

## News Release

Wednesday 22 March 2017

### NEW SELF-PORTRAIT BY HOWARD HODGKIN TAKES CENTRE STAGE IN NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY EXHIBITION

*Howard Hodgkin: Absent Friends, 23 March – 18 June 2017*  
National Portrait Gallery, London



**Portrait of the Artist Listening to Music** by Howard Hodgkin, 2011-2016, Courtesy Gagosian © Howard Hodgkin;  
Portrait of the artist by Miriam Perez. Courtesy Gagosian.

A recently completed self-portrait by the late Howard Hodgkin (1932-2017) will go on public display for the first time in a major new exhibition, **Howard Hodgkin: Absent Friends**, at the National Portrait Gallery, London. *Portrait of the Artist Listening to Music* was completed by Hodgkin in late 2016 with the National Portrait Gallery exhibition in mind. The large oil on wood painting, (1860mm x 2630mm) is Hodgkin's last major painting, and evokes a deeply personal situation in which the act of remembering is memorialised in paint. While Hodgkin worked on it, recordings of two pieces of music were played continuously: 'The Last Time I Saw Paris' composed by Jerome Kern and published in 1940, and the zither music from the 1949 film *The Third Man*, composed and performed by Anton Karas. Both pieces were favourites of the artist and closely linked with earlier times in his life that the experience of listening recalled. Kern's song is itself a meditation on looking back and reliving the past.

Also exhibited for the first time are early drawings from Hodgkin's private collection, made while he was studying at Bath Academy of Art, Corsham in the 1950s. While very few works survive from this formative period in Hodgkin's career, the drawings of a fellow student, *Blondie*, his landlady *Miss Spackman* and *Two Women at a Table*, exemplify key characteristics of Hodgkin's approach which continued throughout his career. All three works evoke the appearance of their sitters precisely, yet they are based entirely on memory, demonstrating Hodgkin's remarkable powers of recall. *Two Women at a Table* also explores the physical relationship between the two sitters. The underlying theme is the intimacy of the situation, a psychological dimension that would assume greater prominence in his subsequent work.



**Blondie** by Howard Hodgkin, 1952, Private Collection © Howard Hodgkin; **Two Women at a Table** by Howard Hodgkin, 1953, Private Collection © Howard Hodgkin; **Miss Spackman** by Howard Hodgkin, 1953, Private Collection © Howard Hodgkin

**Howard Hodgkin: Absent Friends** is the first ever exhibition devoted to the portraits of the great British painter Howard Hodgkin, who died earlier this month at the age of 84. The exhibition shows the breadth and nature of Hodgkin's long-standing engagement with portraiture, an important aspect of his work that has been largely overlooked because his work appears abstract. With over 50 works from collections around the world and dating from 1949 to the present, the exhibition traces the development of Hodgkin's portraits, exploring his important contribution to our understanding of what constitutes a portrait and examining key themes within the artist's work: colour, memory, emotion and imagination.

Featuring key works from a range of international public and private collections, **Howard Hodgkin: Absent Friends** traces the evolution of the artist's visual language and his engagement with a range of friends and others within the artist's circle. Robin Denny, Joe Tilson, Stephen Buckley, Patrick Caulfield, David Hockney, R.B.Kitaj, Anthony Hill and Gillian Wise are among the many leading artists portrayed.

Dr Nicholas Cullinan, Director, National Portrait Gallery, London, says: *'We are indebted to Howard for creating this extraordinary and very moving new painting to be included in our exhibition of his portraits - the first ever to be devoted to this overlooked aspect of his work. Howard's painting has always resisted classification and easy explanation. His work often appears entirely abstract, yet over the course of 65 years a principle concern of his art has been to evoke a human presence, making a significant contribution to our understanding of what a portrait can be. We have worked very closely with Howard over the last two years to create this exhibition and we are grateful to him for making it possible. We hope that it will be a fitting tribute to his life and work.'*

Paul Moorhouse, Curator of **Howard Hodgkin: Absent Friends**, says: *'When I first put to Howard the idea of an exhibition of his portraits, his response was 'At last!' He so wanted this important aspect of his work to be seen in depth. He responded to the invitation to paint a new work for the first exhibition of his portraits with an extraordinary painting, which surely will come to be ranked among his greatest. Forming the climax of the exhibition, Portrait of the Artist Listening to Music is a moving meditation on Howard's life-long theme, the act of remembering, which here receives expression at once intimate, emotional, celebratory and elegiac.'*

Howard Hodgkin is widely regarded as one of Britain's greatest artists and has been a central figure in contemporary art for over half a century. He was born in London in 1932 but as a child was evacuated to America during the war. He studied at Camberwell School of Art between 1949 -50, followed by Bath Academy of Art between 1950-54, where he later taught for many years. In 1984 he represented Britain at the XLI Venice Biennale and he was awarded the Turner Prize in 1985. His first retrospective was curated by Nicholas Serota at the Museum of Modern Art, Oxford in 1976. His work has been the subject of numerous major retrospectives including the Metropolitan Museum, New York (1995), Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, Edinburgh (2002) Tate Britain, London (2006), The Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin (2006) and the Reina Sofia, Madrid (2007). His paintings and prints are held by most major museums including Tate, London; British Museum, London; Metropolitan Museum, New York; MoMA, New York and Philadelphia Museum of Art.

**Howard Hodgkin: Absent Friends** is curated by Paul Moorhouse, the National Portrait Gallery's Head of Collections Displays (Victorian to Contemporary) and Senior Curator of 20th Century Portraits. His previous exhibitions at the Gallery include *Giacometti: Pure Presence* (2015), *The Great War in Portraits* (2014), *The Queen: Art and Image*

(2012) *Gerhard Richter Portraits* (2009), and *Pop Art Portraits* (2007). His displays at the Gallery include Antony Gormley: *Object*, Andy Warhol: *10 Portraits of Jews of the 20th Century*; Bridget Riley: *from Life*; Jim Dine *Portraits*; Patrick Heron: *Studies for a Portrait of T. S. Eliot*; Frank Auerbach: *Four Portraits of Catherine Lampert*; Anthony Caro: *Portraits*; Jack Smith – *Abstract Portraits* and *Thomas Struth Family Portraits*.

#### **HOWARD HODGKIN: ABSENT FRIENDS**

23 March -18 June 2017, at the National Portrait Gallery, London [www.npg.org.uk](http://www.npg.org.uk)

*Spring Season 2017 sponsored by Herbert Smith Freehills LLP*

Tickets with donation: Full price £12/ Concessions £10.50

Tickets without donation Full price £10 / Concessions £8.50 (Free for Members and Patrons)

[npg.org.uk/hodgkin](http://npg.org.uk/hodgkin) or 020 7321 6600 #HowardHodgkin

**Press View: Wednesday 22 March 2016** 10.00-12.00 (with a tour at 10.30).

**For further Press information, please contact: Laura McKechan, Senior Communications Manager,**

**020 7321 6620 [lmckechan@npg.org.uk](mailto:lmckechan@npg.org.uk)**

**For images, please go to: [www.npg.org.uk/press](http://www.npg.org.uk/press)**

**National Portrait Gallery, St Martin's Place WC2H 0HE, opening hours** Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Saturday, Sunday: 10.00 – 18.00 (Gallery closure commences at 17.50) **Late Opening:** Thursday, Friday: 10.00 – 21.00 (Gallery closure commences at 8.50pm) **Nearest Underground:** Leicester Square/Charing Cross **General information:** 0207 306 0055 **Recorded information:** 020 7312 2463 **Website** [www.npg.org.uk](http://www.npg.org.uk)