of the Earth, we encouraged people to contact Michael Dixon directly, resulting in a steady drip of intelligent, heartfelt emails being sent in his direction;

\* also, there was a Climate Camp action (*right*) where people smeared black treacle (that trusty oil impersonator) over the exhibits, resulting in



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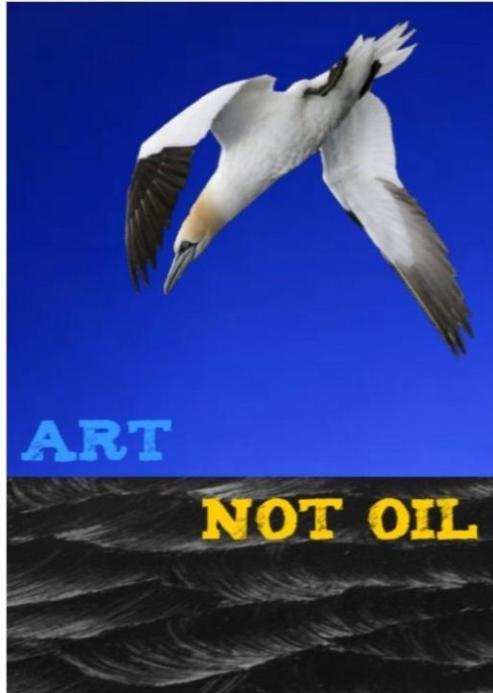


Art Not Oil outside London shock!  
Shell's Wild Lie in Bristol (2007,  
above)  
& Plymouth (2008, below)

When the news came through in early 2008 that Shell's initial 2 year contract hadn't been renewed, we celebrated unashamedly, (for a little while at least.) Even so, we were careful to acknowledge the fact that we hadn't worked alone on the campaign, and that the circumstances around the news weren't very clear. But it seems hard to discount the fact that the actions of a small but determined group of concerned people had made a palpable change for the better.



The number of overjoyed messages of congratulation indicated that with the odds still very much stacked against us in the struggle to get off the fossil fuels before it really is too late, we really need victories – even comparatively small ones like this - to keep despair from gaining the upper hand and robbing us of the belief that having a go is worth the effort. Also, it's often so hard to gauge what effect - if any - we are having, especially if we're trying to create change within institutions which are almost impossible to 'read' from the outside. Sometimes, it's just at that moment of exhaustion and disillusion that the edifice crumbles and a positive change is revealed in all its glory.



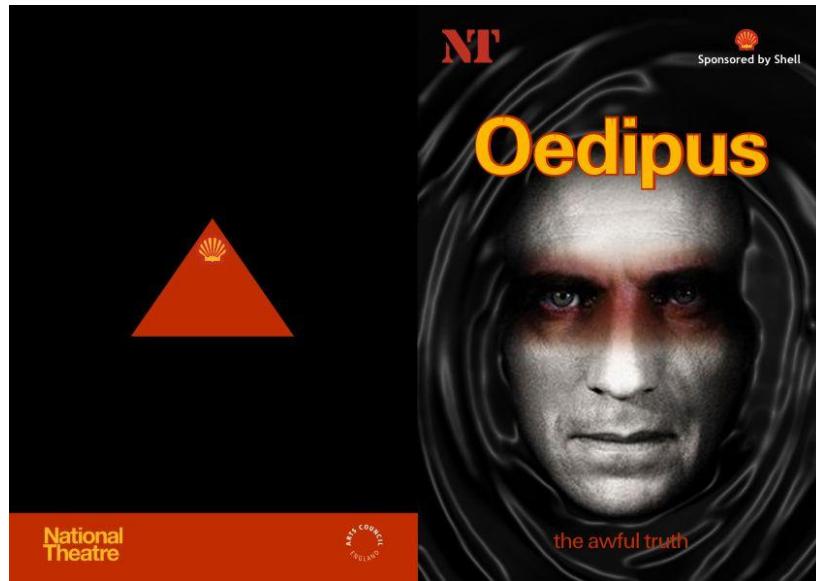
### **Shell: an Oedipal relationship with Mother Earth?**

So 2008 got Art Not Oil – now something of a veteran campaign, and a stand-alone group, though with strong support still from London Rising Tide - off to a cracking start. The rest of the year saw the usual combination of promotional postcards (*left*) and the careful tending of the various online galleries.

Below: LRT visited Britain for its own sponsorship action start of 2008:



Tate  
at the



It wasn't until late autumn that ANO was noticed again by the media, when it launched a spoof leaflet and press release in response to Shell's sponsorship of the National Theatre's production of 'Oedipus'. The spoof – being an artfully worded text and an equally artful NT-like

design, claimed that the NT wanted to use the opening of the play to kickstart a public debate about oil company sponsorship of the arts. It resulted in a piece in *The Stage*, the theatre world's journal of record,

Above: Spoof 'Oedipus' leaflet (designed by Inkthief), distributed by ANO in the National Theatre, late 2008

several bemusedly fooled fellow activists, as well as a letter to ANO from the NT's Chief Executive saying that 'the press release and leaflet you have put out, both purporting to come from the National Theatre, discredit your cause. The tactic is under-hand and dishonest. If these are the "creative interventions" mentioned in your letter to the *Oedipus* company, they are woefully short of honesty and straightforwardness. Please withdraw them forthwith.'

Incidentally, the letter referred to comprised a polite outlining of our concerns about Shell, as well as a more detailed itemisation of its wrongdoings. Over thirty copies were hand-delivered at the Stage Door, but not one received a response of any kind. Did the entire company feel too uncomfortable, insulted, bored or bewildered to reply, or might the NT management have encouraged them not to respond? We can't be sure.

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Shell buying our blindness?' in reference to the plight of Oedipus himself in the play.



Oedipus campaign was made up of a out for art inspired by the Oedipus axis, resulting in various strong including Carrie MacKinnon's painting (below). Various London Tiders and Climate Campers (with made up like Ralph Fiennes poster) leafleted production, sometimes the question 'Is

A supportive audience member turned out to be *Guardian* blogger Chris Wilkinson, whose piece headed '[The National Theatre should clean up its act and ditch Shell](#)' appeared online in January 2009.

'Nothing I could see could bring me joy' - Carrie MacKinnon

## **2009, the pendulum swings back to a centenary-celebrating BP...**

Preparations for the sumptuous 2010 Art Not Oil diary were slowed considerably by the revelation early in 2009 that it was indeed one hundred years since the incorporation of BP, and that the company intended to make something of a big deal of this fact. BP had either failed to notice – or decided to ignore – the fact that April 1st had been designated 'Fossil Fools Day' by the international Rising Tide network. Also, there are several protest events planned for that day in reaction to the G20 meeting, including a '[Climate Camp in the City](#)', all of which meant the BP demo was too much of an unknown quantity not to attempt to avoid.

Our press release from March 21st 2009 was headed '[‘OIL GOLIATH BP FELLED BY FOSSIL FOOL’S DAY DAVID’](#)', and read 'BP has been forced to postpone its centenary party at the British Museum on April 1st, as word had leaked out and triggered a demonstration by Art Not Oil...Any company that can boast that it's replacing '2008 [oil] production by 121% and aims to grow annual output through to 2020' needs to be decommissioned forthwith, if we are to have a chance of avoiding climate catastrophe in the not-so-distant future. Fortunately, Art Not Oil is not alone

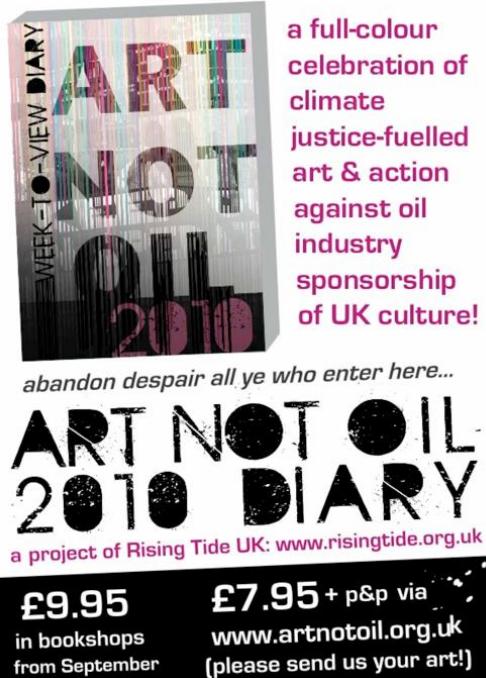
in working for this to happen, as movements of resistance gather strength all over the world.'

This resulted in a short piece in something called *The Times*, headed 'It's BP's party and we'll protest if we want to...', which referred to 'something called Art Not Oil'. When the date of BP's rescheduled party leaked out as being on May 6th, the next ANO press release said 'As before, people wanting to come and say "BP – your party's over!" and wish the behemoth a happy last birthday are more than welcome. The British Museum's main gate...will find a contingent of the newly-formed Brazen Pranksters playing tunes to usher in a new era of climate justice and ecological sanity.' In effect, the black-tie-and-tiara'd invite-holders passed a small but righteous gathering of well-wishers, performing a double whammy of 'Celebrate This!' (whose lyrics had already crept into *The Guardian*) and the Jacksons-emulating 'Shake That BP Down to the Ground'. There was also a trio of oil-swilling zombies who kept the police busy with their constant attempt to gatecrash BP's party ...

2 sides of 'A Wake for BP', British Museum, 6.5.09. (Photos by Amelia Gregory)

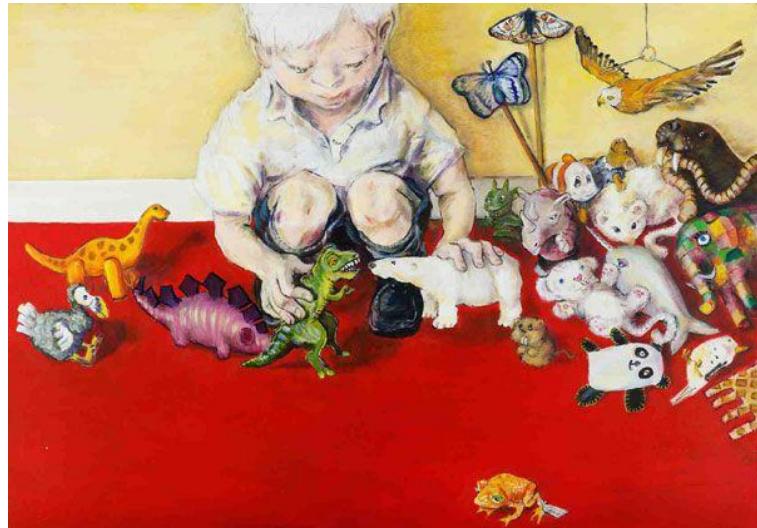


## The 2010 Art Not Oil diary



was a one-off.

Right: 'Extinction' – Kate Evans (from the Art Not Oil 2009 gallery & 2010 diary)



## 2010-2013: new outrages, new creative responses

The Deepwater disaster in the Gulf of Mexico in April 2010 triggered widespread revulsion, and galvanised large number of people already active on climate change and the systemic abuses carried out by the oil and gas industry. Hand-in-hand went growing awareness that the extraction of tar sands oil in Alberta, Canada looks to be make or break for the climate, as well as being nothing short of genocidal for those unfortunate enough to live on land signed over to the industry.

As Big Oil was engaging in an ever more desperate scramble for new sources of fossil fuel energy (not least in the Arctic, but also in places like the Gulf of Mexico), groups in London weren't slow to respond to the fact that these same companies also still had their logos emblazoned alongside some of the country's most prestigious cultural institutions.

Art Not Oil, at this point focused mostly on curating its online galleries, as well as supporting other groups' actions, created a new gallery specifically for BP, called 'Burning Planet'.

**PLATFORM** began devoting more time to sponsorship issues, partly by mobilising within the art world, but also attempting to trigger a **debate** amongst funders. Its "Tate à Tate" project was an alternative audio tour of Tate launched in 2012, with sound works by commissioned artists.

More visibly, **Liberate Tate** emerged in 2010 to create a series of powerful, often silent performances that circumvent traditional expectations of protest, and are helping to build a necessary affinity with artists who might be looking for ways to bring their creativity to bear on social and ecological issues.

<http://www.blouinartinfo.com/news/story/755049/liberate-tates-spokesman-on-why-fighting-bp-sponsorship-picks-up-the-cause-of-tahrir-square>



Left: Liberate Tate performs 'Human Cost' in Tate Britain on the 1<sup>st</sup> anniversary of the Deepwater Horizon, 20.4.11

Liberate Tate also devotes some of its energies to understanding the way the Tate organisation works, often working with members to use existing governance structures to loosen the connection between it and BP.

Right: the great BP-sponsored flashmob sleep-in at the Tate Modern April 2011, organised by London Rising Tide





In July 2011, the ever-righteous Rev. Billy and the Stop Shopping Choir undertook a memorable exorcism of BP from Tate Modern

Right: a group of dancer-activists perform '[BP White Swan](#)' before the 'BP Summer Screens' live feed of the Royal Opera House's Swan Lake, July 2011. Here's [The Guardian's report](#).



Then, with the announcement that the Royal Shakespeare Company had decided to welcome BP as sponsor of its World Shakespeare Festival during the 2012 Cultural Olympiad, it was time for the activist-thespian interface to leap into action. Claiming that 'action is eloquence', and managing ingeniously to reinvent Shakespeare for the modern, oil-blighted age, [The Reclaim Shakespeare Company](#) was born.

This RSC carried out a series of pithy interventions in 2012, often just as a play at Stratford or in London was about to begin, encouraging theatregoers to tear the BP logo from their programmes. Still active in 2013, it's fired up perhaps most by the knowledge that BP is investing heavily in Canadian tar sands, with the [UK Tar Sands Network](#) at the helm.



An actor decorated by - or imprisoned in? - a BP-logo beams outside the Roundhouse, but is brought low by people power at the British Museum, (host of the BP-sponsored World Shakespeare exhibition), both in 2012.

Meanwhile, conscious that all this focus on BP might be seen to be letting Shell off the

out of

hook,  
London  
Rising  
Tide  
carried  
a series  
actions



focusing predominantly on Shell's relationship with the South Bank.



Festival Hall before a Shell Classic International concert...

...and in June 2012, a '[No More Greenwash](#)' banner appears, courtesy of LRT, just as the Simon Bolivar Orchestra of Venezuela is set to take the stage for its Shell-sponsored concert.

In March 2013, a group of musicians and campaigners, inspired in part by London Rising Tide, as well as by Rev. Billy and choir, and interventions like this [work of genius](#) from San Francisco formed the [Shell Out Sounds](#) (SOS) choir, to further blur the boundary between performance and protest.



They have performed during the interval of several Shell-sponsored concerts, as well as in the Royal Festival Hall auditorium minutes before a concert in October 2013 (*right*), which resulted in unexpected applause, (bad news for those who would like to claim that opposition to oil sponsorship is an extremist position.)

### The Art Not Oil coalition:

Midway through 2013, the various groups working on innovative approaches to separating oil and culture decided to come together a little more formally. It seemed

to make good sense to use the relatively well-established name and reputation of Art Not Oil to be the umbrella under which these groups could collaborate more closely and strategically, and promote their work more effectively.

There was one downside to this new coalition emerging, which was the end of Art Not Oil's time as a part of Rising Tide UK network of groups. However, the presence of London Rising Tide in the coalition means there's still a strong connection.

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So, as it approaches its 10<sup>th</sup> birthday in 2014, ANO is still chiselling away at that 'social licence to operate', sometimes also described as its 'extraction of our consent'. It's still our hope that with the right sort of inspired and concerted pressure, Big Oil will become persona non grata in sponsorship terms before the end of the decade. That would send its public image reeling and make it much harder for it to operate successfully.

Unfortunately, climate chaos and other oil-induced destruction is likely to do much of our work for us, forcing the cultural institutions into a position where they feel their 'good name' will be damaged by any association with an increasingly pilloried industry. Kicking oil out of these institutions would still leave them tainted by their relationships with other arguably equally dodgy corporations. So while such a victory would be a blow of some kind for creative freedom, the real gain would be in the blow it would deliver to the oil industry itself. At the very least, that could clear crucial space for a credible redesigning of the way energy is created and used in the UK and other 'developed' countries.

We keep on keeping on with Art Not Oil because it celebrates the intangible but undoubted potency of human creativity, particularly when it empathises with injustice and transcends a mere reiteration of where we've gone wrong.

It might be worth flagging up and paying tribute to the dormant disquiet that lies just beneath the surface of countless creative individuals, as well as so many who work for oil-sponsored institutions. When it all comes down, perhaps it's love that is the catalytic ingredient to counter the despair and gear-grinding anger that the illusion of powerlessness brings. We invite you to be part of our discourses, conversations, communications and performances, or of course to create your own.

### Further reading:

#### ***Privatising Culture – corporate art intervention since the 1980s***

By Chin-tao Wu (Verso, 2002; ISBN: 1-85984-472-3)

#### ***Art Incorporated - Julian Stallabrass***, (OUP, 2004; ISBN: 0-19-280165-1) 2629

***Free Exchange*** - Pierre Bourdieu & Hans Haacke, (Stanford University Press, 1995;  
ISBN 0-8047-2496-2)

***Not If But When: Culture Beyond Oil*** – PLATFORM, 2011: