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Information and Activities for Secondary Teachers of Art History

Introduction

This resource for Sixth Form Students and Teachers focuses on two portraits. Each portrait will be viewed and discussed in a number of different ways. Discussion questions about the works will be followed by factual information relating directly to the works.

Much of this resource will also be relevant as groundwork for AS syllabus Year 13. The resource has been test run by A Level Art History students from Camden School for Girls, Godalming Sixth Form College, Putney High School and St Paul’s Girls’ School. The resource pack has been approved by the Schools’ Group of the Association of Art Historians.

The material in this resource can be used in the classroom or in conjunction with a visit to the gallery. We have chosen two portraits separated by almost four hundred years, that of Henry VII by an unknown artist (NPG 4176) and Diana, Princess of Wales by Bryan Organ (NPG 5408). The first is in oil on panel, the second is in acrylic on canvas. Both are interesting portrait ‘documents’ with many similarities and differences, they contrast well in terms of the range of discussions that can be explored during teaching sessions.

The two sections of this teachers’ resource look at the portraits in depth.

- Each section consists of a reproduction of the portrait, and supporting relevant imagery
- Questions
- Contextual information organised specifically to conform to designated exam criteria:
  - 2.1 Subjects and genres: The Portrait
  - 2.2 Materials, processes and techniques
  - 2.3 Style
  - 2.4 Context
  - 2.6 Patronage
  - 2.7 Status of the artist
  - 2.8 Gender, ethnicity and nationality

The contextual information provides background material for teachers that can be fed into the students’ work as required. The guided discussion gives questions for the teacher to ask a group or class, it may be necessary to pose additional supplementary questions to achieve the full depth of meaning. Students should pose their own questions, too.

Much of the technical information about the painting of Henry VII, comes from the reports produced as part of the National Portrait Gallery project, ‘Making Art in Tudor Britain’, led by Sixteenth Century Curator Tarnya Cooper and Sophie Plender, Senior Research Conservator. Information about the entire project can be found here:

Questions

Use these questions to elicit careful looking before factual information is received.

• Does he look important?
• Does he look wealthy?
• Does he look powerful?
• Do you recognise what he has around his neck?
• Could you name and describe the fabric and clothing he wears?
• What does he hold?
• Might this be a clue to his identity?
• This is a close up of the text running along the ledge, have you any idea what it says or why it is there?
• Do you think that the blue background is significant?
• Does it recall other paintings?
• How old does he look?
• What type of person is this? How do you know?
• Do you think that character is portrayed in facial features?
• Which features suggest particular traits?
• Do you recognise this man?
• Looking at the portrait are there any clues to telling the period in which it was painted?
• Does the format of the hands resting on the bottom ‘ledge’ suggest any other painting you know?
• How would you describe the format of this portrait?
• Does the shape of the painting remind you of anything or anywhere?
2.1 Subjects and genres: The Portrait

A portrait is an image of a person created in any media that is a record of what they look like and who they are. Visual portraits exist in all media from paint and photography through to pencil and stone; all kinds of portraits exist in the National Portrait Gallery Collection. A portrait is the result of a deliberate encounter between an artist and a sitter. Not all portraits are painted nor are they always of famous people, however all of the portraits at the National Portrait Gallery depict people who have contributed to British society in some way over the years.

This portrait is the most important surviving image of Henry VII, and has been considered a prime document in the iconography of Tudor royalty, the features of Henry VII in the Whitehall mural by Han Holbein the Younger (NPG 4027) relate strongly to this work (see p.7).

The inscription records that the portrait was painted on 29 October 1505 by order of Herman Rinck. Henry is shown three-quarter face, bust-length with his hands on a ledge in the foreground. Henry was the son of Edmund Tudor, Earl of Richmond, and head of the house of Lancaster. Henry VII defeated and killed the Yorkist King Richard III at the Battle of Bosworth Field in 1485, establishing the Tudor dynasty. A notably clever king, he amassed enormous wealth for the Crown and established relative peace in England.
2.1 Subjects and genres: The Portrait

This is the earliest dated painting in the National Portrait Gallery’s Collection. Portraits were employed as part of marriage negotiations, especially between royal families. This function continued throughout the sixteenth century. Often the Royal bride and groom met for the first time at the wedding ceremony and the exchange of portraits beforehand was an essential part of the process. There is a well-known story of Henry VIII comparing the portrait from life by Hans Holbein (1497/8-1543) of his potential bride Anne of Cleves with the real thing when he met her. ‘A Flanders mare’, was his outburst, indicating that Royal portraits were sometimes rather too flattering.

This portrait commemorates Henry’s actual facial features, and yet is a political propaganda portrait in that its use is as a bargaining tool within a potential marriage contract. That is – a merging of states and land, rather than personal affection and love. The red and pink rose he holds symbolises the Tudor dynasty and is also a symbol of a prospective lover. One could argue that the portrait constituted part of Margaret of Savoy’s personal historical archive, in the sense that she kept the work in her private collection despite the fact that the marriage to Henry VII did not take place.
A previous director of the National Portrait Gallery (1994-2002), Charles Saumarez Smith, discussed this painting in the Summer 2002 edition of *Quarterly* magazine:

‘I must have visited the Gallery for the first time in 1968, early in the directorship of Roy Strong, who was putting both the National Portrait Gallery and Tudor portraits on the map. I still hold in my mind Henry’s quizzical expression, the eyes looking out at one suspiciously, his hands propped up on the inscription the right one hold in the red rose of Lancaster…a tight-lipped, rather cautious and calculating Welshman from Pembrokeshire, without any of the regal swagger of his son… Rinck apparently brought with him two portraits of Margaret to show Henry what she looked like. One was on panel and the other on canvas. Henry reciprocated by sitting for his portrait. Presumably by the best artist available. It is a dynastic image, supposed to give a sense of the importance of the sitter to his future bride. But the marriage never took place. I have always assumed that Margaret took one look at the portrait and rejected the idea. She is certainly said to have told her father “that, although an obedient daughter. She would never agree to such an unreasonable marriage”. Thus do portraits influence history… So there Henry VII hangs, his left eye higher than his right, his right eye slanting downwards, with a long and slightly hooked nose. It is a small-scale and quite reticent image, but at the same time powerful as an evocation of character, infinitely more moving than the many much more humdrum portraits of the period that were done for public dissemination. I like to think of it as a rather grand form of studio photograph surviving from an early Tudor marriage bureau.’
2.1 Subjects and genres: The Portrait

The Society of Antiquarians has three portraits in their collection that are useful to compare with this one. Two of Henry VII:
- [www.sal.org.uk/museum/paintings/235450.jpg/photoalbum_photo_view?b_start=18](www.sal.org.uk/museum/paintings/235450.jpg/photoalbum_photo_view?b_start=18) and one of Philip the Good, Duke of Burgundy, which is a copy of the portrait painting by Roger Van Der Weyden (after 1450) in the Musée des Beaux-Arts de Dijon [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Philip_the_good.jpg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Philip_the_good.jpg)

At the V&A, sculptural portraits of Henry VII can also be studied:
- [http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O8858/portrait-bust-king-henry-vii/](http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O8858/portrait-bust-king-henry-vii/)

In Westminster Abbey, tomb effigies of Henry VII and his wife Elizabeth of York:
2.2 Materials, processes and techniques

(i) Painted in oil onto panel (wood):


The entire work is one single piece of vertical grain Baltic oak wood, the image area carved out at the same time as the frame part. The frame part was gilded over a red bole. (Bole was used as a base for gilding – i.e. gold leaf laid onto bole). Bole is a fine clay mixed with size used in the gilding process. All materials date from the same period. The inscription cites the circumstances of this commission in the year 1505. Although the inscription is slightly damaged, the date of this picture is not in question. Dendrochronology (the ability to date a piece of wood by studying the rings of tree growth) has indicated that the last tree ring on the panel is 1480 with a possible felling date of 1488. This indicates a seventeen-year period before the wood was put to use. Old nails evident from an X-ray indicate that the image was once adjoined to another structure or framing device, perhaps to support a cover.

(ii) Drawing and paint layer structure:

Order of application:
• White chalk ground.
• Underdrawing. The position of the knuckles of the proper left hand was raised at the painting stage. Changes to the areas of the cuffs, and the sleeve outlines, were indicated by infra-red radiography and X-ray.
• Very thin white lead priming layer.
• Dark underlayer for the ‘gold’ costume, followed by the yellow paint containing good quality yellow ochre.
• Reserve area left for the order of the Golden Fleece and chain. Showing order of painting with lead-tin yellow highlights applied last (see Micro 06 and 07 on p.11-12 for microscopic enlargements).
• Flesh-coloured paint. See relatively undamaged paint on right-hand, clearly delineated fingers (see Micro 13).
• Background, painted with azurite and white lead mixture.
• Hat.
• Hair on left-hand side showing particularly fine painting (see Micro 17).
• Pattern on gold costume: red lake drawing, opaque lighter red highlights, red lake glazes, lead tin yellow highlights (see Micro 19).
• Dark red glaze on under-robe, chain and Golden Fleece. Note on order of application in the dark red tunic: brown layer, red glaze, black strip down the centre of the tunic applied over red lake.
• Fur - brown and white and maybe fine hair details.
• The (Tudor) rose is pink with a pale yellow centre and darker outlines around the petals (see Micro 05).

(iii) Pigments:

White lead, carbon black, vermilion, azurite - very large azurite particles were noted throughout the paint surface, smalt (ground blue glass) possibly, crimson lake, lead-tin yellow, copper green glaze, brown, yellow and red earth pigments.
2.2 Materials, processes and techniques

(iv) Painting method:

The picture is thickly painted in fine brushstrokes especially fine in the hair, and much of the picture is made up of careful layers of opaque pigment layered in places with glazes. The handling of the work indicates several inconsistencies in the painting style that cannot be accounted for by the condition of the work. In particular, the chain and pendant of the Golden Fleece, passages in the hair and parts of the costume are painted with subtlety and considerable skill, while the eyes and face lack the same level of definition and finesse of description, although, this is largely due to the abraded and restored condition of the face. This may indicate the presence of more than one hand at work.

The artist makes considerable use of blue pigment (azurite) across the picture, including the background, in the shadows of the facial features and chin. When examined under a microscope the particles of azurite are large and good quality, and although this pigment was not as expensive as ultramarine, it was still a costly pigment at the time.

The top paint layer was applied in a smooth manner, particularly in the flesh. There are very fine brushstrokes in the hair and fur in particular (see Micro 17). The thickest paint is in the drapery, the white fur and the background. The quality of painting in the eyes is not as high as might be expected (see Micro 01). By comparison, the handling of jewellery is much finer (see Micro 07). In the area immediately to the right of the chain on the proper right shoulder, the inner edge of the white fur remains unpainted: fine brushstrokes have been applied, but not with white paint as in the rest of the fur. The edge of the fur collar appears to have a line along the edge, incised into the ground.

The blue background takes up about a third of the whole painting. The sumptuous outer brocade garment has a background of ochre with pale yellow (golden) and orange decorations.
Portraits: GCE AS Level Art History Resource

2.2 Materials, processes and techniques

2.2 Materials, processes and techniques

These microscopic enlargements make specific details of the painting visible, see link for additional images and supplementary information. www.npg.org.uk/research/programmes/making-art-in-tudor-britain/case-studies/matb-case-study-4.php
2.3 Style

The painting style indicates that the picture is by a Flemish artist. The head and shoulders pose with hands posed on a ledge can be found in numerous Flemish Renaissance paintings and others. The arc of the frame and the top of the painting is a sympathetic curve echoing his shoulders and Richard’s hat, while the Order of the Golden Fleece reflects it. The sitter is perfectly balanced within the composition. The blue background suggests the outdoors but the hands on the ledge and overlapping planes counter this impression. The space ‘inside’ the painting is shallow and there are no hints or suggestions of any environment that might underpin his character, such as chairs and drapery.
2.3 Style

The painting is meticulous and the rendering of the hands reinforces the idea of the narrowness of the space in which the sitter poses and the fact that he is ‘high born’ and obviously not somebody who labours with his hands. Traditionally the blue-coloured background would have been reserved as the background to a Madonna and Child image, and the arc of the frame reinforces this reading. Transferring it to a painting of a king might enhance his iconic status. His rich red and gold robes are emphasised by the contrast with the blue pigment. In this instance the tone of blue is graduated from dark to light.

A comparison can be made with Giovanni Bellini’s (c.1430-1516) Doge Leonardo Loredan of 1501 in the National Gallery, where the background is a uniform blue. The red and gold are warm which gives the figure more form. These colours also signify status and this is underpinned by the Order of the Golden Fleece. The dark
2.3 Style

hat and fur collar draw attention to the pale face. The main decorative elements are the Order of the Golden Fleece and his highly patterned fur-lined outer garment. There is a single light source coming from the left. Distinct shadows can be seen under his chin and on his cheek, subtle shadows can be seen on the white fur lining where we can also see the shadow of the roses.

The underdrawing is the starting point of the portrait. There are changes to the composition in the adjustment of the fingers and the less easily decipherable light coloured areas of paint below both of the existing sleeves (evident in the X-ray) would seem to indicate that this painting was an original composition rather than a direct copy. The painting has suffered over time and parts of the picture have been damaged and restored, particularly around the eyes.

The underdrawing is evident here. Infra-red reflectography (IRR) shows the way the face was originally built up from a drawn pattern with some freehand additions. It is very likely the original drawing derives from a sitting from life.

A technical report describes the work in the following way:

‘Extensive underdrawing has been identified with infrared reflectography. Parts of the underdrawing, including the hair and the fingers, appear spontaneous and freely drawn in a way that indicates uncertainty and a search for the development of the composition. However, the lines around the chin and eyes show stronger, more definite marks, which appear traced, and then strengthened during the final stages of the drawing process. To what extent these findings indicate a sitting from the life is difficult to assess.’
Portrait 1: King Henry VII (1457-1509)

2.3 Style

The sitter’s left shoulder is turned slightly towards us and he appears solidly in the space. There is good modulation created by the tonal values on his facial features. One can see the tiny brush strokes with the naked eye. Both the pearls on the Order of the Golden Fleece and his eyes are given highlights by the addition of pure white pigment dots. One can see the grey streaks in his slightly wavy hair. Brown and white fur is denoted by a stippled edge.

The portrait attests a number of Flemish stylistic features, namely – intricate detailing in painted decoration and intense realism of the face and its three-dimensional rendering. These are both achieved through professional knowledge of painting techniques, the surface preparation, drying of individual layers and final glazing of the painting. In contrast Italian works can be identified by their more volumetric treatment of form and by warmer lighting.

A previous attribution to Master Michiel Sittow was rejected in the 1990s and is not supported by this analysis. However, a similar painting from 1514 by Michiel Sittow (c.1469-1525) but not of Henry VII - exists of Christian II of Denmark (1481-1559).

Numerous other later broadly similar ‘versions’ exist loosely based on this image in facial type and pose (Christchurch Oxford, Royal Collection, Society of Antiquaries and various private collections).
Portrait 1: King Henry VII (1457-1509)

2.4 Context

For information about Henry VII and how he came to power see this link:
www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/person.php?linkID=mp02144

Sculptural portrait of Henry VII:
www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/person.php?linkID=mp02144
http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O8858/portrait-bust-king-henry-vii/

Tomb effigies of Henry VII and his wife Elizabeth of York:
www.royalcollection.org.uk/egallery/object.asp?object=403440&row=34&detail=about

The Order of the Golden Fleece was established in 1430 by Philip the Good, Duke of Burgundy to celebrate his united kingdom of Flanders and Switzerland and in emulation of the British Order of the Garter. It comprised a Grand Duke and twenty three knights, (though the number was later increased to fifty one), the Order proposed defending the Roman Catholic religion and the chivalric code, settling any disputes between the knights. Dedicated to the Blessed Virgin and Saint Andrew, the Order’s symbol was a Golden Fleece. This may be connected to Jason in Greek mythology and his band of Argonauts who quested the Golden Fleece from the edge of the known world.

It is not known why Philip chose the Golden Fleece as the sign and symbol of his order. Perhaps it was associated with the great wealth he obtained from the wool trade in Flanders, other historians suggest the spread of humanism and classical literature. As a young man Philip had wanted to make a crusade to the East, and so the choice of Jason journey to attain the golden fleece may have been an appropriate souvenir of his youthful desire. In England today, one can still see pubs called ‘The Golden Fleece’, with signs showing the lamb hanging down in the same position of the original award (for example: www.goldenfleecehotel.com).

A Victorian Order of the Golden Fleece can be seen here:
www.royalcollection.org.uk/eGallery/object.asp?piclib=y&searchText=king+queen&makerName=&category=&collector=&title=&rccode=&theme=&startYear=&endYear=&pagesize=20&object=441170&row=312
This portrait of Henry VII played a part in a marriage negotiation. As the inscription records, it was painted on 20 October 1505 by order of Herman Rinck, agent of the Holy Roman Emperor Maximilian I. In other words, he was organising a potential suitor for his daughter, and therefore his political aggrandisement.

This woodcut image of Maximilian I shows him in profile as if he were on a Roman coin. He too wears the Order of the Golden Fleece around his neck. The similarly posed coin profile of Henry VII is an interesting comparison.

Henry hoped to marry Maximilian’s daughter Margaret of Austria (widowed Duchess of Savoy), as his second wife, after the death of Elizabeth of York in 1503. The portrait of Henry was sent to her in exchange for two portraits of herself.
Portrait 1: King Henry VII (1457-1509)

2.6 Patronage

(brought back by Rinck). Margaret kept the painting in her palace in Mechelen (Malines – in French) until her death in 1530. Henry is shown as a European monarch, wearing the Order of the Golden Fleece awarded to him by Maximilian. The rose he holds symbolises the Tudor dynasty and is also a symbol of a prospective lover. Their marriage did not take place and the painting is recorded as being in her collection in 1524 and 1530 with a red painted cover ‘une couverture painte de vermeil’ (Strong, p.150). The painting was bought by the National Portrait Gallery in March 1876 for £120 from E.G. Muller of London. Previously owned by Emile Barré of Paris who bought it from Julian of Le Mans. Nothing is known of its previous history after 1530.

Margaret of Austria in about 1493-5:

According to the National Gallery, the coat of arms at the top is hers: showing on one side the family arms (identical to her brother’s) and a blank area on the other side of the panel, signifying that she was at this time unmarried. The other coats of arms are of territories which belonged to the House of Austria.

From the arms and inscriptions it can be established that this diptych was painted in about 1493-5. This is confirmed by a diptych of the same sitters at Schloss Ambras, Innsbruck, Austria on the frame of which their ages are written as sixteen and fourteen, so dating it to about 1494. The commission of the Schloss Ambras picture and the present painting was perhaps connected with a proposed double marriage into the Spanish royal house.

When commissioned, these works would only have been viewed within the context of the court. Private, royal commissions were for political and dynastic purposes.
2.7 Status of the artist

Artists at the time were generally all men, women often worked in the studio performing subsidiary roles such as mixing paint. This is a royal commission, so whoever painted it must have had a recognisable status. Stylistically we can deduce that the artist was Flemish, the attention to detail, the careful modulation of paint on the face and the minute brushstrokes that delineate the fur testify to this. It is possible that the artist was either resident in England at the time or else that he was a ‘journeyman painter’, going where commissions would take him. This term can also mean ‘apprentice’ before becoming a master, but this work is of a masterly calibre and thus would refer to an artist who is travelling for work. Before 1990, it was thought that the portrait was by Master Michiel Sittow, an artist who is known to have worked for Margaret of Austria. The positioning of his proper left hand in the Portrait of a Man with a Pink, would seem to underpin this theory. See: [www.getty.edu/art/gettyguide/artMakerDetails?maker=442](http://www.getty.edu/art/gettyguide/artMakerDetails?maker=442)
2.8 Gender, ethnicity and nationality

- When you view the portrait of Henry VII, do you see a man or a king?
- How can you tell that he is a British king?
- What might holding a rose signify today?
- Does Henry VII or Christian II (see p.14,16) look regal and why?
- Henry VII is clean shaven and Christian II is not, which looks more manly?
- Compare the use of fur in these works, and notice that Phillip the Handsome has an ermine collar (see p.15 weblink). Ermine was a fur reserved specifically for royalty.

In the fourteenth century only very important people such as royalty and the papacy would have had their image recorded. Here Henry VII is contemplating making a political alliance with a foreigner and his portrait is to be sent to Margaret of Austria (Savoy). However, in the same year (1505) he was also investigating a possible alliance with the widowed Queen of Naples who was part of the Spanish royal family, who ruled Naples. There is documentary evidence that ambassadors were sent to Spain with a questionnaire relating to the details of her physical appearance, notably whether there ‘appere any here aboutes hir lippes or not’ (L.Campbell, Renaissance Portraits. Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1990. p.159).

In 1479 the Venetian Republic sent Gentile Bellini to Constantinople to enhance cultural relations. Although not a marriage portrait, the portrait attests the power of Sultan Mehtmet II and recognises his position in the political landscape of the time.

Bellini’s portrait of Sultan Mehtmet II:
www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/attributed-to-gentile-bellini-the-sultan-mehmet-ii
Jonathan Jones writes about this portrait by Gentile Bellini thought to have been painted in 1480 and its context:
www.guardian.co.uk/culture/2003/apr/26/art
Another example of Bellini’s work can be seen in the collection of the Isabella Stuart Gardner Museum, Boston, USA:
www.gardnermuseum.org/collection/browse?filter=artist:3157

Christina of Denmark was painted by Holbein in 1538. It is recorded that she sat for him for three hours in Brussels. It is another potential marriage portrait with a ‘failed’ outcome.

Making art in Tudor Britain
Questions

Use these questions to elicit careful looking before factual information is received.

- Do you recognise this person?
- Is it a formal portrait or a casual representation?
- Looking at the portrait are there any clues telling the time in which it was painted?
- How does the pose of her right hand clasping the back of the chair influence our interpretation of the sitter’s character?
- How does the shape of the doorway painted behind the sitter affect the overall composition?
- Where is her head positioned and what effect does this have?
- Why is this?
- What part of the sitter has been cropped and why?
- Could you name and describe the fabric and clothing that she wears?
- Why do you think her blouse is unbuttoned?
- Do you think that the painted wallpaper background and frieze along the top of the door is significant or merely useful in a decorative way?
- Are there any clues to her identity within the painting?
- Look closely at and describe her face.
- What type of person is this?
- Do you think that character is portrayed in facial features?
2.1 Subjects and genres: The Portrait

A portrait is an image of a person created in any media that is a record of what they look like and who they are. Visual portraits exist in all media from paint and photography through to pencil and stone; all kinds of portraits exist in the National Portrait Gallery Collection. A portrait is the result of a deliberate encounter between an artist and a sitter. Not all portraits are painted nor are they always of famous people, however all of the portraits at the National Portrait Gallery depict people who have contributed to British society in some way over the years.

This portrait of Diana, Princess of Wales is a commemorative painting as well as a propaganda piece and pre-marriage portrait. Curiously for an engagement picture, we do not see her left hand on which she would be wearing her famous sapphire engagement ring, on her right little finger is a signet ring. Instead of this, her arm crosses her torso in a protective gesture, isolating her further within the starkness of the formal, rather linear, gilded setting: is she a captive bird within...
2.1 Subjects and genres: The Portrait

a golden cage? Youngest daughter of the 8th Earl Spencer, Lady Diana Spencer married Prince Charles in 1981 in a ceremony broadcast to 750 million viewers worldwide. The couple separated in 1992, and divorced in 1996. Diana, Princess of Wales became a tireless worker on behalf of numerous charities, particularly those concerned with AIDS, children, the homeless and the elderly; she was also a leading campaigner against the use of landmines. She became an international fashion icon by wearing carefully chosen outfits by leading designers for important public engagements. Popularly known as ‘the people’s princess’, she was the mother of Princes William and Harry.

Set in the privacy of the Yellow Drawing Room in Buckingham Palace, this is none-the-less a portrait designed for public consumption as it was commissioned by the National Portrait Gallery in 1981, at the time of her engagement to the Prince of Wales. A photograph by Lord Snowden taken that year provides proof that this is a good likeness, albeit not a very lively one.
2.1 Subjects and genres: The Portrait

The publication of this portrait in Vogue magazine in February 1981 coincided with the official announcement of the engagement of Prince Charles and Lady Diana Spencer. Commissioned by Vogue as part of a ‘Portrait Portfolio’ of young aristocratic women by the photographer Lord Snowdon, it was used by several magazines and newspapers when the engagement was announced. She wears a chiffon blouse by Emanuel, the designers who went on to create her wedding dress. Interestingly in this photograph she also wears a high ruffled collar, perhaps something more revealing might be deemed inappropriate for a fiancée of the future king.

One has little sense of her inner self, however, one might argue that her isolated position within the canvas (and the photograph), serves to make us view her as a shy and guarded individual. This feeling is enhanced by the way that her right arm is posed across her chest in what might be interpreted as a relaxed but also a protective manner. She is being formally introduced and identified with the Palace and little of what we later came to know of her personality show through in these visual statements. Youthful naivety is the predominant ‘flavour’ of the portraits and this was to prove true in retrospect.
2.2 Materials, techniques and processes

The portrait is painted in Rowney CRYLA and Winsor & Newton Artist’s Acrylic on canvas, commercially primed plain fine weave linen, that was prepared using a Winsor & Newton ‘Herga’ ground. The preparatory working ideas and sketches show two possible poses, one in profile that relates strongly to the portrait of Prince Charles (see p.35) and the other chosen by the artist. The working ideas and drawings in pencil and watercolour are by Bryan Organ and currently their whereabouts are unknown. The portrait is signed and dated on the lower right hand corner, Bryan Organ June/1981. It is thinly painted in diluted colours for the background and the underpainting. There are visible brushmarks but no impasto. In the registered packet of information about the painting that is held in the archive of the National Portrait Gallery, there is a note about a conversation that took place on the 29 April 1981 between the director of the National Portrait Gallery, John Hayes and the artist Bryan Organ. This document reveals that Bryan Organ agreed to paint a companion piece to his painting of Prince Charles in time for Charles and Diana’s wedding scheduled for 29 July. Organ met Lady Diana three or four times, in order to talk with her, make drawings, take notes and take photographs. On 22 June, just under two months later, the work was ready to be photographed at his country studio near Market Harborough in Leicestershire. The portrait was formally unveiled at a press viewing at the National Portrait Gallery at 12.00 on 23 July and the public could view the work thereafter. For information about acrylic paint, see p.39 Weblinks.
2.2 Materials, techniques and processes

On the morning of Saturday 29 August 1981, the portrait was attacked with a knife by Paul Salmon, a twenty-year old Belfast student. The portrait was severely damaged and removed from public display.

The following comments are taken from a transcript of Radio 4's ‘PM’ programme on Monday 31 August 1981. National Portrait Gallery Archive transcript.

Interviewer: Bryan Organ, who still hasn’t seen the damage to the painting which was finished barely a month ago, hasn’t so far spoken in public about the attack on his work. Today though… Mr Organ told me how he first heard about the damage inflicted on his portrait of Lady Diana.

Bryan Organ: I was working in my studio Saturday morning, radio on as usual and the news at 11 o’clock. One hears this sort of extra-ordinary thing which has a time-lapse almost like a long-distance telephone call and I couldn’t believe it and I think that my immediate reaction was disturbed. Having had a few hours, I feel confused and I think more than anything, terribly sad, partly because a lot of people had worked very hard to make the thing possible at all and I just can’t pinpoint my feelings about it. You know, in a lot of cases I think when similar damage has been done to paintings, a lot of the artists have not been around for a long time. And so it all seems a relatively new problem to me. One feels hurt. I have to point out to you that the picture is not mine, it doesn’t belong to me, and so we have the strange irony that it’s a complex series of things, one feels responsible for it, but the picture belongs to the nation or the National Portrait Gallery.

Interviewer: Have the National Portrait Gallery given you any idea as to the difficulty they think there may be involved in the process of restoration?

Bryan Organ: This is not my problem. Technically it’s the restorer’s problem. The painting is acrylic on canvas, which is a relatively new medium. The initial problem is much like a jigsaw, to put the pieces together. Apparently the whole middle had been pulled either right out or right down. That has got to be put back, it’s done simply by what they call relining, which is to take another piece of canvas, the lining canvas is impregnated with wax and is then heated on to the damaged canvas so that it bonds together.

The fascinating aspect of this story is related to a rather critical article written about the painting by Brian Sewell in The Sunday Times, 18 October 1981. Sewell felt that the work should have been executed in oil paint rather than acrylic, because oil would have been more appropriate, lasted longer and would be easier to conserve. History proves otherwise. The restorer, John Bull, maintained that had it been painted in oil, it would not have been dry at the time of the attack (only about a month after the painting was completed) and he would not have been able to reline it. Being in acrylic, the work was fully dry and consequently the patching together was simpler. In addition to this, Organ still had some of his ready mixed colours in the studio and these could be used for the repair. The working drawings were displayed at the Gallery from 12 September 1981 while the painting was being restored.
2.3 Style

The style could be termed deadpan and lacks energy in the careful brushwork. The seamlessness of the paint surface lends a pensive unobtrusive air. It is heavily structured and in this respect recalls the composition in the painting of Arthur James Balfour, 1st Earl of Balfour (1848-1930) by John Singer Sargent, NPG 6620. Here Sargent relies on the architectural setting surrounding his subject to influence the atmosphere within which the sitter is seen and also use it to frame the sitter. The pillars lend grandeur, whereas in the Organ portrait, the chinoiserie of the wallpaper gives a more homely feeling set against the rigid linear structures of the doorway and wooden panelling. Both sitters are dressed mostly in black and this draws our attention to the heads, their features and the way that the white collars set off the features. Both sitters stare straight out at us and fix us with their gaze. The decorative motif on the moulding above the doorway of the Organ painting seems to suggest the crown to come, and also recalls the Renaissance flourish found at the top of Hans Holbein the Younger’s cartoon of Henry VIII (see p.7).

The colours range from a viridian green on the brocade cover of the stool and in the foliage of the wallpaper, to the taupe carpet and pale mauve in the wallpaper flowers. Gold occurs in the banding picked out on the door and panel mouldings and again on the edge of her waistcoat. Particular areas of stark black and white contrast with an overall colour of light honey yellow. The depth of field is relatively shallow partly due to the painting technique determined by the use of acrylics. This is perhaps easier to suggest with layers of oil glazes as in the Sargent painting of Balfour.

Preparatory drawings, 1981
© Bryan Organ
Portrait 2: Diana, Princess of Wales (1961-1997)

2.3 Style

What Organ does achieve by judicial cropping of the feet, is a great sense that she is in the room with us, literally sitting in our space, and this is emphasised by the thinner grey space between her and the edge of the frame above which is the artist’s signature. This thin line could perhaps be interpreted as the dividing line between her new royal status and the viewing ‘hoi polloi’. However this device makes it tricky for the viewer to imagine just how much space there is between the sitter, the wall and door behind her.

The structure of this whole portrait relies on the strict design of the doorway and panelling above the skirting board of the room in which she sits. The repetition of the rectangles and the manner in which the verticals and horizontals are picked out in gold make for an organised and secure setting for the princess to inhabit. In this way her form is reframed within the painting. The patterning is minimal as we can see from the wallpaper, the stool cover and the decoration above the door.

Diana, Princess of Wales (1961-1997)
by Bryan Organ (1935-)
acrylic on canvas, 1981
NPG 5408
2.3 Style

Information about the frame made for the painting and the discussions held between Bryan Organ and his framer Michael Carleton were published in Jacob Simon’s *The Art of the Picture Frame: Artists, Patrons and the Framing of Portraits in Britain*, 1997, p.187-8.

Michael Carleton’s bill, dated 31 July 1981, describes it as follows: ‘…in large hockey frame specially flattened and finished in English gold leaf lightly rubbed finish as discussed and agreed with the Artist…£431.25.’

In a telephone conversation with the curator Jacob Simon, Bryan Organ expressed his belief in showing the whole canvas as ‘a visual flat image when framing’ (18 April 1996). The whole atmosphere, tone and colouration of a picture can be changed dramatically by the type of frame selected. The use of a ‘well’ around the canvas can enhance the relationship between the picture and the frame. Organ’s feeling is that a fairly flat ‘hockey’ section (with a profile like a hockey stick), or even a flat frame such as the one on his portrait of the Duke of Edinburgh, suits a picture of this size.

The overarching forms within this work are the architectural geometry juxtaposed with the delicate floral wallpaper used as the backdrop to the figure. The dark material of the sitter’s outfit serves to emphasise her shape and form at the centre of the painting. Her head is literally at the centre of the work, and this uncompromising position reinforces the atmosphere of the work – she is young and inexperienced yet there is a strength and determination in her allure and regard.

Organ’s ‘flat’ style has a quality that is typical of some 1970s painting, evoking familiar images by a whole generation of artists including David Hockney, who were seduced by the excitement of using the brand new water soluble medium of acrylic paint. The cropping of the feet indicate the use of photography or are at least a reference to the manner in which photography can give an image immediacy, for example in the way that certain parts of pictures can be lost either by mistake or design. This is a recognised ploy to give the viewer a feeling that they are part of the action of the image, literally plunging them into the context of the painting.
2.4 Context

This is a commemorative painting as well as a propaganda piece and pre-marriage portrait. The Buckingham Palace setting puts her into her future context, as future Queen-to-be. Painted at the time of her engagement to the Prince of Wales, the portrait shows her in the Yellow Drawing Room of Buckingham Palace. In 1855, Queen Victoria had commissioned James Roberts to paint this room, and this documentary watercolour shows it as it was then; a repository for various items that needed housing from the Brighton Pavilion.

The Yellow Drawing Room (the location is marked ‘K’ on the map) was redecorated and hung in richly figured yellow silk for the State Visit of the Emperor Napoleon III and the Empress Eugénie in 1855. The imperial couple spent three days at Windsor before moving on with Queen Victoria for a further three days at Buckingham Palace. In the years after the First World War, Queen Mary rearranged the room and installed a fine early nineteenth-century Chinese wallpaper that she had discovered in store. Today the room is frequently used by Her Majesty the Queen and other members of the Royal Family for portrait sittings.

Other images of Diana, Princess of Wales from the National Portrait Gallery Collection can be found here:

Other links give a contextual background to life in the 1970s and 80s:

In contrast, just four years earlier on 27 May 1977, the punk band the Sex Pistols, released their single *God Save the Queen*. This was the year of the Queen’s Silver Jubilee and together with their previously staged record-deal signing in front of Buckingham Palace; it was designed to attract maximum publicity and to promote their anti-establishment attitude. The raw opening lyrics attested to the plight of the general public and brazenly presumed an anti-monarchist political stance by the band with their allusions to a ‘fascist regime’ and suggestions that there was no future for people in England. The shouted staccato refrain of *God save the Queen* reinforced the subversive, aggressive attitude and punk power of the song.

This music provoked both the BBC and the Independent Broadcasting Authority to ban the song, yet despite the lack of air time, it made number two in the charts. The cover sleeve, designed by Jamie Reid, used an image of the Queen with her features obscured by the names of the band and the title of the song. Their protest
**2.4 Context**

and irreverence was encapsulated in the graphics, as defacing an image of the Queen is an offence (Contempt of the Sovereign) in English law. This attitude exemplified by the record and the anarchic stance of the band, which by today’s standards seems relatively mild, was deeply shocking at the time, and provides an interesting cultural backdrop to the surprise impact that the royal wedding was to have in 1981.

The Lichfield portrait was taken on the balcony above the Grand Entrance of Buckingham Palace, against a plain sheet pinned to the wall. This intimate portrait of the newly married royal couple was reproduced in newspapers and magazines around the world. The princess wore an ivory silk taffeta dress with a 25-foot train designed by the House of Emanuel. Her veil was held in place by the Spencer family diamond tiara. The wedding of the Prince and Princess of Wales took place on 29 July 1981 at St Paul’s Cathedral. Patrick Lichfield, a cousin of The Queen, was the official photographer.
2.6 Patronage

‘When John Hayes succeeded Roy Strong as Director of the National Portrait Gallery in 1974, he explored the idea of commissioning portraits but came to the view that it would be expensive and also very risky since one could not know how good the results would be or whether the sitter would be pleased. The difficulties were compounded by the Trustees’ reluctance to include portraits of living sitters, even of prime ministers, within the permanent displays. An active commissioning programme only became possible in 1979 following the offer of funding from a private donor, who was willing to support the Gallery and even to take the resulting portraits into his own collection should they fail to please. The very first portrait, that of Prince Charles by Bryan Organ, was undertaken at the artist’s own risk, to be offered to the Trustees to accept or reject as they thought fit but with the understanding that in the event of rejection the whole matter would remain confidential.’

Jacob Simon, Chief Curator (Extract from Icons and Idols: Commissioning Contemporary Portraits, National Portrait Gallery, 2 March - 18 June, 2006)

In a telephone conversation with Bryan Organ on 21 October 2010, between the artist and the resource writer, he remarked that John Hayes had wanted to overcome the problem of not being allowed to hang portraits of living sitters on the gallery walls. He had therefore chosen Prince Charles, a royal sitter, as the best candidate for being represented. At that time the Gallery did not have a painting

**Prince Charles** (1948-)
by Bryan Organ (1935-)
acrylic on canvas, 1980
NPG 5365
Commissioned, 1980


2.6 Patronage

of the prince. This was a ‘well-planned’ exercise that had been discussed and agreed with the trustees. Hayes had dined at Merton College, Oxford and had seen a portrait that Organ had painted of the Master, consequently he had made contact with the artist, with a view to commissioning the painting of the prince. This completed portrait had only recently been unveiled (on 12 February 1981) before Prince Charles and Lady Diana Spencer became engaged and therefore it seemed practical and made sense to commission a pendant work. Lady Diana was very young, there was much media attention and as an artist Organ felt reticent about accepting the commission. Indeed, he said, within two years, she had completely transformed herself and looked utterly different.

One can read the Lady Diana portrait as a companion piece to that of Prince Charles. There are a number of similarities:

- The scale and the fact that the canvas is 1778mm high in both, the medium, the positioning of the figure in the center - each crossing the right leg over the left.
- Each face us, but Charles’s body is turned to the side.
- Both wear informal clothes, not the norm for royal portraiture, and this heralds a new era for the interpretation of the role of the future king, one that he has been busy developing since this work was painted, by way of his championing of architecture, organic farming and the Prince’s Trust.
- Both have a thin line almost at the base of the canvas, that could be interpreted as a vestige of the ledge that we see in Henry VII’s portrait, and it serves to crop the feet, suggesting a photographic immediacy to the portraits, giving depth to the figures and grounding them within the space.
- There is an organisational clarity of the strict verticals that surround the figures, and their environments. Prince Charles in a (supposedly) exterior setting, with the flag behind the fence suggesting his role as king in waiting. His army fatigues and riding boots signal his future role as nominal head of the army, and as a polo player. The relaxed crossing of his legs suggests that he is resting before taking up the reins of monarchy, responsibility and control. The predominant colours of blues, greens and greys encourage this reading of a prince ‘waiting in the wings’, as they conjure an atmosphere of mistiness and uncertainty regarding his coronation: mystery indeed for this was painted over thirty years ago.
- Bisecting both paintings brings us a point just above the head of each sitter: they are squarely in the picture, and also at the forefront of the news. Charles, as eldest son, had been, since his youth, regarded as one of the most eligible bachelors of his day with much media attention devoted to the question of who he would finally marry.
- The veridian green in his portrait is repeated in the damask cover to the chair on which Lady Diana sits, another subtle link between the works.
Bryan Organ (b.1935) has fourteen other portraits in the Collection of the National Portrait Gallery including Prince Charles (in 1980, NPG 5365) and the Duke of Edinburgh (in 1983, NPG5698) marking him out as a popular artist having been so frequently commissioned. In 1969 he had painted Princess Margaret, and this portrait hangs in Lincoln’s Inn, having first been unveiled at the National Portrait Gallery.

Organ, born in Leicester in 1935, was educated at Wyggeston School and Loughborough College of Art. From 1955-59 he attended the Royal Academy Schools and he returned to Loughborough College of Art to teach between 1959 and 1965. From 1966 onwards he committed himself to painting full-time and he has been included in exhibitions both in the UK and abroad. He has had solo exhibitions at the Redfern Gallery, when in 1980 his portraits of Harold Macmillan were on show, including one belonging to the National Portrait Gallery (NPG 5366) www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/portrait/mw07918

All portrait painting is to some extent formulaic, but to describe this painting in this manner (see ‘Style’), denies the success Organ has in rendering likeness, however, the impression that these portraits rely heavily on photography is strong. Organ would take his own photographs and notes to work from. During the 1960s and ’70s he was one of the most highly regarded portrait painters in the country. Roy Strong (Director of the National Portrait Gallery 1967-74) was a supporter of his work and was painted by him in 1971, he also painted such luminaries as Mary Quant (1969) and Elton John (1973). Artist Graham Sutherland was a friend and mentor. Organ tutored Prince Charles in watercolour painting and consequently became godfather to Prince Harry. Other works by Bryan Organ that are in the Collection can be found with this link: www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/person/mp07831/bryan-organ?role=art

This link will take you to the Redfern Gallery website where other works by Bryan Organ can be viewed.
Diana, although seated sideways, has her face looking full square towards us, positioned absolutely centrally within the canvas. This is possibly the first portrait depicting an (almost) royal female in trousers, the clothes she wears were decided on in discussion between her and the artist. Her hair is short, cut in a contemporary ‘bob’, the golden highlights chiming with the braid on her waistcoat and those on the mouldings on the doorway behind her. Her plain court shoes worn (as was fashionable at the time) with slacks, reinforce the feminine aspect of her attire by drawing attention to her elegant ankle. The ‘pie-crust’ frilled collar of the gamine-type blouse emphasises her youth and perhaps suggests her virginal status, a requirement for the crown. Symbolically unbuttoned, it indicates a relaxation of royal protocol, and might indicate her position prior to taking up the responsibilities for which she is intended – she will soon have to ‘button-up’. She is poised between girlhood and womanhood, a new type of princess to be, emancipated and yet not, in fact, this portrait is very telling in its instinctive and uncanny prefiguring of the momentous and later tragic events to come.

Diana was from the perfect background for marriage into the royal family, and it was thought at the time that her youthful, virginal status was an essential ingredient for the princely bedchamber – a rather old fashioned and somewhat sexist scenario – when viewed from today’s perspective. Her crossed legged pose could be seen to make a subtle allusion to her lack of sexual experience.
Weblinks

Making Art in Tudor Britain

Case study 4 - new research on the Gallery's earliest portrait: Henry VII

Cranach Magnified allows you to investigate the refined painting technique of Lucas Cranach the Elder (1472–1553) and his workshop by comparing zoomable macroscopic details from different paintings side by side.
www.getty.edu/museum/conservation/cranach_comparison/index.html

A glossary of art terms and techniques development
www.tate.org.uk/conservation/science/

For information about acrylic paint

British artist's suppliers
Information and Activities for Secondary Teachers of Art History

Further reading

Front cover image credits:


King Henry VII (1457-1509) by Unknown artist, Oil on panel, 1505, NPG 416

Further reading:


Cooper, John, A Guide to the National Portrait Gallery, 2009, p.57


Parris, Matthew, Heroes and Villains: Scarfe at the National Portrait Gallery, 2003 (accompanying the exhibition at the National Portrait Gallery from 30 September 2003 - 4 April 2004), p.62


Saywell, David; Simon, Jacob, Complete Illustrated Catalogue, 2004, p.177


