Face to Face
SUMMER 2010

My Favourite Portrait
by Bill Paterson

BP Portrait Award 2010

Camille Silvy, Photographer of Modern Life, 1834–1910
COVER DETAIL AND BELOW

**Geneva**

by Ilaria Rosselli del Turco, 2010
© Ilaria Rosselli de Turco

This work features in the **BP Portrait Award 2010** on display from 24 June – 19 September 2010 in the Wolfson Gallery
FROM THE DIRECTOR

AFTER TWO DAYS of intensive viewing and discussion of the 2,117 entries for this year’s BP Portrait Award, we have a wonderful exhibition of 58 portraits opening on 24 June. All submissions were made as original paintings, were judged anonymously, and demonstrated the great variety of styles and approaches to contemporary portraiture. See page 5 for more details of this year’s shortlisted artists.

Camille Silvy, Photographer of Modern Life, 1834–1910 is the first retrospective of this innovative French photographer and includes many works unseen for the last 150 years. Not only is there an exquisite selection from his numerous carte de visite portraits, but also Silvy’s pioneering street photography. The exhibition is curated by Mark Haworth-Booth, previously a curator and now an Honorary Research Fellow at the V&A.

The new display, Concealed and Revealed: The Changing Faces of Elizabeth I, highlights the important discoveries of the Making Art in Tudor Britain project, and demonstrates a little of the research on the Collection currently being carried out. Montacute House, one of our National Trust partners, is a fascinating exhibition of sixteenth-century unknown subjects, accompanied by imagined biographies written by a number of eminent contemporary writers. These fictitious short biographies are published in a beautiful book accompanying the display, and Sarah Singleton tells us on page 3 about her experience working on this project.

Commemorating the centenary of the death of Florence Nightingale, Caroline Worthington, Director of the newly redesigned Florence Nightingale Museum in London, talks about the life of ‘the Lady with the Lamp’, complementing our display of Victorian photographs on the pioneering nurse in Room 23.

We are also delighted to present a new display of striking paintings by the distinguished American artist Alex Katz. He creates bold, powerful and stylish portraits that link to his personal connection with a sitter. Alongside recent paintings, and an earlier table-top piece, is a new portrait of the editor of US Vogue, Anna Wintour. This connects to the contemporary photographic displays, which include An Englishman in New York by Jason Bell – who delves into the relationship of those working in New York to their birthplace in the UK – and Glastonbury by Venetia Dearden, the resident photographer of the long-established music festival.
MY FAVOURITE PORTRAIT  
by Bill Paterson  
Actor

RIGHT
Max Wall  
by Maggi Hambling, 1981  
ON DISPLAY IN ROOM 32

THEY WERE BOTH such enthusiastic smokers that there must have been many moments when Max Wall vanished into the smog in Maggi Hambling’s studio while she worked on this lovely study in 1981, but there’s such affection in it that you sense they had far more in common than mere cigarettes.

This was one of a series she painted when the legendary comedian was at the height of his rekindled fame in what he called ‘The Serious Theatre’ after years in the doldrums.

In Scotland we were long used to our comics moving easily from Mother Goose to Molière and from panto to Pinter, but it seemed to come as a surprise to London theatre critics that a great comedian could also be a great actor.

It all started with *Ubu Roi* at the Royal Court in 1966 and then he went on to Osborne, Wesker and Beckett. In fact, in *Krapp’s Last Tape* he seemed to be the very personification of Beckett. When he played Archie Rice in *The Entertainer* at Greenwich Theatre in 1974 he brought his whole biography on stage to merge with the role. It was like alchemy.

Now that he’s been gone for twenty years, perhaps fame could again pass Max Wall by.

The stage, both comic or tragic, is the most ephemeral art, but this portrait captures forever the hang of his face and his wonderfully expressive smoker’s mouth. I find myself adding imaginary speech bubbles above his battered hat to hear that glorious, elongated baritone saying something very naughty about Hambling’s cat, Onde, sitting in front of him. It’s perfect to me that the painting seems unfinished. He once wrote, ‘I think I will probably die amongst a heap of loose ends’.

Bill Paterson is a Glasgow-born actor and writer. Among his many film appearances are *Miss Potter, Truly Madly Deeply, The Witches, The Killing Fields* and *Comfort and Joy*. TV includes *Criminal Justice, Sea of Souls, The Crow Road, Traffik, The Singing Detective, Auf Wiedersehen Pet, Smiley’s People* and *Licking Hitler*. Soon to be appearing in *Earthquakes in London* at the National Theatre. His short stories *Tales from the Back Green* are published by Hodder.
I pondered these notes for some time, showed copies of the pictures to friends, undertook a little research and finally wrote up the imagined biography. All of these have been published in an elegant booklet and I was intrigued to see how the other contributing writers tackled this same project – the differences between them but also the similarities – how each of us had created a personality and a life from pictures long hidden away and only now brought back into the light.

I am seeing portraits in a new light. And I hope the display will inspire others to think again about the sitters in the paintings, to wonder about their lives, thoughts, passions and memories, these people regarding us from the past, seeming to say ‘This is me. I am here’, and inviting us to look through the window of the painting into the world of another life.

Many of my stories start as single images. It may be a photograph, a painting, a landscape, a dream – or some apparently rootless picture that emerges from the darker depths of my mind. I have no talent for painting or drawing, so words have always been my medium for communicating these images, and the stories that flow from them.

I am also fascinated by the Tudor period. It is a time of extraordinary darkness and brilliant light: the first recognisably modern society: a time of cruelty and brutality as well as the creation of some of the greatest art, literature and architecture. Consequently, when the National Portrait Gallery invited me to be part of the Imagined Lives project I jumped at the chance. This creation of a story from a picture seemed so opposite and I love paintings and the stories of painters. In my young adult novel Heretic, set in Elizabethan Wiltshire, one of the main characters is a portrait painter.

I travelled to the National Portrait Gallery’s conservation department to meet my two unknown sitters. Previously I’d seen copies of the portraits of these two very different men, but viewing the real paintings added so much depth, detail and insight. I treated the process much as I treat any of my image-seeded stories – writing first impressions, then asking myself series of questions about the paintings. What does his face say to me? What do his clothes, aspect, expression, accoutrements suggest about this character, his life and thoughts?

Sarah Singleton is the author of one novel for adults, The Crow Maiden (Wildside Press USA), and six novels for young adults, all published by Simon and Schuster UK. Century won the Booktrust Teen Award in 2005 and her new novel The Island was released in April 2010.

Imagined Lives: Mystery Portraits from the National Portrait Gallery, c.1540–1640 can be seen at Montacute House, Somerset, until October 2011.

A publication of character sketches and imagined biographies by John Banville, Tracy Chevalier, Julian Fellowes, Terry Pratchett, Sarah Singleton, Joanna Trollope and Minette Walters accompanies the display.

Price £5 (Members £4.50) available online at www.npg.org.uk/shop/
THE BP PORTRAIT AWARD REMEMBERED
by Ishbel Myerscough
Artist, past winner of the BP Portrait Award and one of this year’s judges

AS A SCHOOLGIRL, on the Tube every day I would see the posters for the prize, and would dream.

Judging this year brought back all those memories and emotions. I imagined each entrant packing and delivering their painting. I remember that prickly feeling of excitement, preparing oneself for disappointment, but secretly yearning for success.

The first time I entered I was at Glasgow School of Art. My self-portrait in a brown spotted dress was accepted. Jean Muir’s P.A. phoned me to commission me. A London dealer asked me to come to his gallery for a chat. This was fantastic. I was hooked.

The next year I was commended and my painting was used as a poster – on the Underground. The year after I was placed among the prizewinners and again the next year. I decided to stop before I was rejected.

I moved to London and, studying at the Slade, I couldn’t resist. I got my entry in at the very last moment.

I won. Winning gave me a new-found confidence, an endorsement of my progression.

The art dealer I had met in that first year was now my dealer. I stayed with him for more than eighteen years and had several shows.

I judged the year after I had won and could see why each had been entered with so much hope. I could imagine the artists congratulating themselves on the eyes, or hand, or concept, hoping the judges wouldn’t notice the weak spots or indeed perfection, which is itself a possible weakness. I was looking for the spark of truth, the natural, a touch of the extraordinary: the twinkle of gawkiness in the teenage boy or the fathomless narrative of the meticulously surreal.

I enjoyed it enormously, the viewing, the discussing, the opposition of tastes and views. And finally, we all walked away pleased with the ultimate winners.
BP Portrait Award 2010
will be on display from
24 June–19 September 2010
Wolfson Gallery
Admission free
Supported by BP

The three artists under consideration for the 2010 BP Portrait Award shortlist are:
DAVID EICHENBERG for Tim II (opposite)
MICHAEL GASKELL for Harry (below left)
DAPHNE TODD for Last portrait of Mother (below)
All © the artist

MICHAEL GASKELL, from Sheffield, has exhibited throughout Britain and was second prize winner in last year’s BP Portrait Award. Whilst out shopping with his family, Michael saw Harry and was persuaded to approach him by his wife. In the resulting portrait, Gaskell tried to evoke a sense of what had drawn him to Harry, but also hopes that the image is informed by what he gained from hearing about the sitter’s experiences and aspirations.

DAPHNE TODD, from East Sussex, has been selected for the BP Portrait Award for the third time. She attended the Slade School of Fine Art and was the first woman president of the Royal Society of Portrait Painters. She chose to portray her mother Annie Mary Todd on her deathbed, creating a devotional study. Daphne says her mother, who had just celebrated her 100th birthday, having lived with the artist for her last 14 years, gave permission for her daughter to paint her.

Exhibition catalogue
A fully-illustrated book accompanies the exhibition and features an introductory essay by Rose Tremain, the author of the Orange Prize winning The Road Home and whose new novel Trespass has just been published. The BP Portrait Award 2010 book will be published on 23 June 2010, and will include over 58 colour illustrations. Price £8.50 (paperback).
I first developed an interest in civil and military historical re-enactment several years ago, while helping with workshops in my local museums in south west London. As a portrait artist, I had a question to resolve: how far a person’s character and identity were bound up in what they wore, how they lived and the period they inhabited.

For my BP Travel Award, I attended two major re-enactments in Europe. The first, in June 2009, was organised by the Company of Saynt George, who occupied the 13th-century Gruyères Castle in Switzerland over a weekend. The second, in September 2009, re-created a Napoleonic camp at Oostmalle, Belgium, and re-enacted the 'Forgotten Battle' of Hoogstraten, which took place on 11 January 1814, leading up to Napoleon’s defeat at Waterloo.

In Gruyères I was joined by my childhood friend Ruth Edwards. Our first taste of a re-enactment was when we found ourselves standing at dawn in front of large castle gates peering at a pair of medieval leather-clad feet and the butt of a halberd. This was our introduction to a member of the Company of Saynt George, founded in 1988 and dedicated to re-enacting the military and civil life of a Burgundian artillery unit between 1460 and 1480. The Company sets out to immerse all its members in the ethos, period character and rigorous discipline of their artillery unit. Strict rules allow no modern-day artefacts on the site during the re-enactment; as far as possible cooking, eating and sleeping have to be done exactly as in the 15th century.

In the castle courtyard, longsword combat training was in progress. Around the courtyard were market stalls run by needle-makers, patten-makers, embroiderers and carpenters selling their wares and demonstrating their crafts.

Going out through the stone arches we found the Italian crossbow men firing into their straw targets on the green. Here we were instructed how to handle and aim a crossbow and even managed to fire a bolt into the target ourselves. Later on we were shown medieval peasant dances, watched a field-gun drill and witnessed the setting up of the camp kitchen where cauldrons hung over an open fire.

Meanwhile, we met Jonas Bergdahl, from Stockholm, who was wearing a suit of armour specially made for him. At close quarters you could see how the plates lay like scales and could shift to allow for movement. During the weekend I photographed and interviewed many members of the Company. One of the participants explained that, for some, re-enactment was a form of escapism from the 21st century and in order to maintain the illusion they might be reluctant to divulge their modern-day occupations. The most striking aspect of the event was the breadth and depth of historic, social, cultural and
military knowledge that each person brought to their individual roles. They carried with them and related with enthusiasm their own stories, personalities, trades, skills and disciplines, all of which fitted firmly within a comprehensive medieval backdrop.

My second re-enactment event took place in September in the Flemish part of Belgium. The organiser, Ron Van Dyke, did all he could to make my visit to Oostmalle a smooth and successful one. The Napoleonic bivouac was on a much larger scale than the event in Gruyères – 500 enthusiasts had set up their regimental camps in fields and woods a few miles east of Antwerp. Five minutes’ walk away, an arena and ‘battlefield theatre’ had been set up for the grand re-enactment.

On Friday afternoon my first encounter with the participants was with the 95th Rifles of the Second Battalion, ‘Sharpe’s’ regiment, made up of Dave, Andy, Dennis and Blakey. They were in costume, brewing tea and cooking dinner around their camp fire. Later Dave showed me the workings of the flintlock rifle and how to prepare gunpowder cartouches, but without the shot, for obvious reasons!

Next I introduced myself, in halting French, to the Gendarmerie of the French Imperial Guard, Yves Moerman, his son Tom, and Dominique Mathurian. Yves persuaded me to don period costume on the final day. Dressed in the uniform, hat, cloak and accessories of the Imperial Guard, I was allowed into the arena in the very midst of the battle re-enactment where I could take photographs. This was a unique opportunity and I was very grateful that Yves trusted me in battle. Under no circumstances could I reveal my camera to the audience – it had to be hidden under my cloak. The only give-away to my period appearance was my pronounced lack of military bearing and the green wellies I was wearing! With rifle, gun and cannon-fire, sabres, bayonets and poleaxes, cavalry charging, smoke and pandemonium all around, I experienced some of the shock, confusion and fear of battle.

Each long weekend ended with an exchange of email addresses, invitations to future re-enactments and promises to keep in touch. Tents were dismantled, straw bedding turned out and clothing metamorphosed from formal to casual 21st-century. ‘Strangers’ unrecognisable in their civvies would address me warmly. It was hard to imagine that the people I met and got to know so well would have their own modern identity. Hats, helmets and headdresses were abandoned, halberds, rifles and cannons exchanged for car keys and phones. Saying our farewells, I left them to their long journeys home to warm beds and showers.

Isobel Peachey’s Travel Award work will feature in this year’s BP Portrait Award which will be on display in the Wolfson Gallery from 24 June 2010.
LOUIS AUChINCLOSS,
BENEFACTOR
by Jacob Simon
Chief Curator
THE AMERICAN LAWYER and author Louis Auchincloss died on 26 January, aged 92, and an obituary was included in the Daily Telegraph a few days later. He was a benefactor of the National Portrait Gallery. One day in March 1998, I received a telephone call from reception. There was a gentleman at the desk. He had come in without an appointment. He had a photograph of a picture. Would I come down and see him? Curators are often faced with such interruptions, perhaps at a critical moment when they are completing a display or an exhibition which will be seen by thousands. Should one break off just for one person? As a rule, curators want to be helpful if they can, and I responded accordingly.

There was a distinguished-looking gentleman in reception. ‘My name is Louis Auchincloss. I have a photograph of a portrait which I would like to show you, if I may,’ he politely suggested. A glance revealed a portrait of interest. Was it vaguely familiar? ‘Let me look in our Archive,’ I replied, taking refuge in the accumulated knowledge of generations of curators. I found that my predecessor as 18th Century Curator, John Kerslake, had published the painting as ‘collection unknown’ in his listing of portraits of the novelist Samuel Richardson. In his catalogue, he attributed it to a significant middle-ranking artist, Mason Chamberlin.

I showed the catalogue to Mr Auchincloss and it was clear that he knew a great deal about the portrait. It emerged that he had been given it some forty years previously by a friend and client, Robert D. Brewster, who had bought it in London for £30 towards the end of the Second World War. ‘Might you be interested in having the portrait as a bequest, perhaps?’ he asked. I responded positively, saying that I would need to take it to our fortnightly Curatorial Meeting. When I wrote back to him, following the meeting, to express our great enthusiasm, he ventured to suggest that he might make the portrait a lifetime gift, writing: ‘When I returned to my apartment here [New York] and looked at Mr Richardson, I seemed to fancy that he was telling me: “Look! You’ve had me for fifty years. Isn’t it time that you sent me where I obviously belong?”’

Louis Auchincloss made his donation through the American Friends of the National Portrait Gallery. The portrait remains on display to this day in Room 10 and I encourage you to see it. Although it is very small, painted in oil on copper in about 1754, I think it is the finest 18th-century portrait to have been given us in my twenty-five years at the Gallery. It was painted for Samuel Richardson’s friend Arthur Onslow, Speaker of the House of Commons. The portrait was described as a ‘speaking likeness’ by Thomas Edwards, another friend, and shows Richardson in a characteristic pose, writing ‘upon a little board ... held in his hand’. In the background is a bust of Milton, whose works Richardson much admired.

Thanks to the generosity of Louis Auchincloss, Samuel Richardson has indeed returned to where he obviously belongs!
THIS YEAR is the centenary of the death of the great French photographer Camille Silvy (1834–1910) (fig. 1). It gives us the chance to assess a remarkable creative talent. Silvy took part in the first ever exhibition of photography as a fine art, which was held in Paris in 1859. He showed large, complicated, modern photographs made by combining several negatives in one print. He manipulated reality and the medium like a digital photographer of today.

He was lionised by French critics but in the summer of 1859 he made a momentous decision. He moved to London, took a studio in Bayswater, and pioneered a new kind of photography. This was the carte de visite portrait, which became a craze on both sides of the Channel and soon on both sides of the Atlantic. These visiting-card-sized portraits industrialised photography. Silvy’s studio became a factory. Two or three poses could be exposed, twice for each pose, in batches of six or eight to a glass negative, and also printed up in a batch, thus lowering the unit cost. Then they were mounted on card and sold by the score, the hundred and (in the case of celebrities and royalty) the hundred thousand. Fans of the new carte de visite cult bought them from stationers’ shops, exchanged them with family and friends, placed them in albums with special pre-cut windows into which they could be slipped, and created the Victorian equivalent of our current virtual networking sites.

ABOVE (FIG. 1)
Self-portrait
1863
Private Collection, Paris

RIGHT (FIG. 2)
Silvy in his Studio with his Family, 1866
Private Collection, Paris
Because he seems such a Modern, I chose to present Silvy in the book of the exhibition through the multiple self-portrait he made in his London studio in 1863. It reminds me of Andy Warhol in his pomp, in the 1960s, the heyday of ‘The Factory’ in New York. Like Warhol, Silvy had a large staff – 40 assistants in his Bayswater studio. Luckily for us, Silvy photographed the back yard of his studio around 1862 (fig. 2). One can see many of the workers responsible for printing and other tasks, with a glass-roofed building in the foreground, which is probably where women trimmed the photographs and mounted them on card before bundling them up for dispatch. Above that building, we can see the ‘glass-house’ which was the actual studio.

In the book of the show I have described Silvy as a ‘Photographer of Modern Life’. The phrase picks up on the title of a seminal essay – ‘The Painter of Modern Life’ (1863) – by the great French poet who was Silvy’s contemporary, Charles Baudelaire. The poet’s writings parallel Silvy’s photographs in several ways. Baudelaire insisted on the importance of fashion in contemporary art and culture. Part of Silvy’s genius lay in capturing the brilliance of French and English tailoring – right at the beginning of couture – as we see it worn by the fashionable people who flocked to his studio. Through his extraordinarily skilful use of natural lighting (these were the days before electrically lit studios) and his flamboyant theatrical ability to pose his
sitters, Silvy created pictures that are neither simply portraiture nor fashion but superb ‘fashion-portraits’.

Silvy was very fortunate to come to the notice of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert in autumn 1859, early in his London career. Although the queen herself never sat to Silvy, she sent many of her family, household and friends to his studio. Among these was her protégée Sarah Forbes Bonetta, daughter of a West African chieftain, who sat for Silvy with her husband on their marriage in 1862 (fig. 3). Silvy’s extensive gallery of over 17,000 portraits, all preserved in the National Portrait Gallery’s magnificent collection, presents 1860s London as a remarkably cosmopolitan world city.

There was another side to Silvy’s work. Like the late Irving Penn, Silvy was simultaneously at the peak of commercial portraiture and engrossed in his own personal picture-making. The most original examples of this are the photographs he made on the streets of London in 1859–60. Here again Silvy connects with Baudelaire, who advised his ‘painter of modern life’ to attend to effects of light, and to bear witness to the fleeting, contingent nature of modern life. These qualities are found in abundance in Silvy’s photograph of *Twilight* (1859) (fig. 4). The photograph was taken outside the studio at 38 Porchester Terrace – the house is still there today. A servant has come out of the house to buy an evening newspaper from a boy. Under the gas lamp we see the glint of a coin, the flutter of paper, and something else – a figure moving swiftly along the pavement, so quickly that the person is blurred. This is probably the first intentional use of blur for creative ends – to suggest rapid movement – in the history of photography.

As curator of the exhibition, it has been an enormous privilege for me to work with Silvy’s descendants, with the Jeu de Paume, Paris, and with the National Portrait Gallery to present the first ever retrospective exhibition of Camille Silvy.
BELOW
Spring, c.1860
Private Collection, Paris

BELOW (FIG. 4)
Studies on Light: Twilight, 1859
Private Collection, Paris

ABOVE (FIG. 3)
Sarah Forbes Bonetta (Sarah Davies) from Silvy’s 9th Daybook, 1862
Private Collection, Paris

Exhibition Catalogue
A 160 page illustrated catalogue by curator Mark Haworth-Booth accompanies the exhibition. Price £25 (hardback).
IN 2007 the National Portrait Gallery began a major research project, *Making Art in Tudor Britain*, with the aim of using scientific analysis and art-historical research to find out more about the Tudor and Jacobean collections. Now in its fourth year, the project, led by 16th Century Curator Tarnya Cooper, has already proved to be very successful and a number of important discoveries have been made. A new display focuses on research undertaken on four portraits of Queen Elizabeth I. It provides an opportunity for visitors to see these very different portraits of the queen, three of which are not usually on display, and to learn about the recent findings.

All of the portraits in this display have changed in some way since they were first created. Advanced scientific techniques, such as paint sampling and infra-red reflectography, have helped us to unlock clues to their original appearance. For instance, paint sampling on the most well-known of the four, the ‘Darnley’ portrait (fig. 1), has revealed that the now brown pattern on the queen’s dress would once have been crimson, and her extremely pale complexion would originally have been much rosier. The latter indicates that the common assumption that Elizabeth had very pale features is largely a myth, true only for the later part of her reign when we know that she did wear pale make-up. X-ray examination of another of the featured portraits (fig. 2) has revealed how an early seventeenth-century panel painting of Elizabeth was completely painted over in the eighteenth century to ‘prettify’ the queen in keeping with contemporary standards of beauty and style. Several other portraits of Elizabeth I exist that were similarly altered in the eighteenth century, indicating a posthumous revival of interest in her at this much later date.

Perhaps the most intriguing of the discoveries highlighted relates to a portrait that has very rarely been exhibited in the Gallery (fig. 3). This portrait of Elizabeth, created in the
1580s, has been painted over an unfinished portrait of an entirely different sitter. Losses to the paint surface have made this other face partially visible. The identity of the first sitter remains a mystery but this discovery indicates that sixteenth-century wooden panels were sometimes reused and recycled. Analysis has also revealed that a coiled serpent held by the queen, now visible on the surface, was part of the original design for Elizabeth’s portrait, but was painted out by the artist shortly afterwards (fig. 4). The serpent may have been intended to symbolise the queen’s intelligence or prudence, but at some stage during the painting process a decision was made not to include this rather ambiguous emblem. Although surface abrasion has made the outline of the snake visible to the naked eye, scientific analysis has provided us with more detailed information about how it would originally have looked, allowing us to re-create the original appearance of the work.

This display highlights just some of the findings of *Making Art in Tudor Britain*. We are currently fundraising to help us finish this critical research on Elizabethan and Jacobean portraits and still need £160,000. More research results and information about the project can be found on the Gallery’s website at www.npg.org.uk/research/programmes/making-art-in-tudor-britain
ALEX KATZ PORTRAITS
by Sarah Howgate
Contemporary Curator

THIS DISPLAY BRINGS together for the first time a selection of works from the 1960s to the present by the internationally acclaimed American artist Alex Katz. Recognised as a ‘painter’s painter’, Katz is one of the most influential artists working in portraiture today, his importance acknowledged by a younger generation of artists from Liam Gillick to Elizabeth Peyton.

Katz’s paintings grew out of abstraction rather than figuration. Although he emerged on the New York art scene in the 1950s when Abstract Expressionism was at its height and Pop Art in its infancy, Katz’s vision has remained uniquely contemporary and distinctly separate from both movements. He has said of his painting: ‘I try always to paint in the present tense. If you paint stories you’re painting in the past tense.’

Living and working in Manhattan, Katz takes as his subjects a close circle of friends and family. The artist’s concern is with the painted surface rather than the psychology of the sitter. Examined up close, the human face is reduced to simplified abstract forms. He is drawn to the refinement and composure

‘I’ve always thought that appearance is one of the most mysterious things. What is appearance today? There are no absolutes. It’s a matter of sensation. Appearance or reality is a variable and it changes every twenty or thirty years. I’m not chasing it. I’m trying to make good paintings.’
Alex Katz
of Japanese manners, and his sitters remain enigmatic; his intention is not to get beneath the skin. Alongside his interest in the work of artists such as Pierre Bonnard and Henri Matisse, Katz has cited the eighteenth-century Japanese artist Utamaro as an important influence.

The centrepiece of the display is a free-standing picture sculpture from 1968 titled One Flight Up. In this piece one comes face to face with Alex Katz’s world, the intelligentsia of 1960s New York at a cocktail party, where one first sees a person from the front and in silhouette from the back. The figures jostle with each other while at the same time remaining aloof. Amongst the crowd, the painters Philip Pearlstein and Rodrigo Moynihan rub shoulders with former Metropolitan Museum curator Henry Geldzahler and his partner, Christopher Scott.

One Flight Up stands alongside a painting of his son, the poet Vincent Katz. In the adjoining room is a series of heads painted against a dramatic blue-black ground, a palette which Katz has been exploring in recent years. The artist’s wife, Ada, an iconic American face and recurring subject for Katz, appears here together with a portrait of Vincent Katz and his wife, Vivien.

To accompany this display Katz’s painting Anna, 2009, a portrait of the editor of American Vogue, Anna Wintour, will be seen here for the first time in Room 36. This is the first occasion that Wintour has sat for a painting. Sittings took place in the artist’s studio, where he produced studies from life as the starting point for the finished painting. Although Wintour is known for wearing her distinctive large sunglasses, the artist chose not to include them but to focus instead on the subject’s gaze. Wintour is painted against a powerful yellow ground, a colour the artist began exploring in his landscape paintings produced in Maine over the summer of 2009. On painting her, Katz said: ‘Some people you want to paint, others you don’t. Painting Anna was like shooting a fish in a barrel. There was no way I could miss it. She’s made to order. Highly styled. At this age she has made her face. If you’re over forty, you make the face. Twenty years ago she was more generic, just another pretty girl. Now she looks different. Her looks are much more definite’.
I moved to New York City six years ago. I say moved there, but I live there only half the time (the other half in London) and find I have never grown out of comparing the two, as those who truly repatriate eventually tend to.

I was on assignment for American Vogue working on an issue concerned with anglophilia, surrounded by English models, in an English tearoom in downtown Manhattan. Having always assiduously avoided English people in Manhattan (no ex-pat life for me) I found it very strange to get into a long conversation with the teashop owners about all the Englishmen they knew in the city. And what a large and varied bunch they were....

So with a vague autobiographical interest I started investigating the group of over 120,000 English men and women living and working in New York, not knowing where it would take me.

And I met cops, plumbers, cab drivers, rock stars, actors, editors, deep-sea divers and helicopter pilots, who all told me their stories and let me photograph them. I went for a walk in Central Park with Sting, and for a cup of tea on Kate Winslet’s roof terrace, sat on Zoë Heller’s stoop and watched Stephen Daldry bicycle down 8th Avenue. I was given a private tour of both the Metropolitan Museum and the Barney’s shop windows. I started with a blank canvas and was amazed by the number of Englishmen and women who have made such a large impact on the cultural life of the city.

And amidst all the questions about why people had come here and what they had left behind, I learnt a little bit more about what it means to be English, what it means to be a New Yorker, and where the two intersect.
THE REAL FLORENCE NIGHTINGALE was not ‘as facile fancy painted her’, wrote Lytton Stratchey, the biographer, who challenged the sentimental Victorian image of Nightingale as the saintly nurse who single-handedly saved the British army during the medical crisis of the Crimean War.

The Florence Nightingale Museum reopens in May, marking the centenary of her death. Housed in the grounds of St Thomas’ Hospital in London, and standing on the site of the Nightingale School of Nursing, the new-look museum aims to deepen visitors’ understanding of Nightingale the real woman, getting behind the legend of the ‘Lady with the Lamp’.

Portraits play a crucial role in the new museum, which has been dramatically redesigned by the award-winning Dutch designers Kossmann de Jong. These range from a bronze bust by the sculptor Sir John Steell, 1862, and intimate drawings by her talented sister Parthenope and cousin Hilary Bonham Carter, to pottery figurines, produced in the thousands when Nightingale became one of the most famous women in the world during the war.

Visitors learn that Nightingale had a complicated relationship with her image. She dismissed the celebrity as ‘buzz fuzz’. It smacked of idolatry and vanity. But she shrewdly recognised the power of her name – and her image – to bring about lasting nursing and health reform.

Visitors may recognise images from the National Portrait Gallery Collection at the Museum. There is an original watercolour of Florence with her sister Parthenope, Lady Verney by William White, c.1836. And the museum would be incomplete without a copy of Jerry Barrett’s group portrait, Nightingale Receiving the Wounded at Scutari, 1857, which he managed to paint in spite of Florence Nightingale. She refused to sit for him even though he had travelled all the way to Scutari. We are delighted that the National Portrait Gallery has mounted a special display to celebrate the centenary, which investigates the relationship Nightingale had with her image, and can be viewed at the Gallery in Room 23 from 17 May 2010.
I WAS SITTING on the crooked fence at the end of our meadow when an exotic convoy of cars, caravans and buses rolled through our village. I remember a whirl of colourful outfits, music, and every kind of face you could imagine. As the quiet lane in front of me turned into a hybrid of a theatrical stage and a travelling circus, I was left wide-eyed and spellbound. It was the end of the festival in the early Eighties and the beginning of my love affair with Glastonbury.

I grew up next to the festival site, and was seven when my mother first took me to the Kids’ Field – a haven from the other spaces full of bustling people that spread over the whole valley. Since then I have been hooked to the festival’s swirling, colourful chaos, from the weeks running up to it to the surprises and new magic it offers every year.

As a photographer I was magnetically drawn to witness and understand what lies at its core. I decided to create an oasis among the crowds where I could meet and document some of the thousands of individuals who travelled from all around the world to make up this vast, eclectic gathering. The festival organiser, Michael Eavis, permitted me to set up a tipi as a portable studio in 2004. Despite the challenges the seed of the project was sown and I continued each year, with a more practical set-up using waterproof marquees, until 2009.

Successfully running a photographic studio on site has depended on a team who have endured testing weather conditions annually with great spirit and humour. It has been an unforgettable experience, and the book is filled with the wonderful personalities I have had the great fortune to encounter over this six-year project.

Venetia Dearden has been documenting the Glastonbury music festival, taking portraits in an on-site temporary studio, since 2004. Her book Glastonbury: Another Stage accompanies the display. Included amongst the many portraits in this book are Dame Shirley Bassey, Lily Allen, Pete Townshend and Leonard Cohen. Price £29.99 (Members £26.99)
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This offer is only open to National Portrait Gallery Members, Associates and Patrons and is not available in conjunction with any other offer.