

# FACE TO FACE

Gallery News

Issue no. 8

Spring 2004

National  
Portrait  
Gallery



Writing in this issue: Ali Smith, Fiona Shaw and Tom Phillips

## FROM THE DIRECTOR

The spring is dominated by photographic portraiture, with the Cecil Beaton exhibition in the Wolfson Gallery and, alongside it from March, a counterpoint in the form of photographic postcards from the artist Tom Phillips' remarkable collection. Featuring nearly one thousand anonymous portraits from the first half of the twentieth century, *We Are The People* is a fascinating slice through British life. As the images are now detached from the information as to whom the subject was, or the occasion on which the photograph was taken, they have a particular poignancy for us now, looking back to the early days of a world becoming modern.

*Interrupted Lives*, the series of special Thursday evening talks examining the work of selected writers who died young, continues with Erica Wagner talking about Sylvia Plath on 25 March, Charles Nicoll on Kit Marlowe on 29 April and Ali Smith on Angela Carter on 27 May. Speculation about what would have happened if these writers had lived longer gives this series a new twist in examining biographies and portraits.

The newly re-hung Early Twentieth Century Galleries, Rooms 30 and 31, have brought out a wealth of interesting sitters, and also include some new acquisitions (for instance Dame Wendy Hiller, Edwin Smith and Aleister Crowley) and some fascinating loans (for instance Lord Reith by Sir Oswald Birley and the Reverend Dick Sheppard by Sir Gerald Kelly).

As always, I hope that the changing collection displays in St Martin's Place provide continuing interest or intrigue for our members, patrons and supporters.

  
Sandy Nairne  
Director

## MY FAVOURITE PORTRAIT



*Queen Elizabeth I* by  
Marcus Gheeraerts  
the Younger, c.1592

On the Ground Floor Germaine Greer looks sideways at Doris Lessing, waiting a reply to a difficult question; neither takes prisoners! Jonathan Miller and Harold Pinter have taken themselves off to a corner to worry the problems of the cerebral, these the courtiers of our age held for a moment in living time. But up on the Second Floor one enters a different world and is shunted into the past by the astonishing presence of Elizabeth the First.

She pierces the lone visitor with her eye. Standing on the world she leans back into her boarded corset, her unmarried hand holding gloves, her giant dress a white firework display arctic, virginal but dazzling as if to exhaust you, to stop you looking at her head. Behind her the clouds give way to the worthy sky of 'la Reine Soleil'. And there it is, her face, weary, sharp, sunken eyed, not as compassionate as the inscription claims, not as beautiful as those at the unveiling must have said, serious, temporal, lonely. All around her on the walls her courtiers celebrate their success in her. Philip Sidney, Walter Raleigh, Leicester and the fateful Essex about whom she admitted she was 'too fond too fond' before allowing him to be executed.



She is a real presence. For a moment you are with her and her complex world. She stares out jaded with state, life, or with the memory of her beloved but troublesome Essex. The heart takes no prisoners.

### Fiona Shaw

Fiona Shaw, actress and writer,  
by Victoria Russell, winner of the  
BP Portrait Award 2000.

## BEING PRESENT: NINE PAINTERS



*Michael Frayn* by  
Jennifer McRae

*Being Present* at the Jerwood Space brings together exciting new works by nine of Britain's most acclaimed and talented young figurative artists, presenting ninety works including portraits, nudes, still lives and cityscapes.

**Stuart Pearson Wright** (b.1975) won the BP Portrait Award 2001 and is famous for his controversial portrait of the Duke of Edinburgh.

**Jennifer McRae** (b.1959) has recently completed a portrait of playwright and novelist Michael Frayn for the Gallery.

**James Lloyd** (b.1971) won the BP Portrait Award 1997. The Gallery commissioned James to paint a portrait of Sir Paul Smith.

**Brendan Kelly** (b.1970) is a Scottish artist living and working in London. He has been commended several times in the BP Portrait Award, taking second prize in 2001.

**Ishbel Myerscough** (b.1968) won the BP Portrait Award 1995. She has painted Dame Helen Mirren for the Gallery.

**Phil Hale** (b.1963) is a Canadian artist based in London and twice winner of the BP Portrait Award. The Gallery, with support from The Jerwood Foundation, recently commissioned Phil to paint composer Thomas Adés.

**Carl Randall** (b.1975) has exhibited at both the Royal Academy and the National Portrait Gallery. He is currently painting in Japan following a scholarship from the Daiwa Anglo-Japanese Foundation.

**Nicholas Byrne** (b.1979) is studying at the Royal College of Art and is the youngest of the nine artists. His paintings are influenced by film sequences and surveillance footage.

**Joe Schneider** (b.1973) is a self-taught painter and winner of the Carroll Award for Young Portrait Painters in 2001.

**18 May – 6 July 2004**

**Jerwood Space, 171 Union Street, London SE1 0LN**

## INTERRUPTED LIVES: ANGELA CARTER



Angela Carter by Fay Godwin, 1970s ©

other, redefined this originality and in her four seminal collections of short stories her anarchic fusion of low and high art and life took to bits the machineries of romanticism, tale-telling, biography, the notion of story itself, and laid them bare, then recreated them. She wrote verse, poetry, stage and radio drama, screenplays; she was a gifted painter; she wrote children's fiction; she edited, translated, rewrote and analysed the fairy tale tradition. She was an exceptional thinker, critic, reviewer and essayist, a transformer of both cultural history and cultural potential. 'The world was the same,' as she writes in one story, 'yet absolutely altered.' That's what it's like to read Carter - to recognise what's familiar as strange and loaded and exotic, and to know what's possible. She wrote with such an eye to the

If you've ever wondered what written energy might look like in human form, or what phrases like 'height of her powers' or 'in full flow' might actually look like, find Mike Laye's portrait of Angela Carter in her late forties, sitting happy and wry at her study desk with the London skyline behind her and at her feet the books, music, pictures, piles of manuscript pages and, best of all, the two huge wastepaper baskets full of screwed up bits of paper, overflowing, all over the floor. Carter died in 1992, at only 51. It wasn't a young-and-tragic writer's death, like Plath or Brooke or Keats. It was the loss of an artist at the height of it, an artist who, from the publication of her strange and dark, savagely comic first novel, *Shadow Dance*, when she was 26, to the life-loving, art-loving, generous and energetic blast of what turned out to be her last, *Wise Children* in 1991, had always worked at the height of it, and whose power had, each time she wrote, and within the mere twenty five years in which she wrote, revolutionised the literary and intellectual landscape and made unthinkable heights possible.

Playful, fearless, fierce and brilliant, Carter's work made contemporary critics dizzy; what she did was unsettlingly original, uncategorisable in its time. Each of her nine novels, one after the

histories of words and books that she reignited the common English language with itself. The happy dandification in her work never strayed far from the comedy of bombast; as one of the earliest of her raucous old women characters declared in a very early short story, 'THE BOWELS ARE GREAT LEVELLERS.'

In person, by all accounts, she was funny, cuttingly polite, acidly quick, a great teacher and a renowned and astonishing swearer of swears, the worse the curse the better - Carter was the only person in the whole series (and one of the far too few women writers featured anyway) of Channel 4's recent *The Story of the Novel* whose quiet, polite-sounding voice had to be bleeped out so nobody would hear her f\*\*\*. Add to this a feminism which was a combination of good sense, good necessary irreverence, profound intellectual rigour and transformatory energy. This is what she wrote in a letter to her great friend, the critic Lorna Sage, about why she had decided to stand on the editorial committee of a brand new publishing firm called Virago: 'I suppose I am moved towards it by the desire that no daughter of mine should ever be in a position to be able to write BY GRAND CENTRAL STATION I SAT DOWN AND WEPT, exquisite prose though it might contain. (BY GRAND CENTRAL STATION I TORE OFF HIS BALLS would be more like it, I should hope.)'

You get the picture. Carter, the creator of new modes for old when it came to the story, the novel, the politics, the given shape of things, is sitting at her desk in the middle of something, with the thrown-away old versions at her feet and the typewriter next to her. She's politely waiting for the photographer to do his job. Then she can get on with hers.

When Angela Carter died, energy was interrupted at its height. We could do with her now, with her dismissal of cultural and political and literary piety and pap, her ability to see through the tricks of narrative, the dictates of form, to remind us how transformation works in the world.

We have her books, her own good, argumentative, interruptive force.

Ali Smith



Angela Carter by Mike Laye, 1989 ©

## BEATON, BRANDT AND TESTINO

### PHOTOGRAPHIC EXHIBITIONS AND DISPLAYS IN EARLY 2004



*Lily Elsie by Foulsham & Banfield,  
published by Rotary Photographic Co., c 1910*

This year marks the centenary of the birth of three highly significant British-based photographers who all excelled in portraiture and are well represented in the Gallery's collection. Cecil Beaton and Bill Brandt will be shown during 2004 whilst an Angus McBean retrospective will follow in 2006.

Beaton is arguably the most accomplished and diverse British photographer of the twentieth century, producing work over a fifty-year period that included images of nearly all the most significant faces of the times. Cecil Walter Hardy Beaton, born in Hampstead, holds a special place in the history of twentieth-century photography and that of the National Portrait Gallery. Shortly after Roy Strong's appointment as Director in 1967 Beaton presented a collection of 240 of his portraits to the Gallery, and the following year was the first photographer ever to be exhibited at the Gallery with the ground-breaking retrospective exhibition *Beaton: Portraits 1928-1968*. The exhibition, with an innovative design by Beaton's friend the ballet historian and designer Richard Buckle, included 572 exhibits. The show subsequently travelled to America, establishing a strong tradition of this Gallery as a key instigator of important photographic exhibitions.

In his 1951 autobiography Beaton recalled that his lifelong interest in photography and the possibilities of stage design was born at the age of three when he first set eyes on a photographic postcard of Lily Elsie as the Merry Widow in Lehár's 1907 musical. Lily Elsie and her contemporaries of the musical comedy world such as Gabrielle Ray, Gertie Millar, Gina Palerme and Gaby Deslys

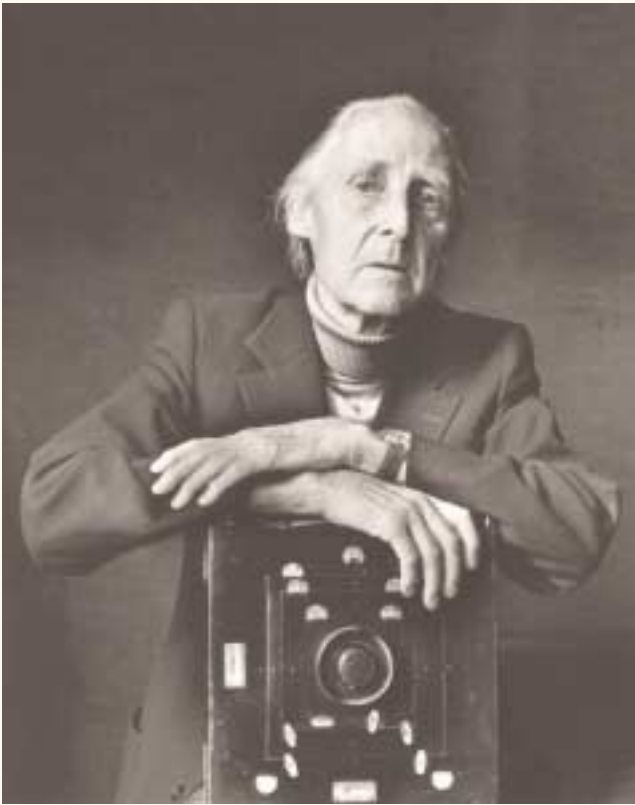
are to be seen again in a Bookshop Gallery display entitled *Gaiety Girls: Footlight Favourites from the 1900s to the 1920s*. Selected from over 3,000 negatives generously donated by theatre historian John Culme. The subjects were photographed by the Bassano studio and have, with DCMS funding, been catalogued, printed and digitised. The end of the project neatly coincides with *Cecil Beaton: Portraits*, adding a further dimension to the exhibition. One of Beaton's own postcards of Lily Elsie (see illustration) will be included together with pages from his scrapbook, clearly showing the inspiration he received from this portrait for the design of Audrey Hepburn's ballgown costume for his Oscar-winning work on *My Fair Lady*. The headwear of Edwardian actresses, as featured in the work of Bassano and other contemporary photographers, provided further inspiration



*Audrey Hepburn (detail) by Cecil Beaton, 1963*

for many designs for the film. Also tying in is Beaton's drawing of Gaby Deslys, which can be seen in the Early Twentieth Century Galleries in a concurrent showcase display of graphic studies entitled *Beaton Drawings*. The same Gallery also displays the superb painting by Christian 'Bebe' Berard of 1937 which, Beaton felt, was his definitive portrait.

A stark and stimulating contrast to these highly theatrical displays is offered by *Bill Brandt: Portraits*. The Brandt display, selected from over 112 works in the collection, is to act as an introduction



*Bill Brandt by Roger George Clark, 1978*

to the full-scale, wholly comprehensive retrospective being mounted by the Victoria and Albert Museum, *Bill Brandt: A Centenary Retrospective* (24 March – 25 July).

Hermann Wilhelm Brandt, born into an Anglo-German family in Hamburg, was a schoolboy in Germany during the First World War and learnt photography in a Viennese studio in the 1920s. He spent a brief time with Man Ray in Paris before settling in London in the 1930s. Taking hard-edged documentary photographs during the Depression for *Picture Post* and *Weekly Illustrated* helped him establish a reputation that was made apparent with his first books *The English at Home* (1936) and *A Night in London* (1938). The former contains his classic pictures of a day in the life of a domestic servant, published in *Picture Post* and recently included in the *Below Stairs* exhibition. However it was his commissions from *Lilliput* that first established him as a portraitist of note specialising in writers and artists. The first portfolio entitled *Young Poets of Democracy* was accompanied by text by Stephen Spender and included studies of Dylan Thomas (photographed in The Salisbury public house), Cecil Day-Lewis, William Empson and Robert Graves.

The portrait of Stephen Spender (see illustration) is of special interest in that it shows in the background another portrait in the Gallery's collection, Christopher Isherwood in Berlin photographed by Spender's brother Humphrey Spender. Other series focused on composers, film directors and novelists. The Gallery first acquired prints from Brandt after his first retrospective held at the Hayward Gallery in 1970; these were supplemented in 1982 when the Gallery organised a major showing of his portraits. Brandt photographed Beaton and Beaton photographed Brandt and they hold a number of subjects in common which form the basis of interesting contrasts.

On the way to the Beaton exhibition, visitors will be able to see fifteen prints by Mario Testino, recently acquired for the collection. These, with the exception of the large-sized Diana, Princess of Wales, are smaller prints of most of the British subjects included in the Gallery's record breaking show *Mario Testino: Portraits* staged in 2002 and currently touring the world. Mario Testino continues to be Britain's most highly rated international portrait and fashion photographer. As one of his most significant inspirations and influences he cites the career and flair of Cecil Beaton. It is thus an appropriate moment to show these two major figures at the same time and thereby engage the past with the present.



*Sir Stephen Spender (detail) by Bill Brandt, 1941 © Bill Brandt Archive*

**Terence Pepper**  
Curator of Photography

#### Exhibition and Displays Dates

*Cecil Beaton: Portraits* Until 31 May

*Gaiety Girls: Footlight Favourites from the 1900s to the 1920s* 5 April – 22 August

*Beaton Drawings* Until 8 June

*Bill Brandt: Portraits* 20 March – 30 August

*Mario Testino: New Acquisitions* Until 13 June

# WE ARE THE PEOPLE: POSTCARDS FROM THE COLLECTION OF TOM PHILLIPS

2 March – 20 June | Porter Gallery



The liberation of the postcard took place in 1902 when the Post Office finally allowed written messages on the back of cards leaving the whole front free for pictorial matter. The greatest concentration of postcards in this exhibition are from the first third of the twentieth century, described in the postcard world as 'The Golden Age'.

The postcards are all real photographs and not commercially produced. The majority of mature people who appear in them are the first in their families' history to have been portrayed in any way at all. Elderly relatives were naturally brought into the visual round up and there is a whole category under the heading 'Generations' featuring family groups in which three or even four generations are present. The oldest person, certainly the earliest born that I have in my collection, is stated on a card produced in 1904 to be 109 years old and therefore saw the end of the



eighteenth century. The most recently born must have lived to see the twenty first.

In the Golden Age of the picture postcard, the portrait photographer was present in every town. Arriving at a studio there was a choice of scenic backdrops which afforded comforting fictions in the form of surroundings you might not normally aspire to. These ranged from the platonic pastoral to poetic evocations of baronial splendour as you leaned on a hollow plaster balustrade or sat among marble pillars. Alternatively you could sit in a deckchair or on a papier maché rock in front of a painted sea which would end suddenly where the canvas met the floor. Various more specialised backgrounds served the needs of the military (a stern array of tents) or loving couples (complicated arrangements of stiles or rose-strewn casement windows).

In larger cities more exotic studios flourished which would indulge wilder fantasies in more theatrical situations. Here gun toting cowboy could meet Indian squaw or a vamp in top hat and tails could lounge on a piano while Pierrot played. Cross dressing was





popular especially in patriotic tableaux involving Britannia and lady soldiers and sailors. For what we would now call a niche clientèle there were bedroom scenes of a mildly risqué sort usually involving two women in pyjamas (stage cigarettes were supplied to add sauciness and sophistication).

With the advent of the car and aeroplane, studios (especially at the seaside where air displays were all the rage from 1909) developed a whole new vocabulary of three dimensional wish fulfilment via sketchy simulations of new travel. One cannot help wondering to what degree the pilots, drivers or passengers of these fictive vehicles found them convincing. None of them would have been in a plane and few even would have travelled in a car: thus they tend to take their imaginary trips rather earnestly.

The story of women and their victories of emancipation is by far the era's most stirring tale and a comprehensive parade of shifting styles of dress as captured by the photo postcard is one way of telling it. Their political and social liberation is also reflected in fields like education, transport, sport and employment. The most sudden and significant of these moments of transition is the use in World War I of women to take over the jobs left vacant by serving men. For women war workers such as land army girls new practicalities of dress added to the prefigurement of inevitable equality.

The real photo postcard not only documents women's progress towards equality but it is egalitarian in its own right. Many social barriers fall before it once the lady of the house, the children, the housekeeper, the maid, the under gardener and even the dog are

all individually content to be pictured in the same style and format. Such an act of levelling set up social reverberations and gave the common, casual and trivial seeming postcard a significant role in general social change. Activities were made equal in the same way giving the village cricket team a permanence until then only reserved for famous elevens.

Out of the 50,000 cards I have collected (themselves whittled down from an inspection of more than two million) some hundred and twenty clear categories have emerged as a framework of pigeon holes. As the process became clarified the goal of the project became more ambitiously unlimited. My initial plan had been to create, so to speak, an alternative National Portrait Gallery, an antidote to the inevitable concentration in the National Portrait Gallery of certain types and classes of person. It had never happened before that almost everyone, as if in a visual census, was accounted for in portrait terms. Needless to say I did not mean to oust the worthy from their frames but at least give, via this transforming period of demotic portraiture, pictorial enfranchisement to those who constituted the nation, the hitherto unsung.

I have abandoned dating cards by costume since where photographs bear actual dates the clothes do not always tally with those in books on the history of fashion. Thus with spare or non-existent captions I pass on the advantage of a low level of information and a high degree of the existential authenticity that led me to immerse myself in these images in the first place. The range of characters and contexts dealt with is nonetheless as complete as the photographic card generously allows, though it should be pointed out that the postcard market has, like any other, its own forces that swell the prices of the sought against the disregarded. Trams, traction engines, railway stations, and gypsies have their driven buyers and you would not expect to meet here a passenger waving from the rail of the departing Titanic. But I am happy enough at postcard markets and gatherings with what in terms of collecting are the remains of the day and, in terms of the scope of this work, the remains of that half century within which a whole nation seemed to stand forward as a visual collective as if to declare with their blended individualities, We Are The People.

### Tom Phillips

This is an abridged version of the Introduction to the exhibition catalogue.

Special Gallery price £20 (RRP £25)



All images are from the Tom Phillips Collection

# NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY GIFT SHOP

## CECIL BEATON: PORTRAITS

To accompany this spectacular exhibition, we have selected a lavish range of jewellery and accessories to capture the glamour and style of Beaton's work. From beautiful custom-made pearl necklaces to bold, chunky bangles and rings, elegant compact mirrors and evocative Philip Treacy hats and bags.

### Pearl necklaces: Designed exclusively for the National Portrait Gallery by Simon Harrison

A striking collection of pearl necklaces and earrings. The necklaces feature a unique clasp of two profiles locking together, which was inspired by works in the collection.

120cm Necklace with 20mm white pearl beads	£110.00	(pictured)
40cm White shell pearl necklace	£95.00	(pictured)
40cm Black shell pearl necklace	£95.00	(pictured)
40cm Multi-colour pearl necklace	£95.00	(pictured)
White pearl drop earrings clip	£15.00	
White pearl drop earrings pierced	£12.50	(pictured)

### Selection of bangles: By Angie Goodermham

Designed to complement Cecil Beaton's portrait of Nancy Cunard.

Range from £12.00 to £35.00 (pictured)

### 1930s style chunky rings:

Tortoiseshell-effect ring	£10.00	(pictured)
Carved ivory-effect ring	£10.50	(pictured)

### Art Deco inspired drop earrings: By Marcasite and More

Black drop earring	£18.00	(pictured)
White drop earring	£18.00	(pictured)

### Range of luxurious flocked velvet Marilyn Monroe hats, bags and purses: By Philip Treacy

Black velvet Marilyn hat with side brim	£150.00	(pictured)
Black velvet Marilyn clutch bag	£140.00	(pictured)



### Polished or brushed silver compacts:

Square, oval and round	£14.50
(Oval polished pictured)	

### Art Deco inspired frames:

Single (black or silver)	£8.00	(pictured)
Double (black or silver)	£15.00	



### Exhibition Catalogue:

A fully illustrated catalogue accompanies the exhibition.

Hardback	£35.00
Mini paperback	£9.99

National Portrait Gallery, St Martin's Place, London, WC2H 0HE [www.npg.org.uk](http://www.npg.org.uk)  
Recorded Information Line: 020 7312 2463

### FACE TO FACE

Communications and Development Director Pim Baxter | Marketing Assistant Kelly Bagley | Editor Jonathan Ray | Designer Ian Gardner

Front cover image taken from forthcoming exhibition *We Are The People: Postcards from the Collection of Tom Phillips* from 2 March – 20 June 2004