

A.S. Byatt

Audio Guide transcript

Antonia Byatt was painted for the gallery by Patrick Heron shortly before he died. She took an intense interest in the creation of this image both in its representation of her and as an example of Heron's style and technique.

'I think there are two reasons why I wanted an abstract painting. One is that I actually don't like looking at images of myself. The second reason is because I don't like to be truthful...most representational portraits I see nowadays. What I wanted was a presence of the idea of me, not a record of the whole of my face which I don't that much like.

Something that is very interesting is that Patrick at that time was painting in a kind of dark red and a kind of very bright purple. None of which are colours I would ever wear or particularly love. And then he began to notice what it was I was admiring in his painting in his house. The final painting came about when he suddenly said 'I think it's time to do something in bold primary colours' and he squeezed out the colours I love in the prints I have of his – a sort of very bright clear yellow, bright sort of royal blue. And then he got a tube of red paint and he said 'You know you can't get this particular kind of red any more, it's terribly expensive.' And he squeezed our vast quantities of it and just put it into the background. Sort of gleefully putting it on. And suddenly there was what I had originally imagined – a sort of huge expanse of Patrick's hand scribbling which is immediately recognisable as Patrick.'