

## The Big Picture (2013) – Stewart MacFarlane

MacFarlane's imagery it seems has always been with us – for me a Damon Runyon world of louche characters and innocents abroad acting out some latter-day Hogarthian exposé on the venality and abject nature of the human condition. The settings of cheap hotel rooms, gangster chic apartments, corporate boardrooms, highways, triple-fronted suburbia, rooftops and industrial wastelands cast these characters as actors in existentialist dramas without hope or reason. Compelling they have always remained, credit to the artist's nuanced working of film noir tropes and his informed appreciation of how much can be implied by the merest of gestures courtesy Edward Hopper through another artist MacFarlane came in contact with, John Button. However to say that the distinctive nervous energy of the imagery is derived from such sources is to discount the raw feed of life experiences and a slew of alternative, popular culture influences (particularly music across a diversity of genres) which have provided the artist with a seemingly inexhaustible source of ideas. You know what I like about MacFarlane the most? His capacity to collapse time and space. I'm thinking of some works, not necessarily his best known, like Good Friday in which a traveller is checking his hair in a shop window next to a petrol station. This image is underpinned by the specifics of observation and place but has a universal quality which speaks about moments between one instance and the next.

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Extract from the essay 'Look Homeward Angel'

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