



R O B E R T F R Y

WHAT IS ART? HISTORY'S MOST WELL-REMEMBERED ARTISTS EACH HAD THEIR OWN INTERPRETATION. FOR SAUL BELLOW, ART WAS 'THE ACHIEVEMENT OF STILLNESS IN THE MIDST OF CHAOS.' FOR PABLO PICASSO, IT WAS 'A LIE THAT MAKES US REALISE THE TRUTH.' MARCEL DUCHAMP BELIEVED IT 'A HABIT-FORMING DRUG,' WHILE ANDRÉ MALRAUX THOUGHT OF IT RATHER AS 'A PROTEST AGAINST EXTINCTION.' THE DEFINITION OF ART IS CERTAINLY AN ELUSIVE ONE. THE SUBJECTIVE NATURE OF ITS CONTENT SERVING ONLY TO FURTHER PROPEL IT FROM OUR GRASP.

words by **RJ ARKHIPOV**
photographed by **ALEX BRAMALL**

We approached contemporary abstract and figurative painter Robert Fry in an attempt to get an understanding of his definition of art and the extent of its power. Fry — born, bred and based in London, England — is conflicted. “There are so many contrasting aspects to being an artist. I would find it difficult to summarise what the power of art means to me. There are moments within my creative practise where I feel empowered; and there are moments where I feel wholly disempowered. As for being a painter, there is something indefinable within this field of fine art. I believe painting is a language in itself. For the spectator, however, art is about the experience you attain from that piece of work. At its worst, it can make you feel nothing at all and at its most effective it can be transcendent.” In Fry’s Red series of paintings, one of the fundamental ideas was that of a single figure in various psychological states, however it was often interpreted as a metamorphosis. “This is just one example of when the interpretation an artist wishes to instil within the spectator can greatly differ from how the work is perceived. The process of creating art is so different to the end result. As an artist, you are trying to deliver a message to the viewer and sure, in one way or another, you can shape that, but you do not have the final decision on how it will be experienced.” From a more abstract interpretation of the human entity in his Partners series to the more realist detail of the masculine form in his series Related, Robert Fry’s portfolio spans the many hues of the ‘the human’. His art is exploration, both of the corporeal and psychological aspects of man. At first sight, his oeuvre appears to depict man at a skin-deep level, but at closer inspection, it is hard to ignore the muted references to the fragile state of the mind and of psychological struggle. It is telling, therefore, that when we asked Fry what his superpower would be, his reply was ‘time-travel’. We inquire further, but a coy “So I could see around the corner.” is all we get. Whether that corner is behind or ahead remains at the artist’s discretion and we are left pondering on a quote from William Faulkner... “The aim of every artist is to arrest motion, which is life, by artificial means and hold it fixed so that a hundred years later, when a stranger looks at it, it moves again.” Although he may not travel with it, we have confidence that Fry’s work possesses the superpower he so desires.





purple stud



“THE AIM OF EVERY ARTIST IS TO ARREST MOTION, WHICH IS LIFE, BY ARTIFICIAL MEANS AND HOLD IT FIXED SO THAT A HUNDRED YEARS LATER, WHEN A STRANGER LOOKS AT IT, IT MOVES AGAIN.”

robert fry, london 11:00 pm