

Germaine Greer

Audio Guide transcript

Partly because portrait painting can often be a troublesome business for the artist, many famous painters are unwilling to accept commissions except in exceptional circumstances. The Gallery was therefore delighted when Paula Rego agreed to paint a portrait of the writer and pioneer feminist Germaine Greer. The sitter here talks about how the portrait came about.

‘What happened was that the National Portrait Gallery asked Paula Rego if she would like to paint a portrait. And she apparently said (*hesitantly*) ‘yes’, she would like to paint a portrait, and they said, well who would you like to paint, and she said she would like to paint me. And so of course I said yes to Paula. And that meant that I had to go up to her studio in Camden Town, and she was going to work in these big chalkses, great big crayons, and, uh, I said come up to London and sit in her studio and we listened to the entire ring-cycle that took all six sittings.

I think it’s a wonderful picture. I know it doesn’t make me look particularly good-looking, but I’m not good-looking so that’s alright. I don’t feel as though I have been out-guise or caricatured or anything, but what I think it does look like, it looks like a portrait of intelligence. It’s got this incredible flicker about it, of energy, which is her energy more than mine, but it’s...my image is invested in her...her power and her concentration.’