

Understanding British Portraits

Understanding British Portraits Annual Seminar

Wednesday 26 November 2014, 10.00 — 17.10 National Portrait Gallery

Co-chaired by Dr Ellen McAdam, Director of Birmingham Museums Trust, and Dr Stephanie Pratt, independent scholar and Curator of Art

Programme

10.00—10.40 Registration and refreshments in the Print Sales Gallery

10.40—10.50 **Welcome from Sandy Nairne, Director, National Portrait Gallery**

10.50-10.55 **Welcome from Dr Ellen McAdam**

10.55—11.20 **Will Troughton, Curator, National Collection of Welsh Photographs, National Library of Wales.**

Military Portraits of D C Harries

D C Harries operated two photographic studios in Llandeilo and Ammanford in Southwest Wales. During the First World War many hundreds of servicemen and women passed through his doors. More than just a window on the past these portraits of anonymous sitters open up many possibilities in the present.

11.20—11.45 **Amanda Askari, independent art historian/historical costumier & Jane Hardstaff, Audience Development Coordinator, Derby Museums**

Putting Yourself in the Picture: Creating Costumes for the Joseph Wright Institute, Derby Museums

In May 2014 Derby Museums opened The Wright Institute, incorporating the Joseph Wright Gallery of paintings from the permanent collection, Study Centre and Exhibition Space. In addition, the interactive display *Put Yourself in the Picture* aimed to engage the broadest range of visitors with the portraiture of Wright by inviting them to dress-up in clothes created from the portraits by 'The Artful Costumier', Amanda Askari. This paper examines the research for the project, funded by a *UBP* bursary; the design of individual garments; the use of portraiture as a source for recreating historical dress, and how the process has in turn enriched the understanding of dress in portraiture, the impact on engagement, and the shifting boundaries between collections and audiences.

11.45—12.10 **Matthew Storey, Curator, Historic Royal Palaces (formerly Victoria and Albert Museum)**
What Makes An Object LGBT? John Minton's Portraits

Portraits and images of young men by John Minton (1917—57) seem obvious candidates to identify objects relating to same-sex desire, but raise problems as to whether these readings were intended for, or obvious to, original audiences. Based on an event organised for LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Trans) History Month at the V&A, this talk explores how museums can identify objects that relate to historically hidden or marginalised identities.

12.10—12.40 **Panel discussion with the morning's speakers, chaired by Dr Ellen McAdam**

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12.40—14.00 **Lunch** in the Education Studio (provided for all), and time to visit the galleries.

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continued over



14.00-14.05 **Welcome from Dr Stephanie Pratt**

14.05—14.30 **Esther Chadwick, PhD candidate, History of Art, Yale University; Paul Mellon Fellow, Center for Advanced Studies in the Visual Arts, Washington, D.C., and Meredith Gamer, PhD candidate, History of Art, Yale University**

Figures of Empire: Portraiture and Slavery at the Yale Center for British Art

Figures of Empire: Slavery and Portraiture in Eighteenth-Century Atlantic Britain is currently on display at the Yale Center for British Art, New Haven. This paper will provide an overview of the exhibition, as well as an introduction to the archival, conceptual and conservation work undertaken in its preparation.

14.30—14.55 **Dr Vicky Coltman, Senior Lecturer, History of Art, University of Edinburgh**

The aesthetics of colonialism: George Chinnery's portrait of Gilbert Elliot, 1st Earl of Minto, 1812

This paper considers the aesthetics of colonialism by offering a focussed analysis of George Chinnery's under-studied portrait of Gilbert Elliot, as Governor-General of India. Drawing on the sitter's unpublished familial correspondence in the National Library of Scotland, it raises a constellation of issues in and out of representation, concerning the art historical genre of early C19th portraiture in a colonial context; namely, the relationship between formal and domestic portraits, public and private contexts, likeness and unlikeness, proximity and distance, stasis and change, or youth and age, and a painterly palette of brown and white faces.

14.55—15.20 **Dr Rebecca Wade, Henry Moore Institute Post-Doctoral Research Fellow**

'The hand is a portrait': The reception of the plaster death masks and hands of Thackeray and Rossetti by Brucciani

When the novelist William Makepeace Thackeray and the artist Dante Gabriel Rossetti died in 1863 and 1882 respectively, D. Brucciani & Co. were commissioned to make plaster casts of the face and right hand of the deceased. This paper examines the reception of these objects and argues that the hand was interpreted as a more accurate portrait than the death mask.

15.20—15.50 **Refreshments** in the Education Studio

15.50—16.15 **Dr Caroline Bressey, Department of Geography, University College London, and Dr. Gemma Romain, freelance historian and consultant**

Spaces of Black Modernism: from application and archive to display

This presentation will outline the research process for the 'Spaces of Black Modernism' spotlight display on show at Tate Britain until March 2015. The project grew out of a pilot project undertaken at UCL Art Museum to explore the Black presence within UCL's art collection. In turn this work supported an application to the AHRC which employed Dr Gemma Romain as a Research Associate on the main project *Drawing over the Colour Line*, which sought to recover the experiences and identities of black people in Britain during the inter-war period, through art collections. While reflecting on the research process, the presentation will highlight some of the research themes that have come out of this work including queer identities and black modernism and Marxism; the impact of the Harlem Renaissance on London's art scene; celebrity and identity and the black body in the studio.

16.15—16.40 **Rosie Broadley, Associate Curator, National Portrait Gallery**

In the bedroom or under the coats: rediscovering Laura Knight's portraits

Most of Laura Knight's portraits are in private homes, many with the families for whom they were first made. This paper will focus on the planning stages of the National Portrait Gallery's 2013 exhibition *Laura Knight Portraits*, and consider some of the challenges faced in finding and borrowing little-known portraits in domestic settings.

16.40—17.10 **Panel discussion with the afternoon's speakers, chaired by Dr Stephanie Pratt**

17.10 Close



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