

Paula Rego

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. Paula Rego describes some of the motives and methods behind its creation.

‘I thought that Germaine Greer was a very important figure for women and that’s why I wanted to do her, and also I like the way she was, I liked her outrageousness, her imagination, and I admire that a great deal.

Germaine, because she has such a mobile face, such an expressive face that changes all the time. It’s very difficult to get her, and I think that’s why I think pastel is a very good way because the pastel, um, animates...animates the surface quite a lot.

Very slowly I held my breath, and I began to do the corner of her face, and the pencil, pastel stick crawled down the side of her face picking up the resemblance as it went along. It was like...it was like a fishing net trapping the face while, it trapped the face, and it was right, my dear. I went down on my knees. I prayed and I was so grateful that I’d actually managed to get her.’