



2026

Annual Exhibition 2026



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President's foreword

Welcome to the Royal Society of Portrait Painters' Annual Exhibition 2026.

“There are multitudes of people, but there are many more faces, because each person has several of them.” Rainer Maria Rilke

Rilke's assertion is axiomatic. He goes on to write that some people only ever use one of their faces and that they store the others away. In time their children wear them. To the poet this is unremarkable; ‘And why not? A face is a face.’

A face is a face - until it becomes a portrait. When a portrait is made a face is formalised. It acquires an existence quite separate to that of its model. The face is represented, made again and presented afresh. The portrait is an observation offered to a conversation. To be portrayed by an artist is to appear in public, literally, to be publicised.

All the portraits in this exhibition have entered the public discourse. Unlike more instant forms of publication such as social media, however, the painted portrait is slowly, thoughtfully and often painstakingly constructed. It accrues in its making something beyond the flash of the moment.

Rilke's near contemporary Oscar Wilde suggested that ‘Every portrait painted with feeling is a portrait of the artist, not of the sitter.’ This idea resonates and further disrupts any reductive notion of the portrait as a simple record of one person's singularity.

A portrait then is a complex response to a familiar experience, that of noticing each other. Every year in these galleries we gather together a collection of the most remarkable examples of these meditations on likeness.

I feel I may have been somewhat circumspect in previous years when writing this foreword. I perhaps understated the glory of this annual show. I would like to record here and now my considered and unequivocal opinion that this is, without doubt, the very best review of contemporary portraiture anywhere.

2025 was a remarkable year for the Society. It saw the launch of ‘The RP Drawing Prize: Revealing the Human’ and we took the resulting show to Hull, with grateful thanks to the University of Hull and its gallery director, John Bernasconi. The venture was a huge success, and we curated what may well come to be regarded as a seminal exhibition.

2025 also saw the third iteration of The RP Critical Writing Prize. The prize was inaugurated in 2023 with the generous encouragement of, amongst others, the art critic Laura Gascoigne. Sadly, Laura died on 18th October 2025. She was the chief art critic at the Spectator and at the Tablet.

I remember Laura as a brisk and insightful commentator on the many essays we received and for the generous and meticulous way she contributed to our judging panel.

You can read the essays shortlisted for the 2025 prize in this catalogue. The number of entries increased again last year, and I would like to thank our judges, Professor Alexander Marr and Dr Alison Smith. Choosing just three essayists is not easy and the judges perform the task of selection with thoughtfulness and much deliberation. The Society is very mindful of the time

and attention so freely given. David Lee at *The Jackdaw* continues to support our endeavours and will be publishing the three winning essays again this year.

Entries for the 2026 RP Critical Writing Prize opened on 15th April and will remain open until the close of the RP Drawing Prize exhibition in November.

Have a look at www.therp.co.uk for details.

I am pleased to take this opportunity to congratulate Frances Bell RP, on winning the 2025 Draper Grand Prize at The Portrait Society of America and Tim Benson RP who was awarded second place in the Herbert Smith Freehills Kramer Portrait Award for his remarkable painting titled, *Cliff, Outreach Worker*.

~

2026 is an auspicious year in Chinese astrology. It sees the pairing of the element of fire with the symbol of the horse. The Fire Horse is bold and passionate, independent and courageous. With those energies in mind, I have the honour to extend the Society's welcome to Shengxinyu Art, its director, Zhang Hongbin and the twenty-four Chinese artists who have delivered their works to London for inclusion in this exhibition. The Society has a history of reaching out beyond these shores to outstanding artists, but never before have we extended that welcome as far as China. I am confident that this collaboration will bring something extraordinary to the exhibition, and I hope that this is the beginning of a new and exciting chapter in the history of the Society.



RP President, Anthony Connolly

On Thursday 14th May we will welcome Andrew Graham-Dixon to the Mall to give a talk entitled, ‘Portraits of Women, Portrayals of Virtue: A new way of understanding Vermeer's depiction of women.’

Andrew's new book, ‘Vermeer: A Life Lost and Found’ is shifting the ground beneath our understanding of this enigmatic artist and we are very much looking forward to this next instalment.

~

On behalf of the Society, I would like to thank our principal sponsor, Mr. William Lock, who has provided a very generous award for the last six years. His enthusiasm and support for the mystery of paint and observation, which is at the core of this society's concerns, is invaluable.

I must also thank The Lord Faringdon Charitable Trust for sponsoring a new drawing prize, for which we are particularly grateful.

We also begin a collaboration with The Almenara Foundation which has generously funded a new purchase prize. We are grateful to The de Laszlo Foundation for its continuing support of young artists, to Neil Davidson of Raw Umber Studios, to Daler-Rowney and to the membership of the RP itself for their continuing generosity.

~

Similarly, I wish to express the Society's gratitude to the judges this year; Christopher Baker, editor of the Burlington Magazine, Dr. Alison Smith, Director of Collections at The Wallace Collection, Hero Johnson RP and Rogier Willems, winner of last year's William Lock Prize and Neil Davidson (The Raw Umber Studios Prize).

Thanks too, to Anne Morrison, who has graciously agreed to chair our revived and refreshed Advisory Board.

Miriam Escofet RP steps down from council at the AGM. The Society is indebted to its members who volunteer year on year

to keep this wonderful exhibition and all the other activities happening and we are grateful to Miriam and to many others who involve themselves so generously and in so many ways.

Welcome and thank you to the FBA's new CEO, Tom King. Organising the RP Drawing Prize gave me first-hand experience of mounting a major show and it underlined the extent to which we need to be grateful to the entire team at the Mall, and especially to Alistair Redgrift, Head of Exhibitions, for doing so much towards putting together this fabulous display. The Royal Society of Portrait Painters' Annual would not be possible without their expertise and hard work.

~

On 6th July 1997 the front cover of The Sunday Times Culture Supplement announced, ‘PAINTING IS DEAD’ and the subtitle read, ‘Hooray! says Waldemar Januszczak.’

With respect, Mr Januszczak, you were wrong. Painting is in excellent heart.

I would be delighted to welcome you to the Mall during this annual celebration of portraiture, just to clarify the matter.

Finally, to everyone who has ever sat for their portrait and especially if one of your several faces appears on the walls of this exhibition, thank you.

Anthony Connolly
President

Prizes and Awards 2026

The exhibition offers prizes and awards worth over £40,000:

The William Lock Portrait Prize

£20,000 for the most timeless portrait with a real feeling for paint and its aesthetic potential. Plus two runner-up prizes of £500 each.

NEW The Almenara Collection Award

A £5,000 purchase prize will be awarded to a picture which is for sale (at a price not exceeding £5,000) and which, in the opinions of the nominated RP panel and representatives of the Almenara Collection, is agreed to be a worthy addition to the Almenara Collection.

NEW The Faringdon Prize

£5,000 for the most distinguished drawing in the annual exhibition.

The de Laszlo Foundation Award

£3,000 for the most outstanding portrait by an artist aged 35 years or under, plus four Highly Commended awards of £500 each.

The Raw Umber Studios Prize

Raw Umber Studios believes that the most exciting contemporary portraiture lies at the intersection of technical excellence and creative expression. Their annual prize, inaugurated in 2023, encourages and rewards such work. Value £2,000.

RAW UMBER
studios

The RP Prize for the Best Small Portrait

A prize of £2,000 for the best small portrait in the exhibition, measuring not more than 38 x 30.5 cm (15 x 12 inches) unframed.

NEW Daler-Rowney Materials Prize

Daler-Rowney materials to the value of £1,000 will be awarded to the artist who in the opinion of the judging panel has submitted a picture to the annual show which is exceptional, either in terms of its imaginative response to the sitter or its technical achievement.

DALER 
ROWNEY

Award Winners 2025



'Familiar Faces' by Jacob Skinnard
(The de Laszlo Foundation Award)



'Self: Familiar Yet Unknown' by Florence Yuqing RI
(The Raw Umber Studios Prize)



'Ezra aged Six and Three Quarters'
by Toby Wiggins RP
(The RP Prize for the
Best Small Portrait)



'Elvan' by Rogier Willems
(The William Lock Portrait Prize)

'The Privilege of Slowness' by Enxi Liu

Winner of the 2025 RP Critical Writing Prize

I am standing in front of Antony Williams’ portrait, *Emma*. From a distance, the face seems calm; up close, it trembles. Williams has spent months building it with thousands of spider-web-thin strokes in egg tempera, a medium that dries instantly and cannot be blended. Look long enough, and the skin appears to break into a vibrating mesh of red, blue, green, and ochre lines. Step back, and those discordant hues miraculously resolve; the flesh re-ignites with life. It feels more real than real.

Outside the gallery, artificial intelligence can generate a “perfect” face in seconds: poreless, symmetrical, effortlessly pleasing, as precise as industrial reproduction. In half a second, our thumbs decide whether that face is worth another glance. In an attention economy where eight seconds can determine the life or death of an image, Williams’ painting feels almost aggressively slow. It asks a question that continues to trouble me: in the twenty-first century, who still has the privilege of being seen this slowly, this expensively?

“Slowness” today is a word that demands deconstruction. If it were merely a matter of duration—four thousand hours versus eight seconds—then we would be discussing nothing more than the logic of luxury craftsmanship: the production of scarcity through un-replicable labor time. But *Emma* feels different. There is an almost philosophical experience here, what Henri Bergson calls *durée*. Those spider-web strokes are not man-hours waiting to be filled, but creases left by time upon the surface. You cannot see those four thousand

hours, but you feel them, in the moment you are pinned to the spot, in the second your gaze is arrested, in that brief interval where you forget to check the clock.

To be able to read “time” in these strokes is perhaps only possible because the museum has taught us a specific way of seeing: one that treats lingering as a prerequisite for understanding, and the sustained gaze as the inevitable path to encountering a work. We are living through a malady of social acceleration; as diagnosed by Hartmut Rosa, what is disappearing is precisely this thickness of experience filled by time. We have more units of time, yet fewer moments permeated by it.

The problem, however, is that this mode of seeing is itself the result of a filtering process. The “Distinction” defined by Pierre Bourdieu provides a clue: aesthetic disposition is the embodiment of class. To be able to pause before a painting for more than eight seconds, to discern the creases of time within Williams’ strokes, this is not a natural gift, but a bodily marker of cultural capital. The viewer’s eye has been trained by art history education, nourished by museum visits, and polished by countless implicit class filters. Williams paints *Emma*; Emma is painted; and the viewer stands before her, looking. The relation between these three positions begins to sketch a structure of class reproduction. This does not mean the viewer’s experience is “false,” but it carries an indelible social coordinate.

Portraiture has never been merely a storage device for time. Historically, it has played



Emma by Antony Williams
69 × 56 cm
Egg tempera on board

many ignoble roles in the distribution of time: whose time is worth recording? Whose time is worth gazing upon? In Thomas Gainsborough’s portraits of landed gentry, the tenant farmers tilling the land remain in the background. Behind that aristocratic smile lies a history of other people’s labor time being appropriated without compensation. Anthony van Dyck painted Charles I as a divine monarch, yet he could not hide the trajectory of a dynasty approaching its end within his brushwork. If we are moved by a portrait today, it is perhaps because the filter of time has sifted out these more complex elements. How was

this work commissioned? On whose wall does it hang? Whose gaze does it serve?

This means that when we speak of “slowness,” we are never talking merely about aesthetics, but about the politics of time. Whose “slowness” is endowed with value? Whose “slowness” is deemed a waste? Who is entitled to be gazed upon for four thousand hours? Whose eyes are worthy of responding to such a gaze? These questions permeate the entire history of portraiture.

Within the white walls of the Mall Galleries, the portrait completes its sociological closed loop. It confirms whose face is worth recording for four thousand hours, while simultaneously confirming whose eyes are worthy of this labor. This mode of seeing is itself a kind of “time tax.” When we enjoy this privilege of slowness in the gallery, we are, in effect, exercising a right of amnesty, an exemption from being driven by an accelerated society.

While this privilege objectively protects the depth of art, it also carries an elitist exclusivity. As predecessors have noted, a portrait is not merely an image, but a synthesis of context, interpretation, and art history.

Even more problematic is the discourse of labor. We are accustomed to praising the nine hundred hours of Lucian Freud or the four thousand hours of Antony Williams, calling these hours a “testament to labor”. But this labor is only seen, discussed, and imbued with meaning because it has already passed through the filters of the art market. The uncertified slowness—the slowness that never enters a museum, receives no critique, and commands no price—is the true silent majority of this system. To talk about slowness without talking about this mechanism of selection

is to talk only about the slowness that is permitted to exist. Yet, if we stop at “everything is a filter,” we miss something more vital. Because that moment did happen. The skin did break into lines of red, blue, green, and ochre; the discordant hues did resolve upon the retina, and the flesh did re-ignite with life. In that moment, class did not disappear and theory did not fall silent, but they receded into the background. In the foreground, there was only the eye, and the face before it. Freud, Saville, and Williams produce, through slowness, an un-recuperable surplus, the lingering warmth left by the artist’s fingertips. Unlike the false lightness of digital imagery supported by sheer computing power, we find in Freud’s *Benefits Supervisor Sleeping* the carnal presence of Sue Tilley, neither “beautiful” nor “ugly,” neither “pitied” nor “objectified”. In Saville’s mounds of paint, we find the marks of constant revision, struggle, and uncertainty, the evidence of a battle. On the surface of *Emma*, we find the vibration of colored lines that can never be replicated, visible only to those standing before the original.

This surplus can only be received through a sustained, even coercive gaze, and only through the viewer’s own body. Once received, it plants within the viewer a permanent discomfort with everything that is faster, lighter, and easier to consume. The market has long learned to recuperate everything, but those who have experienced a true gaze can no longer be satisfied by substitutes. This is the defensive line of portraiture: a refusal to be reduced to consumable visual fast food, demanding that the viewer respond to the thickness of the image with an equal intensity of focus.

The viewer is invited to be like an unarmed soldier: to lay down one’s gaze as one might lay down a weapon.

Today, hundreds of millions of faces flow across our screens. Digital images are light, but the algorithms that generate these faces are backed by vast data systems and the labor of tens of thousands of labelers; by billions of images scraped without consent and a continuous infrastructure of computing power. Digital imagery has its own thickness, but this thickness exists not at the level of experience, but at the level of extraction. If the act of viewing on a screen feels light, it is because the weight has been shifted onto invisible infrastructures and low-wage labelers.

When we discuss the “slowness” of portraiture, if we focus only on aesthetics, we repeat the oldest mistake in art history: masking politics with aesthetics. We must ask: who is excluded from this conversation on slowness? Is there any room to democratize this pinned-down gaze, rather than leaving it as the grace of a select few? *Emma* hangs on the wall. It does not ask the viewer if they have read Bourdieu, nor does it ask if they have seen through the system. It poses a more fundamental interrogation: in the wilderness of acceleration, do you still possess the capacity to be “pinned”? In that moment of being pinned, time changes its mode of existence. It is not eternity, it is merely eight seconds stretched to the length of a lifetime.

If this is a privilege, perhaps it is no longer merely a privilege of money or class, but a capacity to maintain the integrity of human subjectivity in an age of digital extraction. This capacity is becoming like the strokes of an egg tempera painting: both resilient and exceedingly rare.

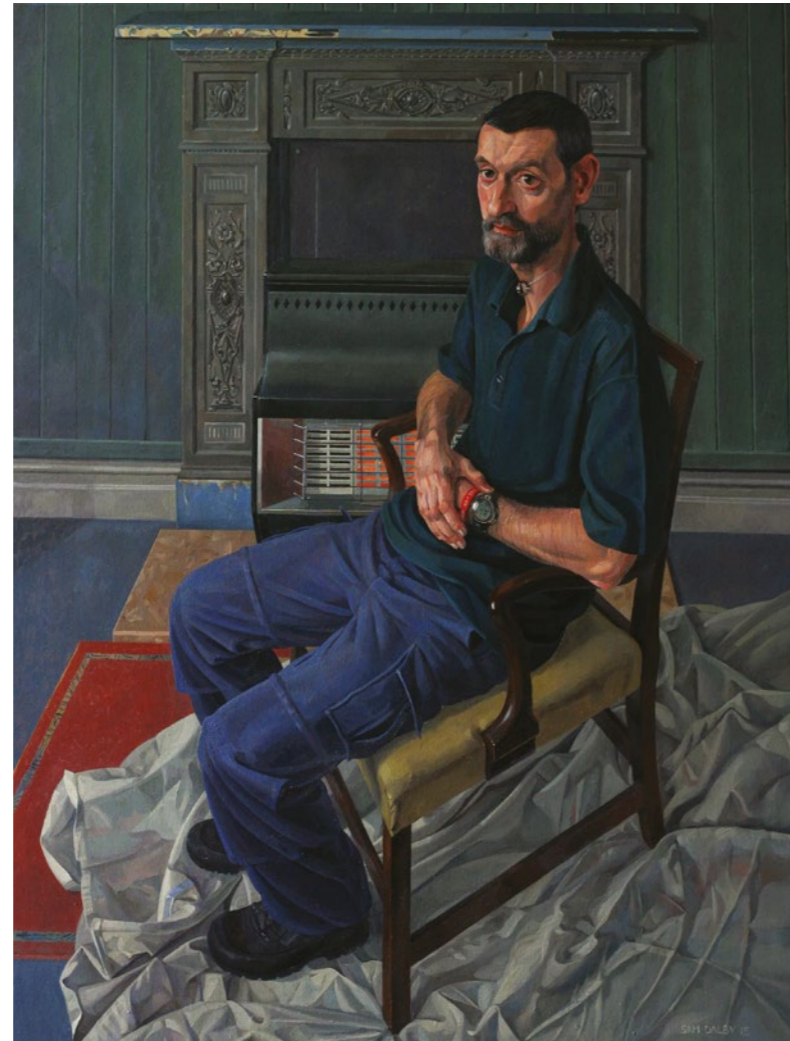
The People's Portraits Collection at Girton College

Conceived as a millennial exhibition by the Royal Society of Portrait Painters, the People's Portraits Collection has been housed in the red brick splendour of Girton College, University of Cambridge, since 2002.

The founding principle was to create an exhibition depicting ordinary people, from all walks of life, celebrating the rich diversity of culture in the UK as it moved from the 20th to the 21st century. This unique display captures a cross section of society pictured going about their daily lives offering proof, were it needed, that remarkable stories reside in the seemingly ordinary.

The exhibition showcases a broad range of responses to the discipline of portraiture by members of the society. Free from the confines of the commissioned portrait, the paintings gently subvert the more sober side of the profession, telling stories born of love, friendship and respect. These histories offer, by visual means, a rare and important glimpse into people's lives as we look back at the millennium, but the collection also continues to grow and change as newly elected members of the society are invited to contribute, developing and diversifying the collection.

Sam Dalby's painting of Justin Eckersley, donated in 2017, tells the story of their meeting at a local building supplier's, and how their friendship developed through their shared love of fell running. In 2022, Peter Brown unveiled a tender portrait of his son, Toby, as he studied for his A-levels which would, coincidentally, lead to his being awarded a place at Girton to study Geography. Mark Roscoe's two paintings of Eniola Sokalu, unveiled in 2025, gently convey the interaction between artist and sitter, presenting an intriguing stylistic contrast between the two portraits of this young academic.



Justin Eckersley by Sam Dalby

These new additions to the collection sit well within the college community as the display grows and snakes along the labyrinth of corridors at Girton College. They expand on the ground-breaking idea nurtured by Daphne Todd OBE, and speak to Girton's ethos of fostering inclusion and equality.

For Girton College and the Royal Society of Portrait Painters they show confidence in the power of art.

The exhibition is open daily, 9am–5pm, and admission is free. Families are welcome.

People's Portraits
Girton College, Huntingdon Road
Cambridge, CB3 0JG
Tel: 01223 338999
Email: peoplesportraits@girton.cam.ac.uk
www.girton.cam.ac.uk/peoples-portraits



Toby by Peter Brown



Eniola Sokalu 1 by Mark Roscoe



Eniola Sokalu 2 by Mark Roscoe

'When Portraits Become Mirrors'

by Emecheta Christian

Finalist, 2025 RP Critical Writing Prize

A teenager walks into a London gallery and stops dead in her tracks. On the wall hangs a pencil drawing so precise it might be a photograph, except photographs don't usually spend nine hundred hours looking at you. The subject has vitiligo — white patches scattered across dark skin like paint splashes on canvas. The girl touches her own face, her own patches, and for the first time in seventeen years, she sees herself staring back from a gallery wall.

This is Kelvin Okafor's 'Drawing Awareness' exhibition, and it's asking a question that contemporary portrait painting can no longer avoid: whose face deserves nine hundred hours?

Portrait galleries have always been about power. Walk through the National Portrait Gallery and you'll see centuries of the same story — wealthy men in expensive clothes, their wives posed prettily beside them, their children sitting obediently at their feet. These aren't just pictures; they're declarations. They say: these people mattered, these lives counted, these faces deserved to last forever.

But what happens when an artist turns that power on its head? When someone like Okafor decides that a face marked by lupus deserves the same meticulous attention once reserved for Tudor kings? When nearly six months of full-time work gets devoted to an acid attack survivor instead of a celebrity? The very act of choosing who to draw becomes a radical statement.

Okafor doesn't merely render these faces; he inhabits them. Before a single pencil stroke, he speaks to each subject, learns their story, and absorbs what their condition means to them. He wakes at 5:30am for meditation, begins drawing at 11am, and sometimes works fourteen-hour days on a single piece. "It feels like it's preparing me for something bigger," he says of his grueling routine. That preparation is visible in every mark he makes — not quick gestures of sympathy, but masterworks of technical precision, each one arguing that this particular face deserves the very best an artist can offer.

Consider Katie Piper, whose face was devastated by an acid attack in 2008. Before the assault, she was a model and television presenter — exactly the kind of face our culture already deemed worthy of artistic attention. Afterward, she became invisible to the world that had once celebrated her. In Okafor's drawing, however, Piper's scarred face is neither hidden nor softened. It is examined with the same forensic devotion to light and shadow that the Old Masters brought to their most prized commissions. The scars weren't flaws to be overlooked; they became features to be understood, each one narrating powerful tales of survival that conventional portraiture would often shy away from.

This is where Okafor's work exposes a tension at the heart of contemporary image-making. A photograph captures a fraction of a second; a nine-hundred-hour drawing

captures something closer to childbirth. Okafor works from photographs because his subjects live far away, their lives too complex for a handful of brief sittings. The paradox is deliberate. He takes the photograph's frozen instant and stretches it across months of labor, transforming a mechanical record into an act of sustained human witness. The camera sees; the pencil contemplates.

That contemplation becomes a form of protest in our swipe-and-scroll culture, where faces are judged in milliseconds and forgotten even faster. Spending nearly a year studying a single face insists on slowness, on depth, on the kind of unhurried attention our digital world has largely dismantled. When Okafor renders Winnie Harlow's vitiligo with museum-quality skill, or traces the lupus scarring across Seal's face with months of painstaking care, he is not simply making portraits. He is redistributing dignity, arguing through sheer technical brilliance and emotional conviction that these particular ways of being human merit our deepest engagement.

The impact on those who see themselves reflected is immeasurable. The teenager with vitiligo who encounters Harlow's face elevated to fine art learns something fundamentally different about her own worth than if she had only ever seen conventional beauty celebrated on gallery walls. The boy with facial scarring who

discovers that someone devoted months to features like his begins to carry himself differently through a world that has always stared but never truly looked. Representation in portraiture does not merely mirror lived experience — it has the power to reshape it entirely.

But there is a risk that must be confronted honestly. Tokenism — the single diverse face inserted into an otherwise homogeneous collection — can become its own subtle form of erasure, a gesture that celebrates inclusion without interrogating why exclusion persisted for so long. Contemporary portraiture that genuinely seeks to transform the cultural landscape must go further than simply diversifying its subjects. It must question the institutional frameworks that determined whose faces hung on gallery walls for centuries, and ask why those curatorial decisions were never treated as political until someone finally dared to challenge them.

This is where Okafor's approach becomes most instructive. He does not exploit his subjects' differences for shock value or reduce them to symbols of resilience.

He studies each face with the microscopic precision a botanist might bring to a rare specimen — not to exoticize, but to

normalize through the sheer intensity of his attention. His subjects are not inspirational poster children or objects of pity. They are individuals whose particular experiences of being human have been deemed worthy of the highest artistic commitment. Each face carries its history visibly, and that history has been honored with months of an artist's undivided life.

For someone accustomed to being stared at for unwelcome reasons, agreeing to sit for such a portrait, to willingly invite an artist's prolonged scrutiny, demands extraordinary courage. The subject must trust that the artist's gaze is fundamentally different from the world's — that it seeks not to judge but to understand. Okafor earns that trust through his process: the long conversations, the emotional immersion, the quiet discipline of returning to the same face day after day until its story has been fully and faithfully told. The drawing becomes a covenant between the artist and his subject, a shared insistence that this face, this life, this story matters enough to warrant such devotion.

What emerges from 'Drawing Awareness' is something that permanently alters how you see every face afterward. These drawings were not acts of charity.

They are arguments made in graphite, built over hundreds of hours, defended with extraordinary skill, that the scope of human beauty is far wider than our galleries have historically been willing to admit. They ask us to look longer, to revise our assumptions, and to recognize that the faces we have been conditioned to look away from may be the very ones most worth seeing.

The teenager with vitiligo will leave the gallery changed. She has seen herself reflected not in a mirror, but in art. Someone chose a face like hers and spent nine hundred hours studying it with reverence, and that single fact rewrites the story she has been told about her own worth. Contemporary portraiture, at its most courageous, does not merely depict the world as it is. It insists on a better one.



This essay was inspired by Kelvin Okafor's latest art exhibition which can be found here: <https://edition.cnn.com/style/kelvin-okafor-drawing-awareness-spc>

Slowing Time: The Quiet Power of a Portrait Painting

Commissioning a portrait painting is more than acquiring a work of art; it is a deeply personal experience that captures a life, a moment, and a story in a way that few things can. In a world that moves quickly, where photographs are taken in seconds and memories often live on fleeting screens, a painted portrait asks us to slow down. It invites reflection, patience, and presence.

A portrait is not simply about appearance. It is about legacy. Long after trends fade and digital files disappear into forgotten folders, a portrait painting remains, quietly holding the memory of a person, their character, and the time in which they lived. It becomes something that can be passed down through generations, a visual story that future family members can look at and feel connected to.

Part of what makes commissioning a portrait a once-in-a-lifetime experience is the relationship that develops between sitter and artist. The process is collaborative, intentional and thoughtful. Conversations unfold, stories are shared, and gradually the artist begins to understand the essence of the person they are painting. A great portrait captures more than a likeness; it reveals

something of the sitter's spirit, their history, their being, and the life that has shaped them into who they are.

There is also something profoundly meaningful about being truly seen. Sitting for a portrait requires time and stillness which is an unusual luxury in a frantic world. In that space, the artist observes, listens, and interprets, translating the sitter's presence into paint.

In the end, the portrait becomes more than a simple image. It becomes a piece of storytelling. It holds memories, personality, and emotion within every brushstroke. Commissioning a portrait is not just about creating art for today, it is about preserving a life's story for tomorrow.

If you would like to discuss a portrait idea or find out more about our commission service, please contact:

Martina Merelli-Stevens
Fine Art Commissions Manager
martina@mallgalleries.com
0207 968 0963

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Mall Galleries, The Mall
St James's, London, SW1Y

Image: Joshua Waterhouse RP & Patricia Wakaimba with her portrait.



Portrait of a Changing Nation: 'Ireland's Presidential Portraits' by Ruth O'Connell

Finalist, 2025 RP Critical Writing Prize

Slender and haughty, she perches her long, elegant arm on an Irish harp, leading our eyes to her delicate face, where large, hazel eyes stare back confidently at the viewer. The palette is muted and her clothing is humble, but despite his best efforts, Sir John Lavery (b.1856) has not succeeded in rendering his wife into an Irish cáilín. This is a 1927 portrait of aristocracy in costume, immortalised as the personification of Ireland on twentieth century Irish banknotes. Let's fast forward to 2018; thin wisps of white hair escape between wrinkled fingers, softly pressing the temples of a tired and lined face, whose eyes are shut tight behind thin rectangular spectacles. The monochrome colour of the photograph creates a deathly palette; however, this impression is dispelled by the softly parted lips, through which a distressed sigh is almost audible, despite the stillness of the image. It would be an image of elderly vulnerability, were it not for his clothes; nothing indicates strength and power in today's landscape like a tailored suit. This is President Michael D.Higgins as Ireland's representative, in an image that could not be more far removed from Lavery's rendition of Kathleen Ní Houlihan. Sarah Doyle captured the reality of independence and power in this spontaneous shot of the President of Ireland in 2018. As President Michael D.Higgin's weathered expression betrays, Irish independence, while a fascinating story, has not been the idyllic and harmonious adventure promised by

W.B. Yeats and Sir John Lavery. The nine Irish presidential portraits on display at Áras an Uachtaráin (the President's house), echo this sentiment. Indeed, unlike mythological personifications, these underestimated presidential portraits offer a contemporaneous window into a nation's soul; as such, we need only to look at three to understand the complicated story of independent Ireland.

Dark, almost black, eyes stare alertly through a thin pair of round spectacles. Though unevenly shaped, their intense focus is unnervingly rendered. The round spectacles sit on a distinctive, long nose, casting a shadow over thin, unsmiling lips. Seated in a three-quarter length pose on a grand mahogany chair, he wears a three-piece black suit, crisp white shirt and grey tie. With his left hand tenuously placed on his left thigh, and his right hand almost closing into a fist, he exudes a sense of restless tension, leaving one with the feeling that he may get up suddenly and furiously at any moment. The heavy, dark blue curtains that provide the painting's backdrop, indicate the sitter's prestige, but there's no need for them to do so. The formidable Éamon de Valera, uncannily rendered in paint, requires no embellishment. Seán O'Sullivan RHA (b.1906), excelled at portraying the mystery and gravitas of this rebel turned veteran politician, at the height of his powers. However, de Valera was not at the height of his powers when he was inaugurated

as President of Ireland in 1959. Rather, he was effectively retiring from a long and turbulent political career. Having been elected as Taoiseach two years previously, de Valera resigned upon his election to the office of the President of Ireland, allowing the more future focused Seán Lemass to lead Ireland into the brave new world that was the 1960s. Despite the changing times, the Irish people remained largely conservative, Catholic and idealistic; as the image of Lavery's romantic Kathleen Ní Houlihan was still branded on the Irish pound note, so was the dream of a utopic Ireland, succinctly illustrated in de Valera's now contentious "Ireland Which We Dreamed Of" 1943 speech. It is therefore no surprise that rather than commissioning a new, accurate portrait of the aging President, an existing portrait (c.1943), which portrayed this highly symbolic political figure in his prime, was chosen instead to hang at Áras an Uachtaráin, thereby encompassing a culture which opted for an unattainable ideal, over crude reality.

As history has repeatedly taught us, bubbles burst, and Ireland's romantic dream was no exception. From the 1960s onwards, the Catholic Church experienced a gradual decline in influence as it faced the cultural war head on in a rapidly modernising country. To the undiscerning eye, it would seem that the old values were being stripped away as cleanly as Lavery's Kathleen Ní Houlihan had been from the

Irish pound note. But the truth was less dramatic; the societal shift in the 1990s was more of a political swing than the profound cultural change the country eventually underwent. As any political historian knows, such swings are precarious and impermanent, and, as any art historian knows, this precariousness is often reflected in the relevant artworks; the case in point here being Mary Robinson's official Presidential portrait at Áras an Uachtaráin, painted by Basil Blackshaw HRHA (b.1932).

It is widely agreed that the election of Mary Robinson to the Office of the President of Ireland was a watershed moment in Irish history. As the first female President of Ireland, the former lawyer and senator was a strong, public proponent of contraception and divorce – a far cry from de Valera's 1943 dream of Ireland. Her portrait by Blackshaw conveys this modernity, embracing an expressive, sketchy style and an adventurous palette which stands out among the surrounding, comparatively staid presidential portraits. In this seated three-quarter-length portrait, Robinson sits with an almost casual pose; her legs folded, she leans forward in a bright, white pantsuit, wearing a soft and engaging expression which is framed by curated gold jewelry. Although Robinson's portrait is modern for the context, traditional, feminine traits dominate the work; her features are soft, her pose is welcoming and informal, and the hues of yellow and pink emit a warmth, creating an effect that is jarring in tone when compared to the other male portraits. Despite the social change her election indicated, Robinson was undoubtedly aware that change is

slow and collective memories endure, such as that of de Valera's dream. As such, the choice to present herself as both traditional and cosmopolitan was likely a tactical one, creating an artwork that masterfully conveys the precarious winds of change that breezed through Ireland in the 1990s.

By 2011, the winds of change had gathered momentum when Michael D.Higgins was elected to the Office of President of Ireland. A consummate socialist, his election as Head of State signified another significant cultural milestone. Ireland was bolder and the portrait of President Michael D. Higgins by Mick O'Dea PPRHA (b.1958), emulates this boldness. President Higgins stands resolutely in a sharp, three-piece navy suit. Framed by a library of innumerable books, he faces the viewer directly and intensely. In an expansive pose leans his weight on his hands, which are tactfully placed on his desk, leading our eyes from his stern, resolute expression down to explore the array of presidential work it supports. Hanging in Leinster House, this striking image would surely remind Ireland's elected representatives of their electorate, resolved to continue down the path of the new Ireland, the illusion of the idyllic land of saints and scholars now fully dispelled...or was it? There are stylistic parallels between O'Dea's portrait of President Higgins and O'Sullivan's de Valera that may suggest an insecurity in this regard. Both men, rendered in a traditional, representational style, are endowed with a chillingly, authoritative presence. Such a show of authority is generally a necessary response to threat; de Valera worked to curate an Ireland that

aligned with his idealistic vision amidst a chorus of dissenting voices that were strong, albeit a minority. Are we seeing a similarly defensive unease in President Higgins's portrait? After all, there are some cultural indications that the old bucolic, Catholic dream still lingers in the hearts of the Irish people; Liam O'Neill's paintings of a vanished Ireland are among the country's most popular, as are sentimental folksongs such as Kingfisher 's 'Killeagh', not to mention that recent milestone referenda were by no means universal in their verdicts. Indeed, while the portrait of President Higgins indicates that Ireland has trekked a 180-degree turn since de Valera's time in office, there is a potential suggestion that this may be rounded out to a 360- degree turn, as so often happens in history.

Despite its lack of executive power, the Office of the President of Ireland holds immense symbolic power, acting as a manifestation of the nation's sense of identity and purpose. The significance of the portraits in this regard cannot be understated; approved by the President before being formally accepted, each portrait offers an opportunity for the serving President to surmise their intentions and the values they stand for in a captivating and timeless medium. As such, Ireland's presidential portraits act as vital records of the collective memory, mirroring the values, anxieties and aspirations of the nation at specific points in time, conveying the tumultuous story of this young republic and, perhaps, even indicating its future.



To read this essay with illustrations, please visit:
<https://therp.co.uk/the-rp-writing-prize-ruth-oconnell/>

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Anthony Connolly RP
President
Royal Society of Portrait Painters
17 Carlton House Terrace
London SW1Y 5BD

Telephone 020 7930 6844

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Annual Exhibition 2026

Alastair Adams PPRP



Professor Rane Thakar MD, FRCOG

102 x 80 cm
Oil



Rory Burns, Captain, Surrey Country Cricket Club

80 x 64 cm
Oil

Frances Bell RP ROI



Rob with a Still Life of Pheasants

100 x 60 cm
Oil on canvas



Sir Nick Clegg

95 x 60 cm
Oil on canvas

Painted for the National Liberal Club.

Tim Benson RP NEAC FROI



Eleanor

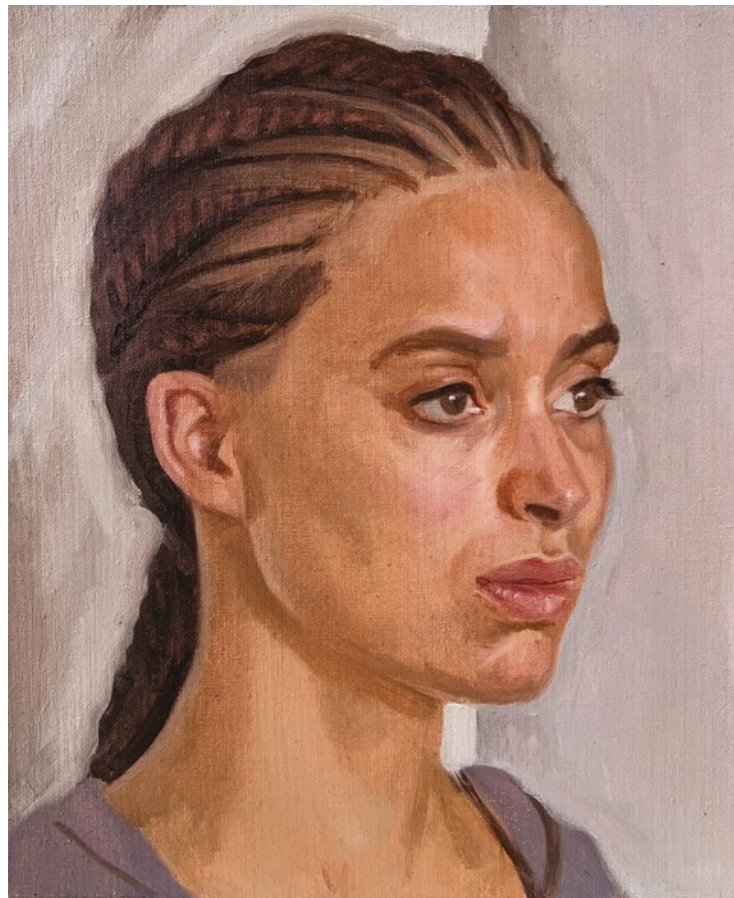
154 x 123 cm
Oil on canvas

Paul Brason PPRP



Hugh and Angus

46 x 61 cm
Oil on panel



Maya

30 x 25 cm
Oil on linen



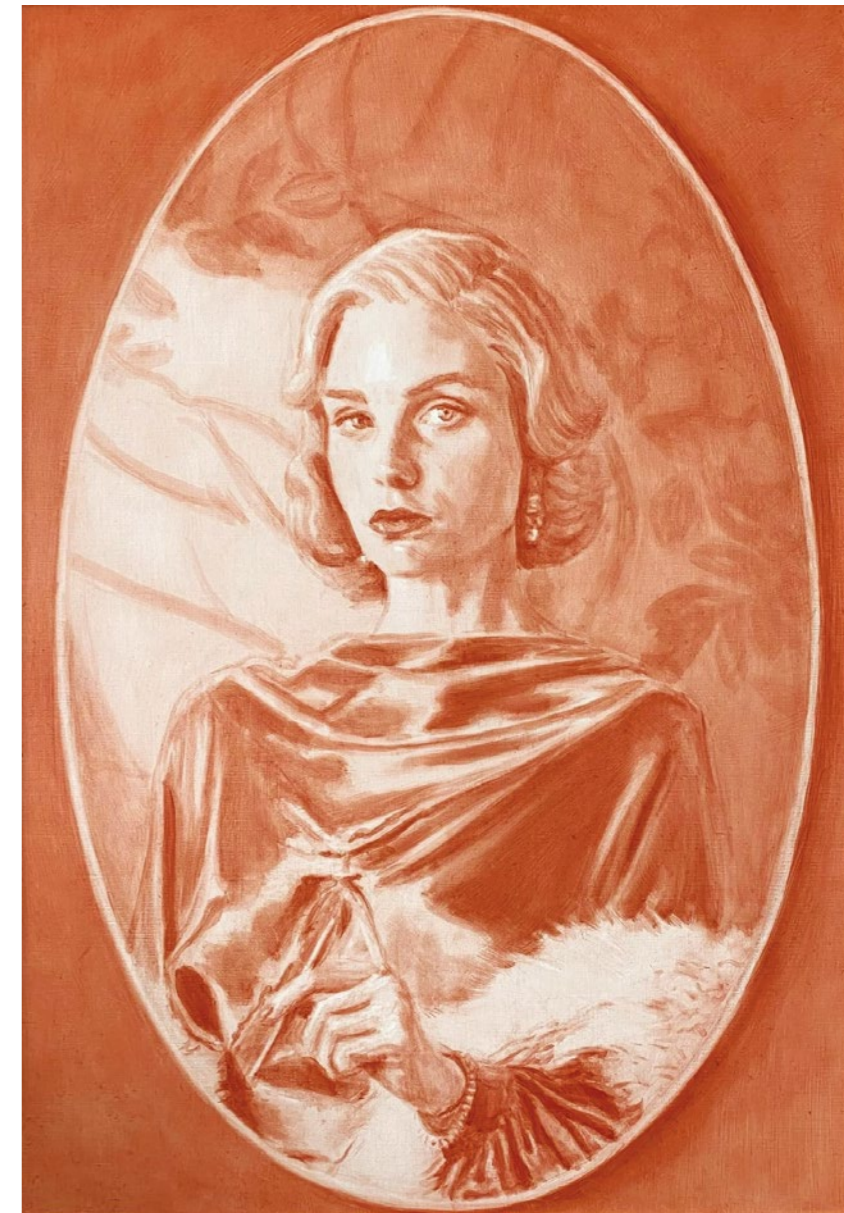
Miki

30 x 25 cm
Oil on linen

Portrait of the actress Joanna Vanderham
as Diana Mitford

75 x 50 cm
Oil on linen

This portrait was commissioned to mark the launch of the television series 'Outrageous' charting the lives of the Mitford sisters in which Diana Mitford is played by Joanna Vanderham. The portrait was painted using a single pigment: Rose Madder, an ancient pigment known for its beauty and soft transparency, but ultimately flawed (a bit like our protagonist) in that it fades over time, thus ultimately condemning the portrait. The portrait was built up in thin layers of paint with the bare canvas acting as the white. The mirror alludes to themes of vanity and solitude, whilst the pen she holds symbolises her preoccupation as a writer.



Anthony Connolly PRP



Clare Staughton

70 x 50 cm
Oil on linen



John Bilton Esq.

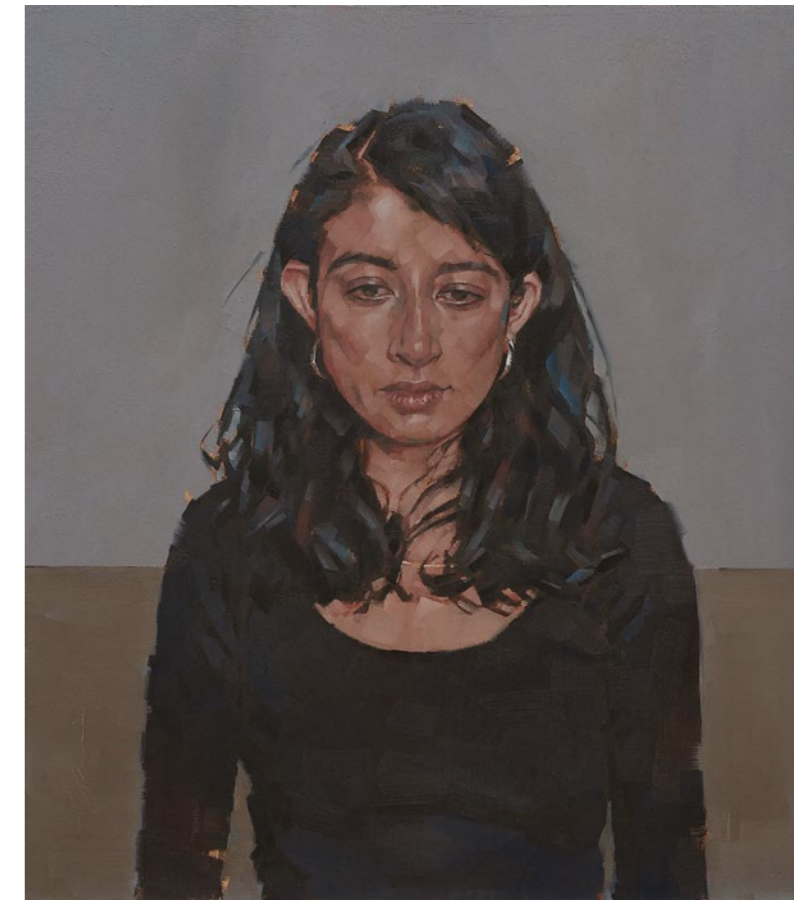
90 x 60 cm
Oil on linen

Simon Davis RP



Thea

47 x 35 cm
Oil on board



Z

46 x 40 cm
Oil on board



Dominic Oliver, MPhil (Oxon),
Headmaster at Lancing College 2014-2025

122 x 85 cm
Oil on gesso panel



Man in Black

90 x 80 cm
Oil on linen on panel



Night Song

84 x 61 cm
Oil on linen on panel

Miriam Escofet RP



Layout drawing for
Margaret Stanley

43 x 35 cm
Mixed media drawing - graphite, ink,
charcoal, gouache, conte, pastel



Professor Margaret Stanley, OBE,
Honorary Fellow of Christ's College, Cambridge

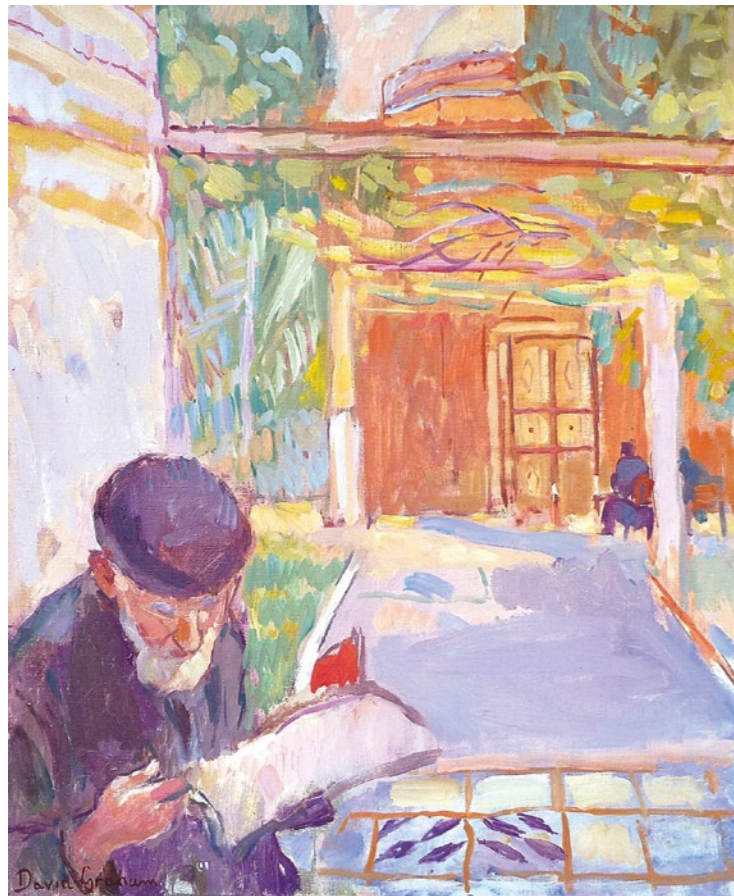
80 x 65 cm
Oil on linen over panel

Richard Foster PPRP



Ladyswood

102 x 153 cm
Oil on canvas



Coptic Orthodox Monastery

61 x 51 cm
Oil on canvas



Girl Reading with Still Life

51 x 41 cm
Oil on canvas



Musicians in Piazza San Marco

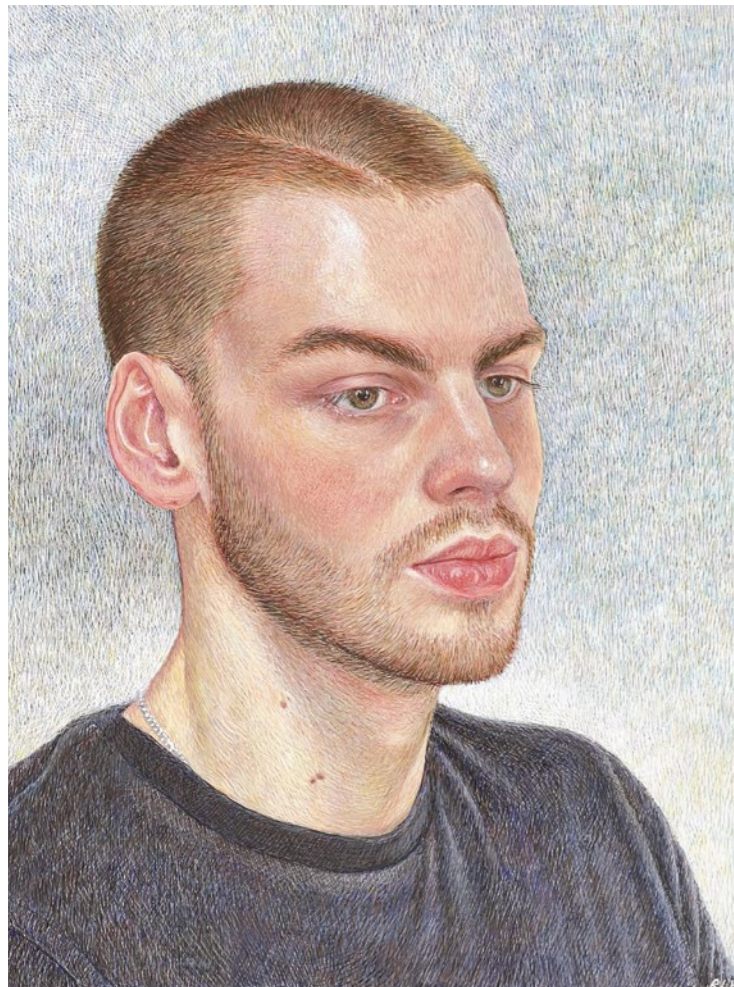
51 x 41 cm
Oil on canvas



Sisters enjoying Rowing Regents Park

44 x 62 cm
Oil on canvas

Robin-Lee Hall PPRP



Jude

40 x 30 cm
Egg tempera on gesso panel



Louis

40 x 30 cm
Egg tempera on gesso panel

Benjamin Hope RP NEAC PS ROI RSMA



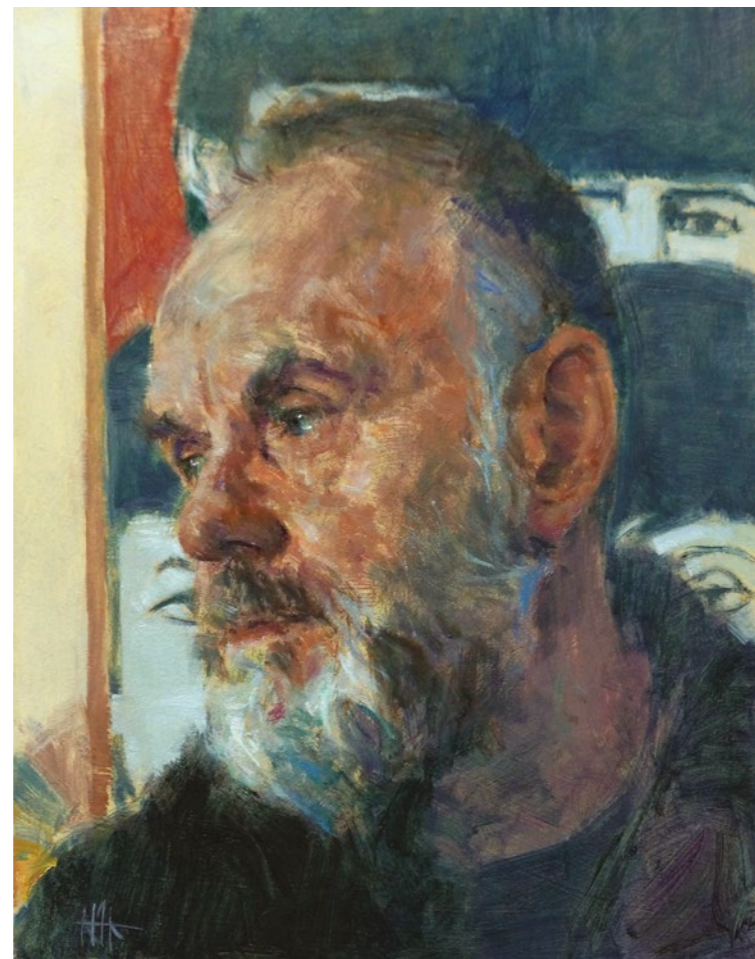
Self Portrait in BUFF

37 x 27 cm
Oil on panel



Colin Davidson, Study

26 x 20 cm
Oil on panel

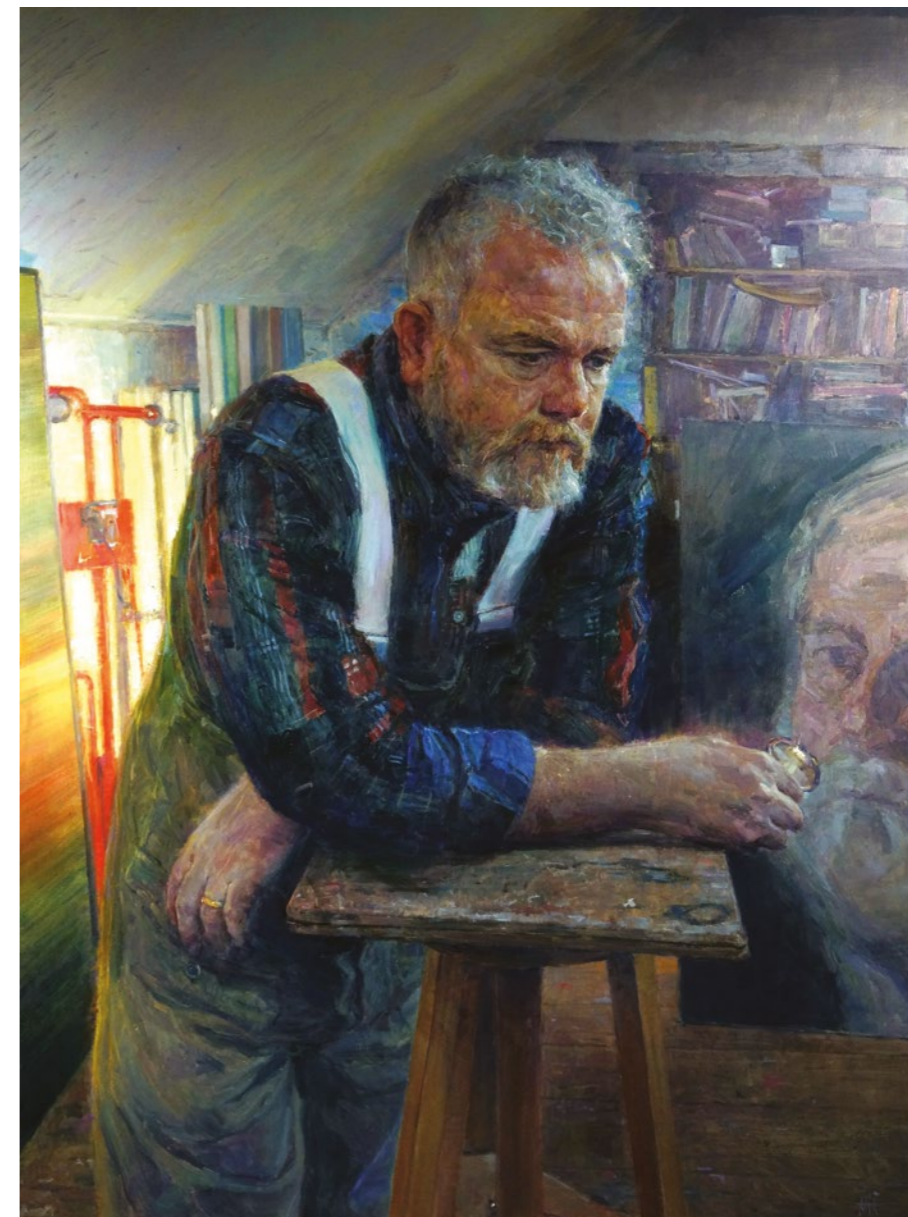


The Beatle-ologist, Dr Richard Mills

26 x 20 cm
Oil on panel

Colin Davidson

100 x 75 cm
Oil on panel



Jamie Routley RP



Les Soeurs (The Sisters)

100 x 110 cm
Oil on linen

Melissa Scott-Miller RP NEAC RBA



Lily

50 x 50 cm
Oil on canvas



Self Portrait of a Worried Islington
Woman Artist, aged 66

60 x 60 cm
Oil on canvas



Annabel and Cameron
with Winnie

76 x 61 cm
Oil



The Congdon Family

91 x 107 cm
Oil



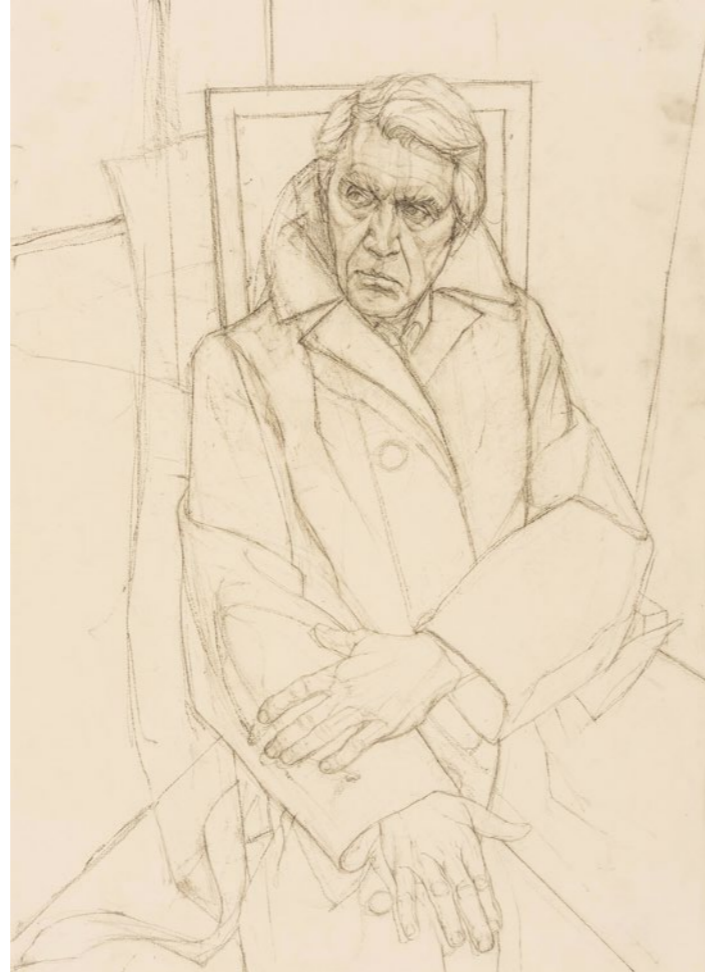
The Nunn Brothers

76 x 91 cm
Oil

Charlotte Sorapure RP NEAC



Couple
80 x 60 cm
Oil on linen



Don McCullin
59 x 42 cm
Conte

Emma Wesley RP

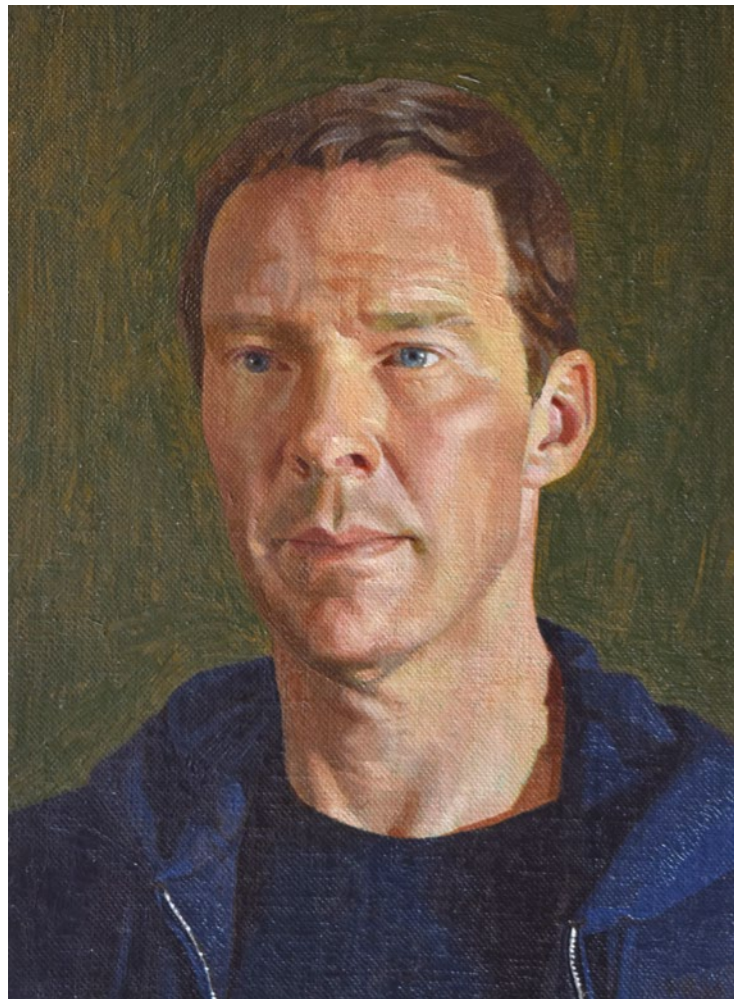


Honeysuckle Rose: Portrait of Catherine Pickles
62 x 41 cm
Acrylic on board



Professor Irene Tracey CBE, FRS, FMedSci, MAE, FRCA, commissioned by the Warden and Fellows of Merton College, Oxford
130 x 80 cm
Acrylic on board

Benjamin Sullivan RP



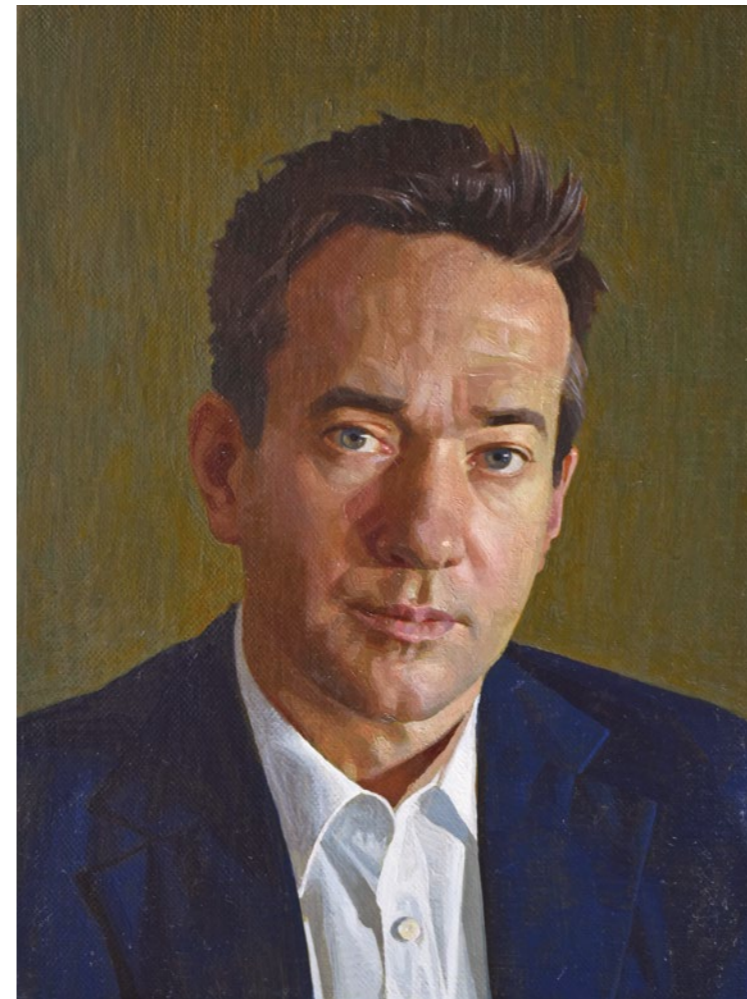
Benedict Cumberbatch

14 x 9 cm
Oil on panel



Damian Lewis

14 x 9 cm
Oil on panel



Matthew Macfadyen

14 x 9 cm
Oil on panel

John Wonnacott CBE RP (Honorary)



Studies for Blue Foot 1

40 x 80 cm
Pencil on paper



Blue Foot 2

90 x 120 cm
Oil on board

Blue Foot 1

When Anne was immobilised by foot surgery last summer, she became trapped into sitting for me every day for 3 months. With her magnificent blue cast stretched out before her, this offered a visual gift for any painter. In a second stroke of fortune, I was able to position her in her chair beneath my 1980s painting of a young girl leaping across the Estuary mud flats in the full glory of her youth. This created a bittersweet composition as my beautiful, leaping niece Maria died last year in her 40s, while Anne and I continue on with the infirmities of age.

Blue Foot 2

In Blue Foot 2, Anne lies trapped in her temporary bed parallel to the bay window through which outside life proceeds in the sunshine.

Studies for Blue Foot 1

Organising 2 beds into our front room left no space for an easel or 4ft boards, so I drew every day, making dozens of A4 pencil studies to help me as I built the paintings in my upstairs studio.

Blue Foot 1

120 x 90 cm
Oil on board





The View in Winter;
Ronald Blythe in his study at Bottengoms

135 x 100 cm
Oil on canvas

Ronald sat for me in his study, at the top of narrow stairs, his back to a low mullioned window overlooking the garden and illuminating his antiquated typewriter; a hand-me-down from friend and later biographer Ian Collins. He had worked at this table for almost 40 years. He told me that time was precious and you needed lots of it to yourself for writing as well as 'just a few close and trusted friends'.

Ronald spoke with great affection of friends John and Christine Nash. He gifted me a dip pen from a box of John's paraphernalia.

After hearing of his death aged 100 on the radio in 2023, I read his final publication 'Next to Nature; a lifetime in the English Countryside' (John Murray 2022) and duly unearthed the sketches from 2008 and began work on this final portrait.

"Not for us covetous desires and inordinate love of riches. Nor for us inordinate affection, although quite how one is to keep this within bounds I have failed to understand. Some friends, the cat, some books, this landscape familiar to me since boyhood, are all in receipt of my inordinate affection and the cat would not be pleased with anything less. But if I am not covetous, it is because I have all I need."

Guest Artists from China

In collaboration with Shengxinyu Art



Yunsheng Liu



Hidden Mother – The Call of the West

44.7 x 55 cm
Watercolour on paper

Longsheng Wang



Empty Room

80 x 80 cm
Oil on linen

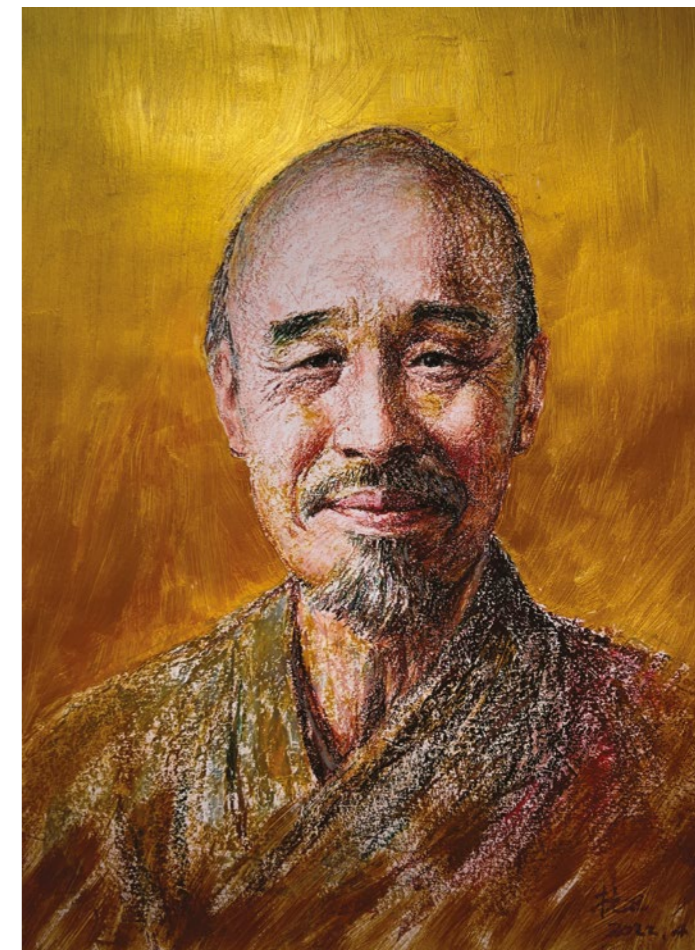
Lijian Xie



Red Attire Reflecting Mountains and Rivers

116 x 81 cm
Oil on linen

Kangwei Zhao



Master Hongyi : The pioneering figure who introduced Western music and painting to China

54 x 39 cm
Oil pastels on paper

Zhengyang Yuan



The Clock Without Hands

100 x 100 cm
Oil on linen

Ming Qin



The Bride on the Pamir Plateau

102 x 76 cm
Oil on linen

Xiaogang Li



Tajik Middle School Students

80 x 60 cm
Tempera casein

Qian Li



The Girl in the Hat

40 x 30 cm
Oil on linen

Junming Zhang



Mother

90 x 81 cm
Oil on linen

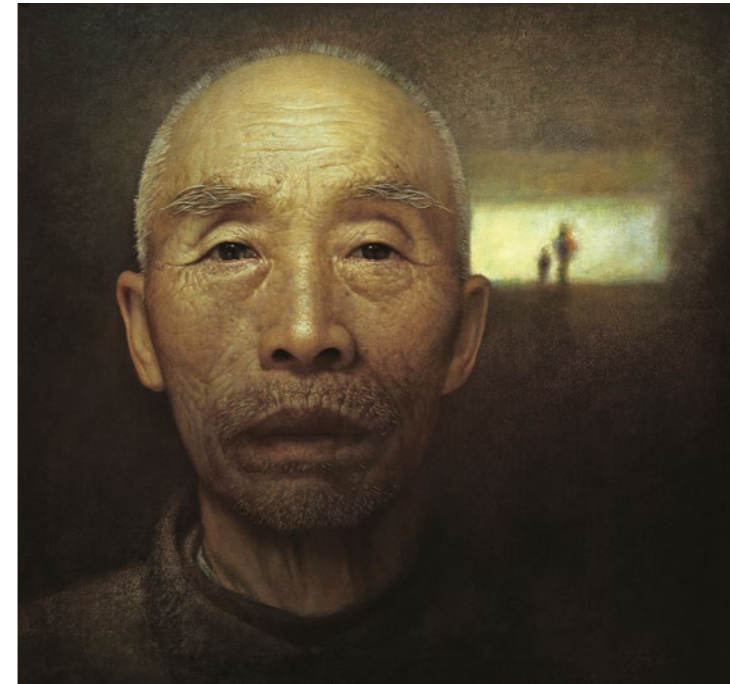
Zhaohui Zhou



The Girl Sitting in front of the Mural

60 x 80 cm
Oil on linen

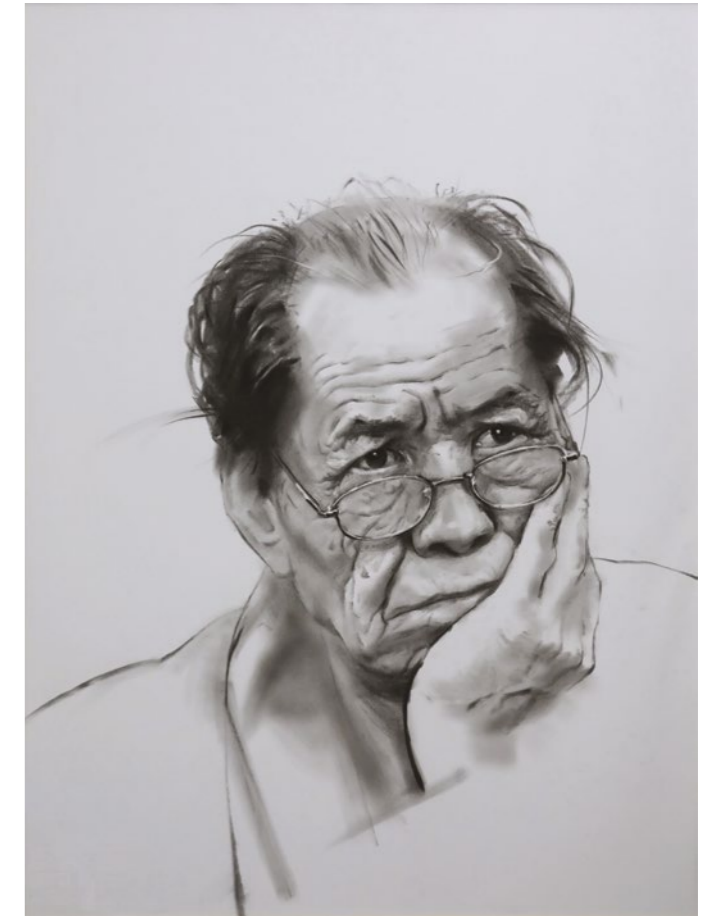
Hualin Du



My Father

60 x 56 cm (74 x 71 cm framed)
Oil on linen

Jianqi Du



Chinese Writer Chen Zhongshi

100 x 72 cm
Drawing on paper

Jinghan Wu



Gaze of the Plateau

90 x 77 cm
Soft pastel on paper

Xiaoyu Li



The Moment of a Gaze

50 x 50 cm
Oil on linen

Jing An



The Distance (also known as Departure for Malta)

100 x 62 cm
Oil on linen

Congxian Dong



The Wind Blows from Afar

60 x 90 cm
Oil on linen

Wanning Liao



Wildflowers by the Celtic Shore

54 x 73 cm
Oil on canvas

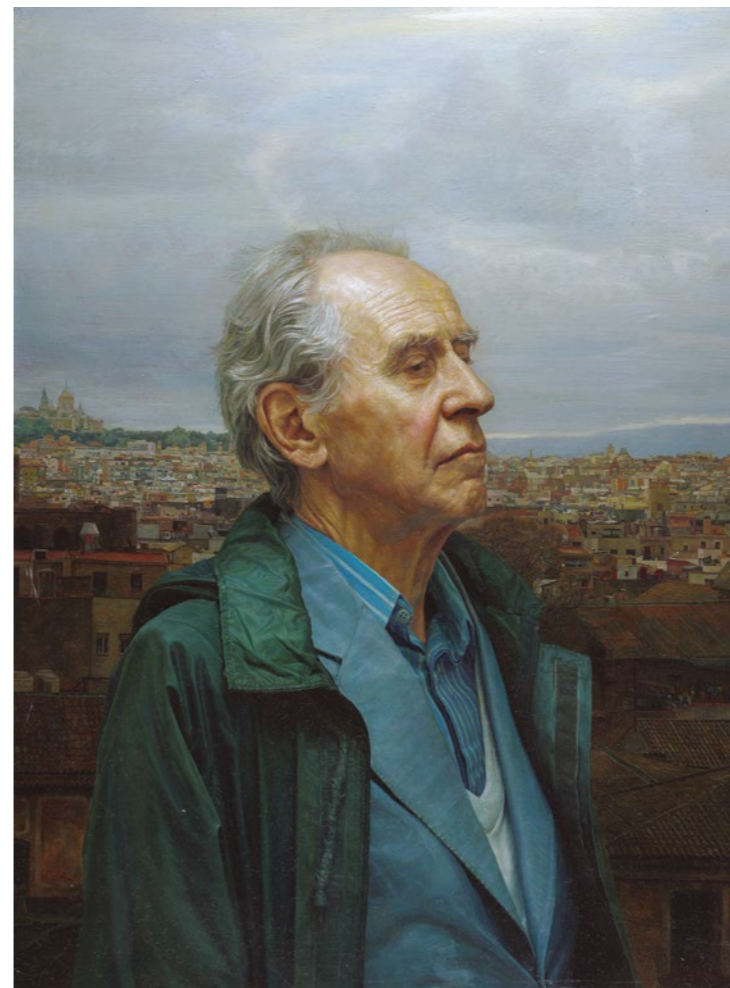
Luzhou Chen



Prayer in the Wind No.1

60 x 80 cm
Oil on linen

Shuang Liu



Looking up from the Barcelona Cathedral

80 x 60 cm
Oil on canvas

Siyuan Pan



Self-Portrait with Foam

40 x 30 cm
Oil on linen

Difei Fan



Grand Attire

30 x 40 cm
Watercolour on paper

Guoqiang Liu



Mother

47 x 21 cm
Tempera and oil on wooden board

Kaiwen Yuan

Portrait of a Woman

20 x 20 cm
Tempera on wooden board



Cong Xie

Dream and Fantasy

96 x 40 cm
Casein tempera on wooden board



Catalogue 2026

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<p>Julia Albo</p> <p>3 <i>The Glare</i> Oil on panel 30 x 40 cm (42 x 53 cm framed) NFS</p>	<p>11 <i>Tuesday at Maya's</i> Oil and coloured pencil on panel 30 x 24 cm (34 x 28 cm framed) £2,575</p>	<p>Anastasia Borodina</p> <p>19 <i>Gilles</i> Oil on linen 40 x 40 cm (40 x 40 cm framed) £2,900</p>	<p>27 <i>Miki</i> Oil on linen 30 x 25 cm (50 x 45 cm framed) £1,800</p>	<p>35 <i>LAM</i> Pencil 70 x 45 cm (75 x 50 cm framed) NFS</p>	<p>David Rees Davies</p> <p>43 <i>Portrait Of John Cahill & The Ghost Of Pablo</i> Watercolour 28 x 23 cm (35 x 30 cm framed) £1,100</p>
<p>Robert Allman</p> <p>4 <i>Summer Sun</i> Gouache on paper 23 x 23 cm (29 x 29 cm framed) £1,400</p>	<p>Frances Bell ROI RP</p> <p>12 <i>Rob with a Still Life of Pheasants</i> Oil on canvas 100 x 60 cm (110 x 70 cm framed) NFS</p>	<p>Paul Brason PPRP</p> <p>20 <i>Hugh and Angus</i> Oil on panel 46 x 61 cm NFS</p>	<p>28 <i>Portrait of the actress Joanna Vanderham as Diana Mitford</i> Oil on linen 75 x 50 cm (95 x 70 cm framed) NFS</p>	<p>Belinda Crozier</p> <p>36 <i>Harvey, Aged 13</i> Oil on board 59 x 41 cm (65 x 47 cm framed) NFS</p>	<p>Simon Davis RP</p> <p>44 <i>Thea</i> Oil on board 47 x 35 cm (60 x 47 cm framed) NFS</p>
<p>Jennifer Anderson</p> <p>5 <i>Presence of Absence</i> Oil on linen 122 x 190 cm (122 x 190 cm framed) £6,800</p>	<p>13 <i>Sir Nick Clegg</i> Oil on canvas 95 x 60 cm (105 x 70 cm framed) NFS</p>	<p>Peter Brown PPNEAC PS RBA ROI</p> <p>21 <i>Ned studying for GCSEs (More practice papers than you can shake a slide rule at), 2025</i> Oil on canvas 51 x 64 cm (59 x 72 cm framed) NFS</p>	<p>29 <i>R26</i> Acrylic on gessoed wooden panel 30 x 20 cm (40 x 30 cm framed) £1,500</p>	<p>Annabel Cullen Invited by Melissa Scott-Miller NEAC RBA RP</p> <p>37 <i>Jo (...and Sevilla's ring)</i> Oil on canvas 86 x 60 cm (92 x 66 cm framed) NFS</p>	<p>45 <i>Z</i> Oil on board 46 x 40 cm £1,800</p>
<p>Jeremy Andrews</p> <p>6 <i>Self Portrait</i> Oil on clay board 36 x 28 cm (37 x 29 cm framed) £3,024</p>	<p>Tim Benson NEAC FROI RP</p> <p>14 <i>Eleanor</i> Oil on canvas 154 x 123 cm NFS</p>	<p>John Burke</p> <p>22 <i>Diana Dunn</i> Oil 30 x 20 cm (40 x 30 cm framed) NFS</p>	<p>Steve Cannon</p> <p>30 <i>Self Portrait in Studio</i> Oil on board 30 x 25 cm (36 x 31 cm framed) £1,100</p>	<p>Saied Dai NEAC RP</p> <p>38 <i>Dominic Oliver, MPhil (Oxon), Headmaster at Lancing College 2014-2025</i> Oil on gesso panel 122 x 85 cm (145 x 108 cm framed) NFS</p>	<p>Tirza Eldad</p> <p>46 <i>Abigail</i> Oil on canvas 47 x 40 cm £3,500</p>
<p>Pablo Astrain Gonzalez</p> <p>7 <i>F01</i> Oil on canvas 92 x 89 cm (93 x 90 cm framed) £4,000</p>	<p>15 <i>Phil</i> Oil on canvas 101 x 71 cm (111 x 81 cm framed) NFS</p>	<p>Hillary Butterworth</p> <p>23 <i>Aimee</i> Oil on canvas 40 x 40 cm (50 x 50 cm framed) £500</p>	<p>Jonathan Chan</p> <p>31 <i>Kehinde</i> Oil on canvas 60 x 50 cm (63 x 53 cm framed) £2,000</p>	<p>39 <i>Man in Black</i> Oil on linen on panel 90 x 80 cm (110 x 100 cm framed) NFS</p>	<p>Miriam Escofet RP</p> <p>47 <i>Layout drawing for Margaret Stanley</i> Mixed media drawing - graphite, ink, charcoal, gouache, conte, pastel 43 x 35 cm (55 x 47 cm framed) NFS</p>
<p>Jeff Avila</p> <p>8 <i>Diego</i> Acrylic and shellac 21 x 15 cm NFS</p>	<p>Jason Bentley</p> <p>16 <i>Portrait of Isabella with Dried Flowers - Drawing Study</i> Pencil, graphite and chalk on watercolour paper 54 x 34 cm (74 x 54 cm framed) £800</p>	<p>24 <i>Paper Crown</i> Oil on panel 25 x 20 cm (30 x 20 cm framed) £350</p>	<p>Amanda Coleman ROI</p> <p>32 <i>Self Portrait in Black</i> Oil 18 x 13 cm (35 x 30 cm framed) £600</p>	<p>40 <i>Night Song</i> Oil on linen on panel 84 x 61 cm (105 x 83 cm framed) NFS</p>	<p>48 <i>Professor Margaret Stanley, OBE, Honorary Fellow of Christ's College, Cambridge</i> Oil on linen over panel 80 x 65 cm (96 x 81 cm framed) NFS</p>

Catalogue 2026 continued...

Libby Fellingham

- 49 *Sister*
Oil on linen
30 x 30 cm (34 x 34 cm framed)
NFS

Peter James Field

- 50 *Small Midnight Self*
Oil on wood panel
30 x 20 cm (36 x 26 cm framed)
£800

Ruth Fitton ROI

- 51 *What in the World?*
Oil on panel
33 x 33 cm (48 x 48 cm framed)
NFS

Marlies Forster

Invited by The Heatherley School of Fine Art

- 52 *On the Edge of Infinity*
Oil on canvas
150 x 120 cm
NFS

Richard Foster PPRP

- 53 *Ladyswood*
Oil on canvas
102 x 153 cm (117 x 166 cm framed)
NFS

Michael Fullerton

Invited by David Caldwell RP

- 54 *Beatrice Lyall (Survivor of Domestic Abuse from a Women's Shelter in Glasgow)*
Oil on linen
60 x 45 cm
NFS

Joseph Galvin

- 55 *Self Portrait 1*
Oil on board
26 x 21 cm (29 x 24 cm framed)
£1,800

- 56 *Self Portrait 2*
Oil on board
26 x 21 cm (29 x 24 cm framed)
£1,800

Thomas Golunski

- 57 *Online Induced High*
Oil
30 x 30 cm (34 x 34 cm framed)
£4,000

David Graham RP

- 58 *Coptic Orthodox Monastery*
Oil on canvas
61 x 51 cm (74 x 64 cm framed)
£5,500

- 59 *Girl Reading with Still Life*
Oil on canvas
51 x 41 cm (68 x 56 cm framed)
£3,500

- 60 *Musicians in Piazza San Marco*
Oil on canvas
51 x 41 cm (67 x 57 cm framed)
£5,000

- 61 *Sisters enjoying Rowing Regents Park*
Oil on canvas
44 x 62 cm
£7,000

Dominique Grantham

- 62 *Betty*
Oil on canvas
40 x 30 cm (46 x 36 cm framed)
£950

Evgeny Grouzdev

- 63 *George with Oskar*
Oil on canvas
112 x 92 cm (116 x 96 cm framed)
NFS

Raof Haghighi

- 64 *The Glass*
Acrylic
50 x 70 cm (52 x 72 cm framed)
£12,000

James Hague RP

- 65 *Man with Hand*
Oil on gesso board
31 x 23 cm
£3,500

- 66 *Woman with Plant*
Oil on gesso board
77 x 77 cm
NFS

Robin-Lee Hall PPRP

- 67 *Jude*
Egg tempera on gesso panel
40 x 30 cm (54 x 44 cm framed)
NFS

- 68 *Louis*
Egg tempera on gesso panel
40 x 30 cm (54 x 44 cm framed)
NFS

Clementine Hanbury

- 69 *Sulk*
Charcoal on hand prepared paper
18 x 12 cm
NFS

- 70 *Wrapped Up*
Charcoal on hand prepared paper
29 x 21 cm (38 x 30 cm framed)
NFS

Julia Hawkins NEAC ROI

- 71 *Portrait of Emma*
Oil
65 x 54 cm (71 x 60 cm framed)
£4,500

Wim Heldens

- 72 *Fever*
Oil on canvas
45 x 60 cm (50 x 60 cm framed)
NFS

Aelfred Hillman

- 73 *A Flautist at Hinton Ampner*
Oil on panel
60 x 60 cm (62 x 62 cm framed)
£6,300

Benjamin Hope NEAC PS ROI RP RSMA

- 74 *Art Model Mike in 20 and 40 Minutes*
Oil on panels
62 x 27 cm (72 x 37 cm framed)
£1,800

75 *Berenice*

- Oil on canvas
51 x 25 cm (61 x 35 cm framed)
£1,700

76 *Nabiha*

- Charcoal on paper
43 x 31 cm (53 x 41 cm framed)
£900

77 *Self Portrait in BUFF*

- Oil on panel
37 x 27 cm (47 x 37 cm framed)
£1,700

Emily Hughes

- 78 *Portrait in Lausanne*
Graphite on toned paper
63 x 48 cm (73 x 58 cm framed)
£2,500

79 *Portrait of Roger*

- Oil on canvas paper
35 x 45 cm (45 x 55 cm framed)
£4,000

Owain Hunt

- 80 *Pregnant Lady Blue*
Oil on linen
90 x 70 cm (96 x 76 cm framed)
£8,500

Invited by Joshua Waterhouse RP

- 81 *We Make Our Own Yarn*
Oil on linen
100 x 100 cm (104 x 104 cm framed)
£12,000

Andrew James NEAC RP

- 82 *Derly, Summer Meadow*
Oil on canvas
125 x 90 cm (130 x 94 cm framed)
£14,000

83 *James*

- Pencil and charcoal on paper
60 x 42 cm (64 x 46 cm framed)
£2,000

84 *James*

- Oil on canvas
94 x 74 cm (98 x 78 cm framed)
£8,000

Olga Kats

- 85 *Portrait of a Gentleman in Hat and Scarf*
Oil
18 x 13 cm (23 x 18 cm framed)
£450

Diarmuid Kelley

- 86 *Flash Gordon Conquers the Universe*
Oil on linen
153 x 153 cm
NFS

87 *Study for a Painting*

- Oil on linen
107 x 127 cm
NFS

Jeannie Kinsler ROI

- 88 *Holding: A Portrait of Amy, Frances and Cecily*
Oil on canvas
122 x 91 cm (125 x 94 cm framed)
£5,800

- 89 *Transient: A Portrait of Byrne, 2025*
Oil on canvas
45 x 35 cm (48 x 38 cm framed)
£1,700

Nahoko Komatsu O

Invited by Robin-Lee Hall PPRP

- 90 *Mother*
Egg tempera and urushi on canvas
35 x 28 cm (43 x 36 cm framed)
£1,400

Peter Kuhfeld NEAC RP

- 91 *Florence*
Oil on canvas
64 x 46 cm (68 x 50 cm framed)
NFS

92 *Raven*

- Oil on canvas
66 x 61 cm (72 x 65 cm framed)
NFS

August Lamm

Invited by Hero Johnson RP

- 93 *Andy with a Sandwich*
Oil on panel
61 x 44 cm (67 x 50 cm framed)
£1,200

Joe Laycock

- 94 *Self Portrait with Hand*
Charcoal, graphite, gesso, pastel and oil pastel
48 x 28 cm (53 x 33 cm framed)
£500

Zac Lee

- 95 *Interdependence*
Oil on canvas
102 x 82 cm
£6,000

Catalogue 2026 continued...

Celia Liberace

- 96 *Arnold in Blue*
Pencil on paper
16 x 16 cm (26 x 26 cm framed)
£1,300

Dylan Lisle

- 97 *Face to Face with Ada*
Oil on canvas
60 x 60 cm
NFS

James Lloyd

Invited by Anastasia Pollard RP

- 98 *Portrait of Ishbel*
Oil on canvas
180 x 120 cm (184 x 124 cm framed)
£20,000

Hari Lualhati

- 99 *Washed in the Blood of the Lamb*
Oil on aluminium panel
60 x 60 cm (72 x 72 cm framed)
NFS

James Mann

- 100 *Kenneth*
Oil
32 x 26 cm
NFS

Helen Masacz

- 101 *Etienne*
Graphite on paper
29 x 42 cm (30 x 43 cm framed)
£650

Kenny McKendry RP

- 102 *Colin Davidson*
Oil on panel
100 x 75 cm (114 x 89 cm framed)
£9,000

103 *Colin Davidson, Study*

- Oil on panel
26 x 20 cm (40 x 34 cm framed)
£1,600

104 *The Beetle-ologist, Dr Richard Mills*

- Oil on panel
26 x 20 cm (40 x 34 cm framed)
£1,600

Jinlyu Mei

- 105 *Say Cheese*
Oil on canvas
160 x 120 cm
£4,800

Alina Moderate

- 106 *Omari*
Oil on canvas board
23 x 31 cm (26 x 34 cm framed)
£800

Jordan Morgan

- 107 *Dad #4*
Charcoal and graphite on paper
56 x 42 cm (57 x 43 cm framed)
£1,600

Keith Morton

- 108 *Self 2025*
Oil
25 x 21 cm (39 x 34 cm framed)
£950

John Murphy-Woolford

- 109 *Grey Mirror*
Oil on canvas paper
30 x 21 cm (49 x 37 cm framed)
£1,000

Paul Newton

- 110 *Self-Portrait in Lockdown*
Oil on linen
87 x 86 cm (91 x 90 cm framed)
NFS

Li Ning

- 111 *Portrait of the Artist in the Studio at Night*
Oil on canvas
60 x 50 cm
£4,000

Ashley Ogilvy

Invited by Andrew James NEAC RP

- 112 *Anna and her Portraits*
Oil
131 x 83 cm (136 x 88 cm framed)
NFS

Olivia Pang

- 113 *Matteo*
Watercolour on silk with gold leaf
30 x 20 cm (42 x 32 cm framed)
£1,100

114 *Spring Is Coming*

- Mineral pigments on paper
68 x 169 cm (74 x 175 cm framed)
£9,300

Harriet Pattinson

Invited by Alastair Adams PPRP

- 115 *Study of Marwa*
Oil on canvas
45 x 35 cm (45 x 35 cm framed)
£3,000

Lizzie Phillips

- 116 *Self Portrait at 23*
Oil on canvas
40 x 30 cm
NFS

Anastasia Pollard RP

- 117 *Meredith*
Oil on panel
30 x 25 cm
NFS

118 *Richard's Breakfast*

- Oil on panel
41 x 51 cm
NFS

119 *Tatiana*

- Oil on board
56 x 48 cm
NFS

Allan Ramsay

Invited by Neale Worley NEAC RP

- 120 *Finlay Gravette Ramsay*
Oil
40 x 30 cm (42 x 32 cm framed)
NFS

Carl Randall

- 121 *Graveyard Getsuho*
Acrylic on aluminium plate
45 x 32 cm (50 x 37 cm framed)
NFS

Alex Rooney

- 122 *Gabriella*
Charcoal on paper
46 x 36 cm (67 x 56 cm framed)
£1,400

Ross Rounsevell

- 123 *Happy Camper*
Oil on board
46 x 35 cm
NFS

Jamie Routley RP

- 124 *Les Soeurs (The Sisters)*
Oil on linen
100 x 110 cm (105 x 115 cm framed)
NFS

125 *Private Commission*

- Graphite on paper
35 x 25 cm (45 x 35 cm framed)
NFS

126 *The Winding Stair - Jesse Norman MP*

- Oil on linen
105 x 105 cm (110 x 110 cm framed)
NFS

Noah Rush

- 127 *Self Portrait, 2025*
Oil on canvas
26 x 21 cm (28 x 23 cm framed)
£320

Susan Ryder NEAC RP

- 128 *Annabel and Cameron with Winnie*
Oil
76 x 61 cm
NFS

129 *The Congdon Family*

- Oil
91 x 107 cm
NFS

130 *The Nunn Brothers*

- Oil
76 x 91 cm
NFS

Tai Shan Schierenberg RP (Honorary)

- 131 *A Chinese Memling*
Oil on board
29 x 21 cm (32 x 23 cm framed)
NFS

132 *Self Portrait*

- Oil on canvas
120 x 65 cm
NFS

Melissa Scott-Miller NEAC RBA RP

- 133 *Ikaay*
Oil on canvas
70 x 60 cm (75 x 65 cm framed)
NFS

134 *Lily*

- Oil on canvas
50 x 50 cm (55 x 55 cm framed)
NFS

135 *Self Portrait of a Worried Islington Woman*

- Artist, aged 66*
Oil on canvas
60 x 60 cm (65 x 65 cm framed)
£3,500

Daniel Shadbolt NEAC

- 136 *Large Portrait of Nicholas, Against Orange*
Oil on canvas
90 x 65 cm
£1,200

137 *Self Portrait Wearing a Hat*

- Oil on panel
20 x 20 cm
£450

Ella Sheltawy

Invited by The Art Academy

- 138 *Self Portrait After Munch*
Oil on canvas
46 x 55 cm
NFS

Mark Shields

- 139 *Self Portrait*
Oil on canvas
30 x 25 cm (34 x 29 cm framed)
£2,400

Howard Sills

- 140 *Looking and Waiting*
Oil
20 x 25 cm (22 x 27 cm framed)
NFS

Rachata Siriyakul

- 141 *Portrait of a Man*
Oil
101 x 121 cm
£48,000

Bran Sivas

- 142 *Alfred*
Oil on linen
35 x 40 cm (49 x 54 cm framed)
£1,400

Catalogue 2026 continued...

David Orrin Smith

Invited by Anthony Connolly PRP

- 143 *Tessa, Reading*
Transparent watercolour on paper
132 x 183 cm (152 x 203 cm framed)
NFS

Neyha Sofat

- 144 *This Courage Grows*
Pencil and charcoal on paper
42 x 30 cm (63 x 46 cm framed)
£900

Hanie Soltani

- 145 *Waiting*
Oil on canvas
70 x 70 cm (80 x 80 cm framed)
£1,800

Charlotte Sorapure NEAC RP

- 146 *Couple*
Oil on linen
80 x 60 cm (100 x 80 cm framed)
£10,500

Don McCullin

- 147 *Conte*
59 x 42 cm (78 x 61 cm framed)
£3,500

Phoebe-Louise Stewart Carter

- 148 *Jasmine*
Oil on linen
75 x 50 cm (85 x 60 cm framed)
£9,500

Lucy Stopford

- 149 *Song*
Willow charcoal on paper
60 x 50 cm (90 x 80 cm framed)
NFS

Benjamin Sullivan RP

- 150 *Benedict Cumberbatch*
Oil on panel
14 x 9 cm (40 x 24 cm framed)
NFS

- 151 *Damian Lewis*
Oil on panel
14 x 9 cm (40 x 24 cm framed)
NFS

- 152 *Matthew Macfadyen*
Oil on panel
14 x 9 cm (40 x 24 cm framed)
NFS

Liam Thomas

- 153 *So, On The Topic Of Self Reliance*
Oil on aluminium
30 x 42 cm
£2,000

Luke Thompson

- 154 *Jacquie in Red*
Oil on linen
70 x 50 cm (75 x 55 cm framed)
£4,200

Thomas Thyrion

- 155 *Behind the Sun*
Oil on wood panel
24 x 30 cm
NFS

Richard Tomlin

Invited by Antony Williams NEAC VPRP

- 156 *Two Black Hearts*
Oil
92 x 92 cm
NFS

Jason Walker

Invited by Simon Davis RP

- 157 *Garry*
Oil on board
50 x 35 cm (56 x 40 cm framed)
NFS

Sally Ward

- 158 *How I See You*
Oil on canvas
40 x 30 cm (53 x 42 cm framed)
£6,000

- 159 *Self Portrait: Oil Study*
Oil on canvas board
25 x 20 cm (32 x 27 cm framed)
NFS

Joshua Waterhouse RP

- 160 *Dame Clare Gerada*
Oil on wood panel
80 x 85 cm (100 x 105 cm framed)
NFS

Ada Weng

- 161 *A Friend*
Graphite
25 x 20 cm (27 x 22 cm framed)
NFS

Emma Wesley RP

- 162 *Honeysuckle Rose: Portrait of Catherine Pickles*
Acrylic on board
62 x 41 cm (77 x 56 cm framed)
NFS

- 163 *Professor Irene Tracey CBE, FRS, FMedSci, MAE, FRCA, commissioned by the Warden and Fellows of Merton College, Oxford*
Acrylic on board
130 x 80 cm (144 x 95 cm framed)
NFS

Jeremy White

- 164 *Self Portrait with Bucket Hat*
Charcoal and graphite on toned paper
38 x 28 cm (49 x 39 cm framed)
£700

Toby Wiggins RP

- 165 *Head of a Girl*
Pencil on paper
30 x 21 cm (40 x 31 cm framed)
£950

- 166 *Study of Ronald Blythe, Writer*
Pencil on paper
30 x 24 cm (50 x 43 cm framed)
£1,250

- 167 *The View in Winter; Ronald Blythe in his study at Bottengoms*
Oil on canvas
135 x 100 cm (140 x 105 cm framed)
£15,000

Antony Williams NEAC VPRP

- 168 *Jean*
Egg tempera
46 x 41 cm (56 x 49 cm framed)
£13,850

Sophie Williams

- 169 *Emmy*
Oil on board
25 x 25 cm (27 x 27 cm framed)
NFS

John Wonnacott RP (Honorary)

- 170 *Blue Foot 1*
Oil on board
120 x 90 cm (132 x 102 cm framed)
NFS

- 171 *Blue Foot 2*
Oil on board
90 x 120 cm (102 x 132 cm framed)
NFS

- 172 *Studies for Blue Foot 1*
Pencil on paper
40 x 80 cm (44 x 84 cm framed)
NFS

Neale Worley NEAC RP

- 173 *Anthony Eyton*
Oil on canvas
117 x 86 cm
£24,000

Mat

- 174 *Mat*
Oil on canvas
36 x 26 cm
£3,600

Robbie Wraith RP

- 175 *Katy*
Oil
50 x 38 cm (62 x 53 cm framed)
NFS

Portrait Drawing 1

- 176 *Portrait Drawing 1*
Charcoal
49 x 33 cm (56 x 42 cm framed)
£3,500

Portrait Drawing 2

- 177 *Portrait Drawing 2*
Charcoal
40 x 39 cm (61 x 53 cm framed)
NFS

Studio Portrait

- 178 *Studio Portrait*
Oil
37 x 25 cm (55 x 45 cm framed)
NFS

Craig Wylie

- 179 *Emily – Winter Light*
Oil on panel
56 x 38 cm
£8,500

Martin Yeoman NEAC RP

- 180 *Paul*
Pastel crayon
42 x 33 cm (63 x 49 cm framed)
NFS

Self Portrait

- 181 *Self Portrait*
Oil
61 x 46 cm (76 x 61 cm framed)
NFS

Jiaxuan Yi

- 182 *Observation No.45*
Pencil on paper
40 x 57 cm
£3,000

Florence Yuqing RI

- 183 *Being*
Watercolour on paper
30 x 21 cm (47 x 35 cm framed)
£1,510

Tatiana Zubova

- 184 *Profile of an Elderly Man*
Oil on canvas
50 x 40 cm (57 x 47 cm framed)
£1,490

Guest Artists from China

Yunsheng Liu

185 *Hidden Mother – The Call of the West*
Watercolour on paper
44.7 x 55 cm (54.7 x 67 cm framed)
NFS

Longsheng Wang

186 *Empty Room*
Oil on linen
80 x 80 cm (84 x 84 cm framed)
NFS

Lijian Xie

187 *Red Attire Reflecting Mountains and Rivers*
Oil on linen
116 x 81 cm (132 x 97 cm framed)
NFS

Kangwei Zhao

188 *Master Hongyi : The pioneering figure who introduced Western music and painting to China*
Oil pastels on paper
54 x 39 cm (84 x 69 cm framed)
NFS

Zhengyang Yuan

189 *The Clock Without Hands*
Oil on linen
100 x 100 cm (110 x 110 cm framed)
NFS

Ming Qin

190 *The Bride on the Pamir Plateau*
Oil on linen
102 x 76 cm (112 x 86 cm framed)
NFS

Xiaogang Li

191 *Tajik Middle School Students*
Tempera casein
80 x 60 cm (82 x 102 cm framed)
NFS

Qian Li

192 *The Girl in the Hat*
Oil on linen
40 x 30 cm (60.5 x 50.5 cm framed)
NFS

Junming Zhang

193 *Mother*
Oil on linen
90 x 81 cm
NFS

Zhaohui Zhou

194 *The Girl Sitting in front of the Mural*
Oil on linen
60 x 80 cm (79 x 99 cm framed)
NFS

Hualin Du

195 *My Father*
Oil on linen
60 x 56 cm (74 x 71 cm framed)
NFS

Jianqi Du

196 *Chinese Writer Chen Zhongshi*
Drawing on paper
100 x 72 cm (110 x 82 cm framed)
NFS

Jinghan Wu

197 *Gaze of the Plateau*
Soft pastel on paper
90 x 77 cm (100 x 87 cm framed)
NFS

Xiaoyu Li

198 *The Moment of a Gaze*
Oil on linen
50 x 50 cm (60 x 60 cm framed)
NFS

Jing An

199 *The Distance (also known as Departure for Malta)*
Oil on linen
100 x 62 cm (107 x 69 cm framed)
NFS

Congxian Dong

200 *The Wind Blows from Afar*
Oil on linen
60 x 90 cm (76 x 106 cm framed)
NFS

Wanning Liao

201 *Wildflowers by the Celtic Shore*
Oil on canvas
54 x 73 cm (57 x 76 cm framed)
NFS

Luzhou Chen

202 *Prayer in the Wind No.1*
Oil on linen
60 x 80 cm (100 x 80 cm framed)
NFS

Shuang Liu

203 *Looking up from the Barcelona Cathedral*
Oil on canvas
80 x 60 cm
NFS

Siyuan Pan

204 *Self-Portrait with Foam*
Oil on linen
40 x 30 cm (57.5 x 47 cm framed)
NFS

Difei Fan

205 *Grand Attire*
Watercolour on paper
30 x 40 cm (41 x 51 cm framed)
NFS

Guoqiang Liu

206 *Mother*
Tempera and oil on wooden board
47 x 21 cm (58 x 48 cm framed)
NFS

Kaiwen Yuan

207 *Portrait of a Woman*
Tempera on wooden board
20 x 20 cm (33 x 33 cm framed)
NFS

Cong Xie

208 *Dream and Fantasy*
Casein tempera on wooden board
96 x 40 cm (100 x 44 cm framed)
NFS

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RP Royal Society of
Portrait Painters

The RP Drawing Prize: Revealing the Human 2026

Once again the RP opens its doors to the raw delights of drawing. 2025 saw the hugely successful launch of this initiative and we are delighted to be taking the exhibition back to the Art Gallery at Hull University.

This open call welcomes submissions in all drawing styles and techniques.

The selectors will be looking for bold, original, and thought-provoking work. We are keen to explore and expand the idea of what a portrait can be and because drawing is such an immediate, direct response to the human, we're hoping to receive a wide variety of responses.

The RP Drawing Prize is open to creatives at all stages of their careers in the UK and internationally.

The Call for Entries will open on 30 March 2026.



The RP Critical Writing Prize

Open to all, the prize is for new writing on any aspect of contemporary portrait painting.

Applicants are invited to send a proposal or pitch for a new text.

Three of the applicants will be selected to realise the proposed text and awarded either the first prize of £500 or one of two 'special mention' prizes of £250.

All three texts will be published in the RP Annual Exhibition Catalogue.

Submissions will open on 15 April 2026.
For more information, visit therp.co.uk



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