

# Portrait of an artist

When is a portrait not a portrait? When the picture is of the subject's hand. But maybe a person's hand can tell us more about them than their face can.

**Shaun Shackleton** meets artist Gary Schneider

**T**HIS is an unusual exhibition as it is the first joint project between the arts development section of Culture and Leisure and the International Artist in Residence programme.

And the artist chosen is New Yorker Gary Schneider. We meet at The Greenhouse where his exhibition runs throughout this month.

'I have been taking tutorials and students' work up at Grange House. It's a really interesting school. Very much an art school.' Gary's residency will also include being guest of honour during the end of year show and awarding a prize to the student of the year.

I said it must be an honour for a student to have an internationally famous artist critiquing your work.

'On the contrary, I like doing it,' he said modestly.

This modesty belies his achievements.

Born in South Africa in 1954, as an artist in Cape Town he was primarily a painter. Excited by the ideas he saw in overseas publications, he found inspiration in the work of New York performance artist, photographer and conceptual artist Vito Acconci.

By 1979 he had made New York



■ **EXHIBITIONIST:** An exhibition of Gary Schneider's artwork is on display at The Greenhouse, Guernsey Information Centre this month. (0444478)

his home and started to exhibit his photographs, present solo performance pieces and make experimental films.

He is perhaps best known for his Genetic Self-Portrait, a core group of 14 photographs which depicts the inside and outside of his body. On this work not only were some of the images achieved by pressing his body against the emulsion of a sheet of film, but also a collaboration with medical researchers to produce X-rays and shots of his chromosomes.

'I went through painting, performance and film and ended up in photography - it precipitated in a way. I'm still attached to film and painting. They influence me.'

The work in The Greenhouse is all portraits of his partner, John,

from 1989 to 2004.

This includes John in Sixteen Parts, which is four lines of four close-up photos and has been described as being 'as much portraiture as landscape'.

There is also a giant handprint. 'I have made handprint portraits since 1996. I consider them to be more private and at least as expressive as any camera portrait of a face, and possibly more revealing.'

As with parts of his Genetic Self-Portrait, these handprints are photographs made without a camera. They are imprints onto film emulsions and are the preservation of the subject's sweat and heat in the film emulsion.

Gary then asks me to shake his hand, which I do.

'What is the checklist when we

shake hands?' he asks. 'Is the hand damp or dry? Is it firm? Large? A handshake, alone, is a very intimate gesture. We all know how to make a face to a camera but touch says much more.'

And like all great artists, Gary has a wide range of influences (but, unlike many, he doesn't mind revealing them).

'I borrow the image from the caves of Lascaux (the earliest known example of self-identification), all religions, the shroud of Turin, a multitude of other artists, stop signs, wet paint signs and preschool children.'

Gary is continually working - his stay in Guernsey will be interrupted by a visit to The Scottish National Portrait Gallery in Edinburgh where his

work will be on show as part of The Naked Portrait alongside Egon Schiele, Lucien Freud, Gilbert and George and Tracy Emin.

'I didn't even bring a camera to Guernsey with me,' he said. 'The island is more picturesque than I imagined.'

For a fascinating insight into identity, to witness a rare glimpse of the work of a true artistic innovator or to simply to see what a four-foot hand looks like, I'd highly recommend a visit.

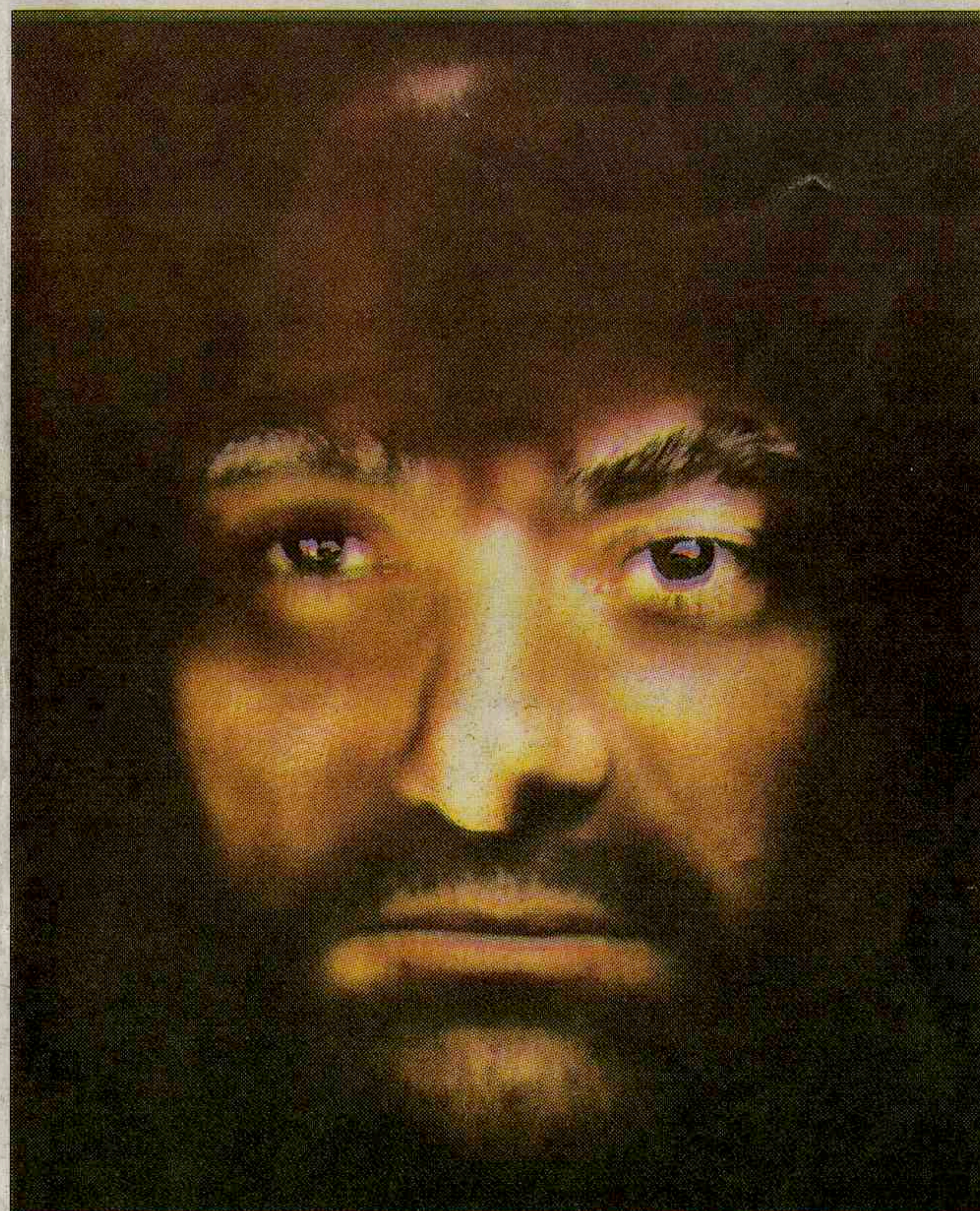
◆ **Gary Schneider is at The Greenhouse, The Information Centre, North Esplanade until Friday 29 June. Opening hours are Monday to Saturday 9am to 6pm and Sunday 9am to 1pm. Admission is free.**



■ **CLOSE-UP:** John in Sixteen Parts is, as Gary describes, 'as much portraiture as landscape'. (0444475)



■ **TOUCHY FEELY:** Gary has created this four-foot high portrait by imprinting his hand on a piece of film emulsion. (0444476)



■ **ABOUT FACE:** The New York-based artist has been inspired by conceptual artist Vito Acconci. (0444477)