



Still from the video portrait 'David'

Sam Taylor-Wood
National Portrait Gallery
Museums

Having booked into a Madrid hotel with David Beckham, not many women would choose to whip out a camera rather than climb into bed with the iconic hero. Sam Taylor-Wood's video gives you ample opportunity, though, to imagine yourself between the sheets with the superstar. Shot from the neighbouring pillow, as it were, her looped portrait shows him facing you, eyes closed in apparent sleep. This allows you to examine every aspect of his face. 'I think he's got mascara on', opined the man next to me, 'or he's had his eyelashes dyed.' I wondered whether those perfectly arched brows had been plucked and if he would look better without a moustache. Our reveries were interrupted by an abrupt movement; Beckham rolled over to reveal the tattoos on his right arm and, suddenly, his astounding beauty hit home. It's a brave man who is willing to expose him-

self to the prolonged scrutiny of strangers and, no matter how hard you stare or how bored you are by celebrity, you can't help being seduced by the exceptional grace of this man who has made himself vulnerable to our gaze.

Beckham's achievements are listed on the wall – scoring 100 goals for his team Ridgeway Wanderers by the age of eight, becoming England's captain in 2000 and again in 2003, when we beat Germany 5-1; he will also captain England for this year's European Championship. The discrepancy between the action man described in words and the sleeper seen on film is startling. In a nearby gallery, 'We are the People' (Tom Phillips' splendid collection of postcards) is hung according to subject. Star of the 'Sports' section is a footballer, a tough guy standing erect, his boot resting triumphantly on a battered ball. When compared with this traditional image and with the stilted paintings lining the walls of neighbouring rooms, Sam Taylor-Wood's video is a breath of fresh air - more akin to Giorgione's 'Sleeping Venus' than Michelangelo's 'David'. *Sarah Kent*