

Glenys Barton

Video Interview Transcript for the Portrait Explorer in the IT Gallery

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Could you explain the importance of photography in your work?

Photography really is very important, in two ways really, not only recording, taking photographs of the subject but I also find that through the photographs I actually find the form that the portrait or the head or whatever I'm doing might take. I'm always trying to invent new forms for the human head or the figure or the portrait or whatever I'm working on and I seem to find this through looking at the photographs.

How much did you want the purity and elegance of the Jean Muir portrait to be a reflection of her personality?

When I'm concentrating on somebody, I like to have as many images or photographs of them as I can around me to really familiarise myself with the person and so the first thing that I did with her was ask her if she could provide me with some sort of photographs of herself, which for her was wonderfully easy because she had lots of wonderful press images and images of photographs that were part of her publicity for her clothes or whatever. So quite quickly I amassed a load of images of Jean Muir. Plus a friend of mine Mayotte Magnus, who is a wonderful portrait photographer, had already taken photographs of Jean Muir, probably as much as ten years earlier. But the photographs were still relevant and so she generously lent me some of her photographs. So already surrounding myself with these photographs I already started to get ideas for the form that the portrait would take. One particular photograph gave me more than most; it was a photograph from *The Independent* of Jean Muir standing in her completely white apartment in Albert Mansions, with massive amounts of space around her, very sparsely furnished, pure white and there she is, a tiny figure in all this space, it's a fabulous photograph. She looked like a little cut-out figure and this gave me the idea for the figure that is actually owned by the National Portrait Gallery, so that was one of the portraits - the idea was there.

How does the pose suggest itself to you?

Now this sculpture came out of the session that I had with Glenda in Flowers Gallery where I actually had her sitting at a table and I sat and talked, got her to talk to me about her day-to-day life as an MP which was totally fascinating. As she talked, for emphasis in what she was saying her hand was coming down on the table and she was gesticulating and talking with great enthusiasm and I just had my camera set up and was shooting lots of shots as she talked, knowing that I was going to get something quite exciting. So this is where really the hand gesture, the lift of the shoulder, the angle of the head, everything came from that.

What was the thinking behind the double-head image of Glenda Jackson?

So now I had two different kinds of portraits of Glenda. The double portrait that's now in the National Portrait Gallery which I coloured, and it was quite a complex image in that it was the Glenda as she is now - the MP Glenda, in the foreground in high relief, almost three dimensional and in the background the young Glenda from *Women in Love* in very low relief. In fact, the piece looked almost in a way like a film poster but that wasn't intentional, it was just one of the things that came as it went along. This one being very different in that there is no colour. In a way it is a little bit like the Jean Muir figure in that I decided that the form and the simple lines, and the sculpture itself almost needed no more embellishment, the mood was

right and so I just put a very simple glaze on it over a cream coloured body, which gave it this lovely creamy colour and then sandblasted the glaze, which makes it matt and soft like satin. The little Jean Muir figure is in fact treated in exactly the same way.