

Understanding British Portraits

Understanding British Portraits Annual Seminar

Thursday 8 December 2016, 10.00 — 16.00 National Portrait Gallery

Co-chaired by Professor Frances Spalding, Fellow of Clare Hall, Cambridge, and Dr Alixe Bovey, Head of Research, Courtauld Institute of Art

Programme

10.00—10.30 Registration and refreshments. Please enter the National Portrait Gallery by the main doors on St Martin's Place. Doors open 10.00.

10.30—10.40 Welcome from Dr Nicholas Cullinan, Director, National Portrait Gallery

Morning session, chaired by Professor Frances Spalding, Fellow of Clare Hall, Cambridge

10.40—10.45 Introduction from morning chairperson

10.45—11.05 Siân Cooksey, Collections Information Assistant, Royal Collection Trust

The Royal Portraits by Dorothy Wilding

Dorothy Wilding (1893-1976), stylish photographer of 1920s and '30s theatre stars and society was, by chance, responsible for the accession images of King George VI in 1937. These photographs, and those of HM The Queen in 1952, travelled around the world, as official images and stamps. This paper exploring Wilding's relationship with her royal clients, particularly when she was based in New York in the 1940s and '50s, will be illustrated by photographs collected by the sitters themselves.

11.05—11.25 Deborah Cherry, Professor of Art History & Theory, Central St Martins, University of the Arts London

Disappearance and visibility: the challenges of curating the art of Maud Sulter

Maud Sulter (1960-2008) was an award-winning artist, writer and curator of Scottish and Ghanaian heritage whose striking sumptuous photographs put black women back in the centre of the frame. Her work was acquired by the Victoria & Albert Museum, National Portrait Gallery and many other collections. Yet today she is comparatively little known. This paper considers the challenges encountered in returning her work and achievements to public visibility through a series of exhibitions and publications across 2015-16 and in sustaining a long term legacy for this artist and writer.

11.25—11.45 Sandra Peaty, Head of Learning and Community, Pallant House Gallery

Pallant House Gallery Community Programme

The Community Programme provides long term meaningful opportunities for people with a wide range of support needs to follow and develop their art interests. Pallant House Gallery's extensive collection of Modern British Art is a frequent source of inspiration and discussion. This presentation will consider and appraise the unique model of engagement that has evolved in the Community Programme over 14 years.

11.45—12.10 Chaired discussion with the morning's speakers

12.10—13.20 Lunch provided for all delegates

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Afternoon session, chaired by Dr Alixe Bovey, Head of Research, Courtauld Institute of Art

13.20—13.25 Introduction from afternoon chairperson

13.25—13.45 Ludmilla Jordanova, Professor of History and Visual Culture, Director Centre for Visual Arts and Cultures, Durham University

Portraits, Institutions and the Responsibilities of Historians

My paper reflects on the experience of writing a short book on the portrait collection at the Royal College of Physicians, London. I consider the opportunities and challenges of working with such an institution. There are ethical issues around using recent controversies about the portraits, especially those commissioned by the College of their Presidents. Equally challenging is finding the right tone, since my account cannot be simply celebratory but nonetheless it presented a valuable opportunity to work with a fascinating collection.

13.45—14.05 Ippy Lanfear, paintings conservator

The Execution of Dukes and Duplicates: cultural clues and material reflections in the portrait collection at Charterhouse

The London Charterhouse is opening its doors to the public for the first time in its history, presenting a unique opportunity for conservation and an investigation into its collection of portraits of late-seventeenth century governors. Depicting some of the period's most influential characters, initial research has established the significance of these forgotten paintings in enriching our understanding of the history of the Charterhouse and their relevance to contemporary visual culture, whilst raising challenging interpretive and practical considerations.

14.05—14.25 Jacob Simon, Research Fellow, National Portrait Gallery

Reducing portraits in size: a debated practice

One of the very occasional responsibilities for a picture restorer working for the newly-founded National Portrait Gallery in the 19th century was reducing large portraits in size. This was ostensibly to improve their appearance but with the unspoken understanding that it would make them easier to fit into the crowded displays. The debate over this problematic practice can be traced in the Gallery's records over almost a century. This illustrated paper examines the practice and sets it in a wider context.

14.25—14.55 Refreshments

14.55—15.15 Louise Baker, Archivist, Madame Tussauds, London

Portraits of the unworthy – Criminal Portraits on display at Madame Tussauds London

This paper will seek to address the unique status of criminal portraiture in the Madame Tussauds collection, and how the Tussauds defied popular taboo and portraiture convention in both the making and display of wax portraits of murders. It will explore the decision-making process behind their choice of sitter giving little regard to their subject's 'worthiness', as well as the practicalities of how sittings, sketches and measurements were taken, giving the so-called unworthy a form of immortality in portraiture.

15.15—15.35 Lisa Beauchamp, Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art, Birmingham Museums Trust

Turning to See: From Van Dyck to Lucian Freud, curated by John Stezaker – Project Study and Curatorial Analysis

This talk will focus on my experiences of working with an artist as curator, taking as its case study the exhibition 'Turning to See: From Van Dyck to Lucian Freud' curated by John Stezaker at Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery. I will discuss my rationale for approaching the artist and the methodology of selecting artworks from the National Portrait Gallery and Birmingham's collections, to consider the wider role of artists as curators as a working model for museums.

15.35—16.00 Chaired discussion with the afternoon's speakers, and close