

## ***Understanding British Portraits Annual Seminar***

**Wednesday 13 November 2019, 10.00 — 16.40 National Portrait Gallery, London**

**Chaired by Nicola Kalinsky, Director, The Barber Institute of Fine Arts, and Chris Stephens, Director, The Holburne Museum**

### **Programme**

10.00—10.40 **Registration and refreshments.** Please enter the National Portrait Gallery by the main doors on St Martin's Place. Doors open 10.00.

10.45—10.50 Lecture theatre. Welcome from **Dr Alison Smith, Chief Curator, National Portrait Gallery**

#### **Morning session chaired by Nicola Kalinsky, Director, The Barber Institute of Fine Arts**

10.50—11.10 **Robert Tittler, 'Distinguished Professor of History Emeritus', Concordia University, Montreal, Canada**

*Arms Painters as Portrait Painters in Tudor and early Stuart England: Painting the Life of Sir Henry Unton*

A significant number of Elizabethan and early Stuart portraits appear to have been painted, not by portrait specialists at all, but rather by the arms painters of the day, whose work brought them into close and constant touch with potential patrons. The National Portrait Gallery's *Sir Henry Unton*, c1596 (NPG 710) can now be placed amongst that number, and its painter revealed.

11.10—11.30 **Jessica David, Senior Paintings Conservator, Yale Center for British Art, New Haven; Richard Hark, conservation scientist, Yale's Institute for the Preservation of Cultural Heritage (and co-authored by Dr. Edward Town, Head of Collections, Information and Access, and Assistant Curator for Early Modern Art, YCBA)**

*'Likeness, Roundness, Posture and Colouring': Revealing the techniques of British portraitists from the Reformation to the Restoration*

For the past five years, the Yale Center for British Art has been engaged in an in-depth technical cataloguing endeavour called 'Reformation to Restoration' which, in its first phase, focused on Tudor and early Stuart portraiture. With the support of Yale's Institute for the Preservation of Cultural Heritage, the project has entered a new stage, utilizing macro x-ray fluorescence spectroscopy (MA-XRF) to analyze approximately fifty portraits, yielding a spectrum of new data on the identity and spatial distribution of specific painting materials, the evolution of the painter's palette over this period, approaches to mark-making and blending as well as compositional changes that are not evident using traditional forms of spot analysis or conservation imaging. Highlighting painters like William Larkin, Cornelius Johnson, Anthony Van Dyck, Peter Lely and Godfrey Kneller, this paper aims to present a new method of dissecting the physical layers of British portraits and their relationship to contemporary primary accounts about portrait-making.

11.30—11.50 **Matilda Pye, National Outreach Curator, Royal Museums Greenwich**

*Construction of an Icon: Illuminating Elizabeth I at Royal Museums Greenwich and Beyond*

A three-year programme funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund has enabled a rich programme of events, partnerships and exhibitions related to the acquisition of the Armada portrait of Elizabeth I at Royal Museums Greenwich. It has allowed the museum to create a series of new artistic commissions which carefully deconstruct the image of Elizabeth at different stages of her life history or in relation to other contemporary women influencers. The projects have concrete artistic outputs but also arise from multiple conversations, public engagement and explorations of the contemporary social relevance of a 16th century material cultural object. The artists inspire debate about the construction of power and gender, beside some of the less comfortable truths of splendour.

11.50—12.30 **Chaired discussion/Q&A session with morning speakers**

12.30—13.30 **Lunch** provided for all, and time to visit the galleries



## Afternoon session chaired by Chris Stephens, Director, The Holburne Museum

13.30—13.50 **Roberto C. Ferrari, Curator of Art Properties, Columbia University Libraries**

*British Portraits at Columbia University: Opportunities for Object-Centred Learning*

The art collection at Columbia University in the City of New York, founded in 1754 as King's College, includes over 100 portraits by British artists and/or depicting British sitters. The collection exists to support curricular projects and to enhance educational programmes for students and faculty. This presentation will highlight some of these unknown portraits by Cornelius Johnson, Jeremiah Davison, George Romney, and others, and then focus on two portraits as recent examples of successful object-centred learning opportunities. The first is a portrait of Isabella Ricketts Batson by John Hoppner, whose simple depiction belies the complex imperialist history of her family; the second is a portrait of James Justinian Morier in Qajar Persian dress by George Henry Harlow, a work that inspired students to explore Orientalism and British politics during the Napoleonic Wars.

13.50—14.10 **Rachel Church, Curator, Sculpture, Metalwork, Ceramics and Glass Department, Victoria and Albert Museum**  
*'...the displaying of a fine Brilliant glittering on the little Finger ...': Considering the use of the diamond ring in male portraits of the 18th and 19th century*

Close inspection of male portraits of the 18th century reveals the surprising sparkle of a diamond ring on the little finger. Diamond rings were part of the self-presentation of a gentleman but when misused, could be exploited by fraudsters and confidence tricksters. Diamonds were also associated with memory and gifts between men either in life, through patronage, or as bequests, cemented networks of sociability and influence. This talk will look at the multiple and sometimes conflicting meanings of the male diamond ring.

14.10—14.30 **Anna Reynolds, Deputy Surveyor of The Queen's Pictures, Royal Collection Trust**

*John Singer Sargent (1856-1925) and Fashion*

This paper will analyse the fashions depicted in Sargent's female portraits of the 1880s, 1890s and 1900s. It will highlight the decisive role of the artist in selecting what his sitters wore and will demonstrate how Sargent modified clothing and jewellery for representation in paint. My research into the portraits is supported by detailed quantitative database analysis, as well as the study of comparable surviving garments during a sabbatical year based at the Costume Institute of the Metropolitan Museum in 2017-18.

14.30—14.50 **Corinne Harrison, Library, Archive and Museum Services Administrator, Royal College of Physicians**

*Inspiring women physicians via digital inclusion: creating a virtual reality portrait gallery*

This paper will present the collaborative Museum-University Partnership Initiative project *Inspiring Women Physicians*, between the Royal College of Physicians and the University of Westminster, in which we developed a digitally-inclusive solution to displaying a collection of photographic portraits of women physicians, to be inspirational to future physicians. This paper also looks at how physicians wanted to be portrayed in the 20th century.

14.50—15.20 **Refreshments**

15.20—15.40 **Ann Chow-Thomas, Assistant Archivist, University of Arts London Archives and Special Collections**

*Different Versions of Her: Materiality and Representations of the artist Pauline Boty, 1958—65*

This paper suggests that various distinct identities of Pauline Boty can be interpreted through our interaction with her self-portrait in stained glass and other representations of her by photographers. If we consider these as material objects with their own specific histories in institutional spaces, this ultimately allows for a freer and more liberating sense of who Boty was as a complex individual and artist.

15.40—16.00 **Beth Hughes, Curator, Arts Council Collection**

*Jo Spence, Beyond the Family Album: A Collaborative Approach to Self-portraiture*

For many artists self-portraiture is a solitary practice; not so for Jo Spence and her collaborators. This talk will take an in-depth look at Spence's iconic work, *Beyond the Family Album*, described by the artist as aiming 'to better understand how, through visual forms of representation, our subjective views of selves, and others, are structured and held across the institutions of media, and through hierarchical social relationships.' The talk will look at this work in a contemporary context reviewing recent research into how today's generation present themselves through social media and the effect it can have on their peers.

16.00—16.40 **Chaired discussion/Q&A session with afternoon speakers, and close**



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