

Artist rails against the 'treason of the scholars'

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- BY LAURA REDPATH



An award-winning Aberdeenshire artist is brushing with controversy with his latest collection, accusing Tracey Emin and Damien Hirst of "treason".

Strathdon-based Peter Goodfellow is railing against Britain's leading conceptual artists, blaming their sponsors – such as Charles Saatchi and Sir Nicholas Serota, director of the Tate galleries – of creating a false economy to drive sales.

The topic is also the subject of a book which features essays from historian David Starkey, philosopher Roger Scruton and art historian Duncan Macmillan.

Mr Goodfellow has spent four years creating the exhibition, which is designed to shine "fresh light" on what he describes as an absurd situation which has diminished the quality of art in the UK.

He said: "It's hard to measure the scale of damage done by Charles Saatchi, Sir Nicholas Serota and the group of so-called artists they promote."

The artist, who was selected to be part of the prestigious BP portrait exhibition in 2012, insists the problem is twofold.

He said: "This scene has resulted in the modern public's alienation from contemporary art, as the concept of art as a mode of communication and reflection of society has been almost lost.

"Traditional skills in the field of art have also suffered.

"Artistic craft, learning, content and judgment have each been compromised by commercialism, cynicism and politics.

"We need a revival of an art with an ambition to communicate, as profoundly and elegantly as it can, with everyone."

Many art critics have verbally and literally questioned the group, but Mr Goodfellow believes he is the first to do it visually with paintings which not only satirise the so-called Young British Artists scene, but demonstrate a quality which he claims is lacking in the work of those he is attacking.

Charles Saatchi's 1997 exhibition at the Royal Academy in London spawned a new breed – art school graduates who went on to create controversial works and build incredible wealth.

Mr Goodfellow, who yesterday launched the exhibition and accompanying book in London, is an admirer of abstract art when created by artists who can draw and paint to a high standard.

"Abstract art is fine," he said, adding: "But things like exhibiting unmade beds are shocking.

"If my exhibition could in some way contribute to the decline of this post-art scene, the Turner Prize and the Royal Academy, then I will feel like it has achieved something of note."

Treason of the Scholars will be at Panter & Hall art gallery, Pall Mall, London, until November 6.