

Face to Face

WINTER 2005

National
Portrait
Gallery

Stuart Pearson Wright
on painting J.K. Rowling

My Favourite Portrait
by Penelope Wilton

Celebrating 50 years of
the Royal Court Theatre

George Scharf and the
National Portrait Gallery

Special discounted
Gift Membership offer



From the Director

COVER

J.K. Rowling

by Stuart Pearson Wright,
2005

Commissioned by the Trustees
of the National Portrait Gallery
with the support of BP

The new commissioned portrait of J.K. Rowling has attracted considerable attention since it was unveiled in September. BP winner Stuart Pearson Wright has brilliantly combined a traditional figure study of the author, delicately painted in oils, with a 'toy theatre' space, making reference to the constrained circumstances when she wrote the early Harry Potter novels, as well as to her three young children.

Creating new portraits is one of the special aspects of the National Portrait Gallery and we are proud of what has been achieved over the past twenty-five years. We are therefore making a special link between our recently launched Associates Scheme and support for the Commissions Programme.

We are in the final stages of preparation for our 150th Anniversary celebrations, sponsored by Herbert Smith. I look forward to telling you about the programme of exhibitions, displays and activities in the next issue of *Face to Face*.

Sandy Nairne
Sandy Nairne
DIRECTOR

MY FAVOURITE PORTRAIT

Penelope Wilton



Penelope Wilton OBE has worked with some of Britain's most accomplished directors on stage and screen. Her recent film credits include *Iris*, *Calendar Girls* and *Shaun of the Dead* and she has also appeared in numerous television dramas. In 1997 she received the Irish Theatre Best Actress Award for *A Kind of Alaska* at the Donmar Warehouse. She has made numerous appearances on the London stage, most recently in the critically acclaimed production of *The House of Bernarda Alba* at the National Theatre.

Photo © Xxxx Xxxxx

MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT was thirty-eight when this portrait by John Opie was painted in 1797. He had known Mary for some years, and admired and sympathised with her, which I think shows in the painting. I suppose her face could be described as handsome rather than pretty or beautiful. The direct gaze, straight nose and wonderfully generous mouth, curling up at the corners, make me long for her to turn and smile at me. It is a face that radiates intelligence and intellect. There is no nonsense about her dress either, plain white muslin, no jewellery, a fresh complexion and hair naturally framing her face.

I have seen other portraits that have tried to prettify Mary, and bring her nearer to the conventional standards of beauty of the time, but although we'll never know for certain, I feel John Opie's portrait has captured her. This courageous woman, who wrote *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, travelled, witnessed and wrote of the terrors of the French Revolution, was the mother of one illegitimate daughter, married William Godwin, and finally died after giving birth to their child.

William had this portrait hanging above his desk. In the Gallery they are placed side by side, and Mary is opposite the portrait of the daughter she never knew, another Mary, who went on to marry Percy Bysshe Shelley. There is something touching about seeing them all together at last.



ABOVE
Mary Wollstonecraft
by John Opie, c.1797
Bequeathed by
Jane, Lady Shelley, 1899

The following four photographs have been shortlisted for this year's prize.

RIGHT FROM LEFT

Georgina, Royal College of Art, London
by Philipp Ebeling

Three Generations (from the series *Prayer*)
by Ric Bower

Both © the artist



SCHWEPPES PHOTOGRAPHIC PORTRAIT PRIZE 2005

9 November 2005 –
12 February 2006



LEFT

Amy and Jack
by Magnus Reed

Girl with Baby – Poland
by Shara Henderson

Both © the artist

CHOOSING THE WINNERS of a photography award is a complex and sometimes bewildering task. And all competitions are different. This summer, the five members of the *Schweppes* jury gathered together to view around 6,000 photographic portraits, sent in from around the world. The range of the photographs was enormous, from family portraits to photojournalism made in Asia and Africa to highly styled studio shots. The process of looking at so many photographs inevitably inspired the jury to ask of itself, 'What exactly defines a portrait?' and, more importantly perhaps, 'What makes a successful one?'

Though these questions can never be fully or satisfactorily answered, good photographs begin to speak for themselves, and the jury was able to identify, very early in the process, many of those that were eventually included in the final selection. Good portraits have a way of staying with the viewer, refusing to be pushed to one side, of opening up areas of experience, faces, gestures, societies which remain in the mind's eye long after the judging is over.

The 2005 *Schweppes* jury was not looking for a particular kind of photograph, or a special kind of subject. Great portraiture makes 'ordinary' people extraordinary. As the selection progressed, the jury began to look for that energy which brings a photographic portrait alive – makes you feel that you might recognise, or want to know, the people portrayed.

Though the variety of photographs was remarkable, a correlation soon began to emerge which was regardless of subject matter. A woman and her child in an African landscape stand alongside a photograph of a Polish girl holding a baby: two portraits very different in style and location, but both full of energy and honesty. Alastair Campbell and Peter Mandelson, severe against the background of Westminster, contrast happily with a portrait of a salesman in a carpet shop. Both photographs have humour, irony and a delicious sense of place.

Making the final choice for the exhibition seemed an almost impossible task, so many of the photographs had become old friends, and we were sorry to see them go. The merit of each photograph in the final selection was considered intensely, and the final sixty were chosen with great care and much discussion. Though the selectors came from very different photographic or art backgrounds, their choices were surprisingly similar.

Choosing the winners was an even more demanding exercise, but again, the jury looked for those special qualities of energy, confidence and curiosity that make for great photographs. Each of the winning portraits was memorable, and they were very different from each other. All created an open dialogue between the photograph and the viewer, asking questions, suggesting possibilities, telling stories.

Val Williams

CURATOR, WRITER AND DIRECTOR OF THE RESEARCH
CENTRE OF PHOTOGRAPHY AND THE ARCHIVE,
UNIVERSITY OF THE ARTS, LONDON

JUDGING THIS YEAR'S PRIZE

This is the third year of the *Schweppes* Photographic Portrait Prize, which has already firmly established itself as the leading showcase for new talent in portrait photography. Val Williams, a member of the judging panel, helped select sixty portraits for the exhibition. The winner, announced on 7 November 2005, receives £12,000.

An illustrated book including photographs from this year's exhibition and interviews by Richard McClure is available. Special Gallery price £9.99, paperback (Published price £12.99).

RECORDING THE MAKERS OF HISTORY

THE NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY COMMISSIONING PROGRAMME



ABOVE
Dame Judi Dench
by Alessandro Raho, 2004
Commissioned by the Trustees of
the National Portrait Gallery and
made possible by JPMorgan through
the Fund for New Commissions

RIGHT
Thomas Adès
by Philip Hale, 2002
Commissioned by the Trustees of
the National Portrait Gallery with
the support of the Jerwood Charity



Dame Cicely Saunders
by Catherine Goodman, 2005
Commissioned by the Trustees of
the National Portrait Gallery with the
support of BP

NOW IN ITS TWENTY-SIXTH YEAR, the commissioning programme at the National Portrait Gallery is part of the lifeblood of the institution and contributes greatly to our uniqueness among major museums and galleries. At the same time it is one of the most demanding aspects of what we do – whom we choose to single out as eminent in our own time goes to the core of how history will perceive us through the people we have admired. Even if the ‘who’ is agreed upon, the way they have been represented and sometimes even the materials chosen by the artist to make a particular portrait have all been much debated and commented on over the years. To some degree this reflects the Gallery’s commitment to working with both traditional portrait artists as well as those who are not normally associated with the genre, whose work challenges our perceptions of what a portrait can be.

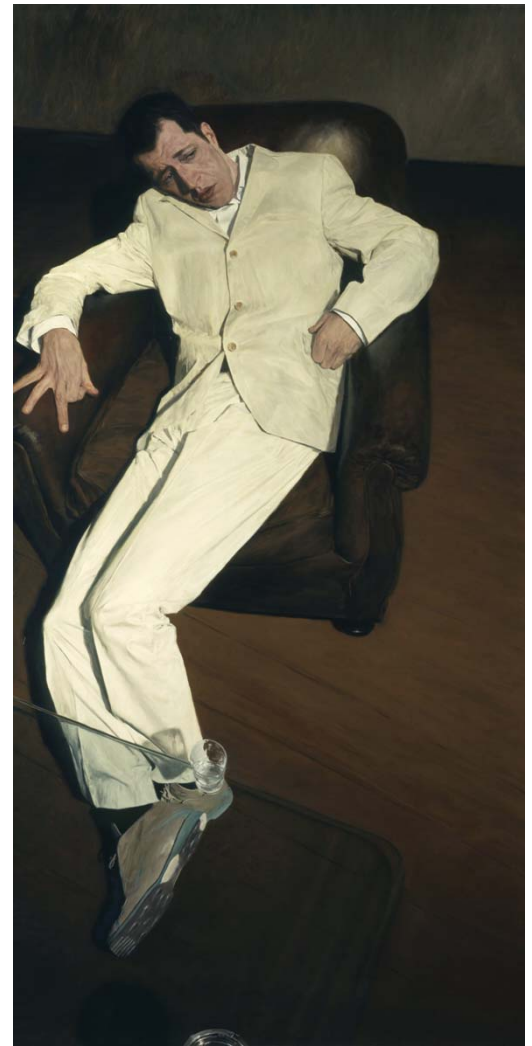
The six or seven subjects selected by the Trustees each year represent some of the outstanding contributions made by British men and women across a broad range of achievement. Some will be well known, others less so, but in all cases there will be reasons to celebrate the sitter. The Trustees consider a selection of eminent subjects on an annual basis. The short-list is made up of their own suggestions and those put forward by the Director and is around fields of endeavour including government and politics, art and culture, scientific research, business and the media. In making the final selection the need to develop a balance in the Collection, so that we have as many quiet achievers as public figures is taken in to account.

The Gallery does not commission posthumously, so a subject must be living and ideally at the height of their achievement. This means that portraits of emerging young achievers is rare. An exception to this is made possible through our partnership with the Jerwood Charity, which supports a portrait series celebrating the most exciting young figures in the arts. The first Jerwood commission was of composer and pianist Thomas Adès painted by Phil Hale; the second was of the three directors connected with the Royal Court Theatre, Katie Mitchell, Stephen Daldry and Ian Rickson, painted by Justin Mortimer.

Both Mortimer and Hale are artists who came to public attention through the *BP Portrait Award*. This is restricted to painters of forty or under and part of the first prize includes, at the judge’s discretion, the chance to undertake a commission which can help to further a successful career. Mortimer won the prize in 1991 aged twenty-one, and was commissioned to paint the writer Harold Pinter as part of his prize. Since then he has gone on to receive other important commissions including Sir Steve Redgrave and HM The Queen. Although remaining concerned with the figure his interests stretch beyond the portrait and in 2004 he won the prestigious *EASTaward*.

Careful consideration goes into finding an appropriate artist for each sitter. This is a delicate process which is initiated by the Director and the Contemporary Curator in consultation with the sitter.

The process usually begins with a walk through the Contemporary Collection to familiarise the sitter with the kind of portraits that have been commissioned in the past. Sometimes the sitters come forward with



artists in mind and other times there are no preconceived notions. Although sitters are involved in the selection process, the final decision remains with the Gallery.

Often a close bond can develop between artist and subject as a result of this collaborative process. Jan Morris and Arturo di Stefano have a mutual passion for Italy, and the pair got on very well, Morris later explaining, ‘I hadn’t realised before what a potent relationship exists during a sitting between the artist and subject.’ She described the process as ‘one of the most interesting experiences of my life’. Wright and J.K. Rowling shared a fixation with ginger hair and a similar sense of humour. When asked at the recent launch if he thought the author liked his portrait he replied, ‘She is still talking to me so that must be a good sign.’ The relationship that developed when Catherine Goodman painted Dame Cicely Saunders was particularly intense as Dame Cicely was living with terminal cancer during their sittings.

Often a subject is so busy that it is necessary for an artist to find a way to work with relatively few sittings. The Trustees only commission portraits from life, but painters often use photography as a tool with which to work up a pose and expression, with or without the assistance of drawings and studies, which require at least some length of time remaining relatively still. So, for example, the portrait of Dame Judi Dench by Alessandro Raho was made on the basis of a selection of over 200 photographs taken in a single sitting of an

hour. This method of working is in keeping with Raho's ongoing engagement with the photographic image in his painting and also suited Dench's demanding schedule.

Over the coming few months recent commissions and acquisitions will be moved from their current location adjacent to the Wolfson Gallery, to accommodate the SELF PORTRAIT Renaissance to Contemporary exhibition, but will remain an

important part of the contemporary portraits display on the ground floor. Next year as part of the 150th Anniversary celebrations we will feature an extensive exhibition *Icons and Idols: Commissioning Contemporary Portraits* (2 March–18 June 2006) showcasing the range of the commissioning programme over the past twenty-five years.

Magda Keaney

CONTEMPORARY ASSISTANT

Artist Stuart Pearson Wright kept a detailed diary charting his sittings with J.K. Rowling. Here we include extracts from his journal written during 2004 and 2005.

2nd February 2004

I am in Edinburgh, on my way to meet J.K. Rowling, author of the Harry Potter books, to discuss painting her portrait for the National Portrait Gallery.

What would I do with J.K. Rowling? How could I depict her? This would be a challenge. I have been reading *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*. I got to know what it's all about though I already know the first three books.

8th February 2004

We got on well. I will spend two days sketching and photographing her, go away, formulate an idea and then go back. This time I do not have a clear idea about what I will do – this is rather rare. However, I am excited by several ideas – one, the context of the café. This is where Jo writes. She enjoys being around people without having to talk to them. She is stimulated by the buzz of human activity. The other aspect of her that interests me is the idea of her being a mother. She has managed to write the books in spite of this, which, I think, is quite an achievement. I am interested in this idea, fulfilling one's creative impulses despite one's maternal obligations. I like the idea of the mother-figure as heroine, breadwinner and artist, all rolled into one. I enjoy the cliché of the struggle from obscurity and poverty to artistic success and recognition. And I respect the single-mindedness required to conceive an idea for a series of seven books and actually to see them all through.

25th February 2004

I did a half-hour charcoal sketch in a café whilst she wrote, and took lots of photographs. I have decided to do it on paper as a collage. I like the idea of having a flat-screen TV with a film of a sky shot in real time: clouds passing slowly by, light shifting. This solution arose as a result of wondering how to increase the tonal palette and through embracing the principles of collage. Happily, though, this idea lends itself to the duality of the real world and the fictional world, pertinent to a novelist. Since the world of Harry Potter is a fictional one it follows that the painting can justifiably present itself in two different languages: film and paint.

20th March 2004

The sittings are going well. Today was good. I enjoy Jo's company. There is something wonderful about the very particular intimacy of a set of portrait

sittings. It is difficult not to grow extremely fond of whomever one is drawing or painting. Scrutiny demands empathy and empathy leads to affection. The longer I stare at a person the greater the sense of empathy and the stronger the affection.

29th October 2004

I have made a full-size plan of the thing with photocopies and a bit of charcoal. It's quite big (around 150 x 120cm). I think I have to go with the three-dimensional idea.

Of course, the problems only exist with the free-floating figure and chair – the rest of the structure, the 'background', can all be made from MDF and coated in gesso before being painted. I still have no realistic idea about how to make the sky through the window. I must speak to someone who knows something about digital media.

9th March 2005

I finished the box about fifteen minutes ago – that is, the actual timber structure. The thing now needs to be decorated. I have built the sash window that will fit on to the wall. That was fun – a little timber, glass and cardboard window – painted in household gloss.

14th April 2005

Today I took the finished portrait (after much agony) into the NPG. Sandy Nairne and Sarah Howgate were both very enthusiastic. Sandy suggested that the Gallery hold a dinner to unveil the painting. The only thing left to do was a photographic print on acetate of a cloud painting mounted on a lightbox and illuminated. This afternoon I took in the lightbox I had made and finally fixed the thing together.

30th July 2005, Edinburgh

We are here to attend J.K. Rowling's fortieth birthday party tonight. On the bus from the airport I couldn't help reflecting upon the last time I made the same journey, just prior to beginning the portrait of Jo – and remembering my reflections and speculations then about the portrait and what I would make of it. That was nearly two years ago now. I was at the National Portrait Gallery yesterday in consultation with lighting engineers who plan to light the picture with a system of fibre-optics. Exciting stuff indeed.

Stuart Pearson Wright

Stuart Pearson Wright (b. 1975) is a London-based painter who studied at the Slade School of Art, University of London. He was the winner of the BP Travel Award in 1998 and the BP Portrait Award in 2001 for his group portrait of the six presidents of the British Academy.

PAINTING J.K. ROWLING



This portrait of J.K. Rowling has been made possible by the BP Portrait Award sponsorship in which the first prize winner each year is commissioned as part of their prize to paint a portrait which is then presented to the National Portrait Gallery Trustees for selection. It is currently on display in Room 37.

ABOVE

J.K. Rowling

by Stuart Pearson Wright, 2005

Commissioned by the Trustees of the National Portrait Gallery with the support of BP

BELOW

Second sketch

by Stuart Pearson Wright, 2005

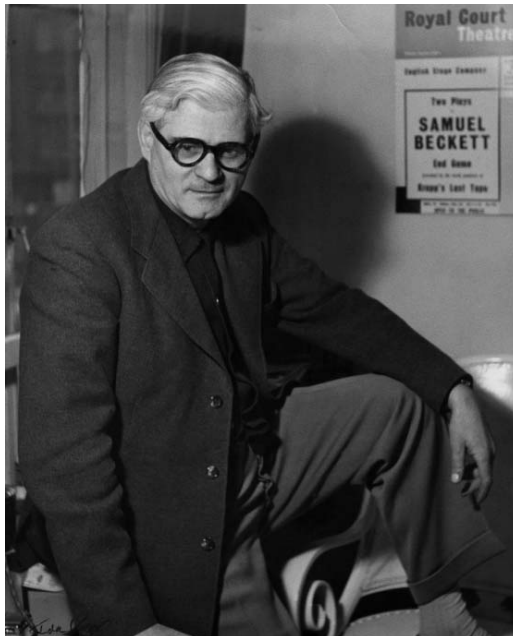


ROYAL COURT THEATRE:

A CELEBRATION OF FIFTY YEARS

25 January–2 July 2006

Balcony Gallery



RIGHT FROM TOP

George Devine

by Ida Kar, 1958

Penelope Wilton

by John Vere Brown, 1967

© John Vere Brown

Alan Bates

by Trevor Leighton, 1989

© Trevor Leighton / National

Portrait Gallery, London

BELOW

Juliet Stevenson

by James Hunkin, 1991

© James F. Hunkin



APRIL 2006 WILL MARK the 50th anniversary of the English Stage Company at the Royal Court Theatre, Britain's first national theatre company. On 2 April 1956 the curtain went up on the company's first production, Angus Wilson's *The Mulberry Bush*. According to the first artistic director George Devine the goal was to produce serious, contemporary works to stimulate new writing, and the Royal Court soon became known as a writers' theatre. Its productions were to include new plays by young writers and British premières of authors such as Brecht, Beckett, Ionesco, Sartre and Wedekind, as well as revivals. In Devine's words, the Royal Court was to present 'new works as if they were classics, and classics as if they were new works'.

The play that is most closely associated with the early days of the RCT and that revitalised – if not revolutionised – theatre in Britain, John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger*, premiered in Sloane Square on 8 May 1956. With its main character, Jimmy Porter, the play introduced the 'Angry Young Man', a term coined by the Royal Court's press officer. Porter represented a generation of young people who had never before been depicted on the British stage. The play's construction, characters and language revealed how outdated much of drama was at the time and forced the British theatrical establishment into a new age. In 1968 the Royal Court opened the Theatre Upstairs, a smaller studio space that allowed for a wider range of experimentation. 1968 marked another important milestone in British theatre history in which the Royal Court played a vital role, namely the abolition of stage censorship with the Theatres Act of 26 September.

Over the decades, a number of young playwrights such as Edward Bond, Arnold Wesker, Christopher Hampton, Harold Pinter, David Hare, Ann Jellicoe and Caryl Churchill, and more recently Martin Crimp, Hanif Kureishi, Sarah Kane, Martin McDonagh, Ayub Khan Din and Mark Ravenhill, have found their voices on the stage of the Royal Court under successive artistic directors. Likewise, many now well-known directors and actors such as Tony Richardson, Stephen Frears,

Lindsay Anderson, Michael Caine, Joan Plowright, Richard Wilson, Glenda Jackson, Albert Finney and Tim Curry have furthered their early careers through an association with the Royal Court. Everyone who has been involved with the 'Court' has contributed to the creative ethos that has driven the company over the years, constantly questioning itself as well as established thinking, and giving those who put the work on stage the freedom to take risks.

With *Royal Court Theatre: A Celebration of Fifty Years* the National Portrait Gallery pays tribute to the Royal Court's rich history by bringing together some of the people who have been associated with the theatre in the past. Since 1956 the Royal Court has put on more than 800 plays. Given this vast repertoire, it goes without saying that this exhibition – exclusively drawn from the Gallery's own collection – can show only a small selection of the many who have contributed to the pivotal role the Royal Court Theatre has played in British theatre from 1956 to the present day.

Axel Rügär

THE NATIONAL GALLERY

GUEST CURATOR OF THE ROYAL COURT

THEATRE DISPLAY



To sketch the history of Sir George Scharf's career in service to the Trustees would be to sketch the complete history of the National Portrait Gallery itself, so entirely was he identified with every page in that history, every purchase or acquisition made by the Trustees and every step, which led from the modest housing of a few portraits in 29 Great George Street, to the present palatial edifice of St Martin's Place....

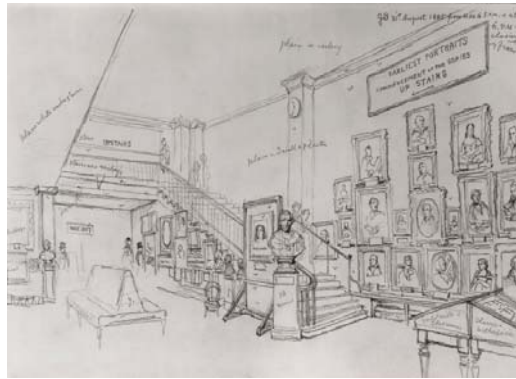
38th Annual Report of the Trustees of the National Portrait Gallery, 1895

THE APPOINTMENT, in 1857, of George Scharf (1820–1895) as Secretary of the newly founded National Portrait Gallery was an inspired choice. The son of a Bavarian artist, Scharf pursued a peripatetic career as a draughtsman of antiquities, drawing master to young ladies, lecturer on art and designer for the theatre before joining the Gallery. With a 'brisk and genial personality' ('Celebrities at Home', *The World*, 1892) and an obsessive habit of sketching and recording in minute detail everything that caught his eye, his interests ranged broadly across the classical world, theatre, art, costume and history.

His career at the Gallery spanned almost forty years and during this time he devoted himself to building a national collection of portraits and laying the foundations of the institution we know today. As the man who, perhaps more than anyone else, was responsible for the success of the Gallery in its early years and for realising the ambitions of its founding fathers, it is fitting that Scharf should be celebrated with a display in our 150th Anniversary year. Through a selection of early photographs and his own meticulous pencil drawings, this display looks at the long career and reveals something of the personality of this most extraordinary man.

Charged with administering the Collection and identifying portraits for acquisition, Scharf visited country houses all over Britain to catalogue and sketch paintings, identify portraits and search out pictures for the Gallery to acquire. Over the course of his career he made many hundreds of tracings and filled over 230 pocket sketchbooks with literally thousands of drawings of the portraits he came across. His efforts were so successful that by the time he retired the Gallery had grown from just a handful to over 2,000 portraits. Scharf's practice of recording and cross-referencing each picture he encountered remains the guiding principle behind the core work of the Heinz Archive and Library to this day.

His other great achievement was securing a permanent home for the National Portrait Gallery. When it was founded in 1856 the Gallery was assigned temporary apartments in an eighteenth-century town house in Westminster. However, from the very beginning conditions were cramped and clearly unsatisfactory for the display of pictures. Scharf campaigned tirelessly for suitable accommodation and the Collection was moved first to South Kensington, where the fire risks eventually precipitated a second and less popular move to Bethnal Green. In 1889 a wealthy philanthropist, W.H. Alexander,



SIR GEORGE SCHARF AND THE NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY

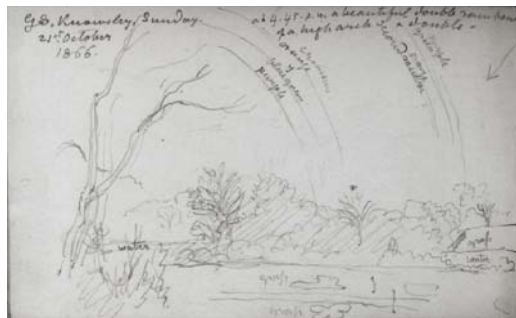
17 December 2005–
18 June 2006
Room 16



LEFT FROM TOP
A sketch showing the interior of the National Portrait Gallery at South Kensington shortly before its removal to Bethnal Green, dated 31 August 1885

A tracing of a portrait of Mary Queen of Scots, of a type after Clouet, made during a visit to Peterborough on 26 July 1661

A view of the garden at Knowsley showing the position of a double rainbow as seen at 4.45 pm on 21 October 1866
All by Sir George Scharf



generously offered a large sum of money for a new building and the government agreed to provide a suitable site. A plot of land behind the National Gallery was identified and work began almost immediately. Tragically, Scharf did not live to see the new building completed. He remained in post beyond official retirement age to supervise the move to St Martin's Place, but in early 1895 he was forced by ill-health to retire and died soon afterwards.

If you would like to find out more about the man who did so much to ensure the success of the newly founded National Portrait Gallery, a display based on his life and work can be seen in Room 16 from 17 December 2005 to 18 June 2006.

Robin Francis
HEAD OF ARCHIVE AND LIBRARY

