

News Release

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National Portrait Gallery Unveils Newly Commissioned Portrait of Malala Yousafzai



Malala Yousafzai with her portrait *Malala Yousafzai* by Shirin Neshat, 2018, at the National Portrait Gallery, London.

Photograph by Jorge Herrera

The National Portrait Gallery has commissioned a new portrait of Malala Yousafzai, the girls' education activist. The work by Iranian-born artist and filmmaker, Shirin Neshat, was commissioned with support from Outset Contemporary Art Fund. The portrait, which has gone on public display at the National Portrait Gallery, London, is the first in a series of three commissions supported by Outset over three years.

The work is one of a pair of portraits of Yousafzai by Neshat, acquired for the National Portrait Gallery Collection. Neshat took a series of photographs during a sitting in London in March 2018. From this the artist and the Gallery selected two photographs, onto which Neshat has hand inscribed in calligraphy a poem, *MALALA II: (Malala Yousafzai)*, by the Pushto poet Rahman Shah Sayel from Peshawar, written in 2011 when Malala had already become a well-known activist for education. The poem addresses the legendary Malala of Maiwand and praises Malala Yousafzai, while making connections between the two young women. The second portrait of Malala seated at a school desk with an open book will travel to Birmingham Museums, where it will be unveiled in 2020 as part of *Coming Home* - a new initiative, which will see fifty portraits from the National Portrait Gallery's collection travel to places across the UK they are closely associated with.



Malala views the portrait on display at National Portrait Gallery, London; *Malala Yousafzai* by Shirin Neshat, 2018, © National Portrait Gallery, London; Artist Shirin Neshat with her portrait *Malala Yousafzai* by Shirin Neshat, 2018. Photos by Jorge Herrera.

Born in Mingora, Pakistan in 1997, Malala Yousafzai first came to prominence in 2009 after writing about her life during the Taliban occupation of Swat Valley, and the ban on girls' education. In October 2012, Malala was shot in the head in an attack by a Taliban gunman on her school bus. She recovered in Birmingham where she chose to remain with her family. In 2013, Malala was awarded the International Children's Peace Prize and co-founded the Malala Fund to champion every girl's right to 12 years of free, safe, quality education. In 2014, Malala became the youngest recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize with Indian activist Kailash Satyarthi. She is currently studying Philosophy, Politics and Economics at Oxford University.

Dr Nicholas Cullinan, Director, National Portrait Gallery said: "We are delighted to have commissioned these powerful new portraits, which represent an historic coming together of an inspirational and fearless young woman, who has had a profound impact on the education and welfare of girls throughout the world, with a leading international artist known for her unique and pioneering work. I am extremely grateful to Outset Contemporary Art Fund for their generous support in making this possible."

Malala Yousafzai said: "I am honoured to have my portrait included in the National Portrait Gallery alongside some of Britain's most influential writers, artists and leaders. I hope it will remind visitors that girls everywhere are fighting for change in their communities and countries — their stories must also be heard."

Shirin Neshat, artist said: "I knew of Malala as an extraordinary young woman who had marvelled the world by her victory over death; her fierce fight for women's education and for winning the Nobel Peace Prize, all before she turned twenty years old. It was impossible not to feel intimidated ... Yet as she arrived at the studio to be photographed, I was immediately taken aback by her timid, gentle and innocent demeanour. To this day, when I look back on our encounter, I am left with impressions of humility, wisdom and a rare sense of inner beauty."

Dr Ellen McAdam, Director, Birmingham Museums Trust, said: “The people of Birmingham welcomed Malala when she made the city her home, so we are thrilled to be partnering with the National Portrait Gallery on this initiative to bring this internationally significant work to Birmingham for them to see in 2020.”

Shirin Neshat’s early photographic works explored questions of gender in relation to Islamic culture. Her subsequent video works departed from overtly political content or critique in favour of more poetic imagery and complex human narratives. In 1999 Neshat was the recipient of the Golden Lion Award at the Venice Biennial. In 2009, she directed her first feature-length film, *Women Without Men*, which received the Silver Lion Award for Best Director at the Venice International Film Festival. Her most recent feature film *Looking for Oum Kulthum* was released in 2017.

For further press information please contact: Laura McKechnan, Senior Communications Manager, National Portrait Gallery, Tel. 020 7321 6620 (not for publication)/Email lmckechnan@npg.org.uk

Notes to Editors

NPG 7052 Malala Yousafzai by Shirin Neshat ink on gelatin silver print, 2018, © National Portrait Gallery, London
Supported by Scott Collins and Lotta Ashdown, in partnership with Outset Contemporary Art Fund

MALALA II: (Malala Yousafzai)

By Rahmat Shah Sayel

Translated by Qasim Swati

O Malala I, Malala II is your reincarnation and the new Malala of the Pakhtoons.

You can listen to your own voice when Malala II is speaking after a long time, as Malala II is obsessed with what you believed in and acted upon.

As the flag made up of your red shawl is still flying over your grave in Maiwand as a symbol of your heroism for the sake of your Pashtoon Nation, Malala II is also following in your footsteps.

As you made your Pashtoon Nation undefeatable in the history of Maiwand by your own single *tappa* [a short folk song of northern Indian origin], Malala II is also determined,undefeated and strong enough in carrying out her mission.

No one could break your record of bravery for the last two generations, but she [Malala II] did so, because she does the same for her nation, as you did for yours.

If the people had valued you as equal to flowers [because of your bravery and achievements], so have the flowers themselves gifted Malala II to the people of Pakhtunkhwa.

You might have seen the wreckage of your country, but this Malala II is fit and proper enough to find a solution for compensating for that wreckage.

Whatever *tappa* you had sung in the battlefield of Maiwand; that *tappa* had been coined and invented by Malala II, as she is hugely inspiring.

As you encouraged the defeated and disheartened fighters of your nation to come back to the trenches and fight against the enemy, this is Malala II who is determined to accomplish your mission.

While you brought a huge honour to your nation by encouraging your countrymen to fight against the enemy, the same battle is fought by her [Malala II] with the help of a pen [education] to serve her nation.

You are the reflection of the poetry of Sa’eel, but she is a light born from your reflection.

Outset Contemporary Art Fund

Outset Contemporary Art Fund is the only international philanthropic organisation which has championed innovative private/public partnerships for over 15 years, in support of the creative ecosystem. Outset achieves this vital role by pooling donations from entrepreneurial patrons and engaged partners to support new art for the widest possible audiences. Addressing the complex pressures facing the creative community globally today, Outset’s presence in 9 countries supports art projects benefiting urban and regional communities, artists and curators, keynote publications, and the Outset-led initiative

Studiomakers, in support of the Mayor of London's mission to safeguard affordable space for artists and creative professionals for the long term.

outset.

Coming Home

Coming Home is a major new project which will see the National Portrait Gallery loan portraits of iconic individuals to places across the UK they are most closely associated with. The initiative will enable fifty portraits from the national Collection to travel to towns and cities across the country from 2019 onwards and has been made possible by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, and generous contributions from The Thompson Family Charitable Trust and funds raised at the Gallery's Portrait Gala in 2017.

National Portrait Gallery

The National Portrait Gallery was founded in 1856 to encourage through portraiture the appreciation and understanding of the people who have made and are making British history and culture. Today it promotes engagement with portraiture in all media to a wide-ranging public by conserving, growing and sharing the world's largest collection of portraits. The Gallery, just off Trafalgar Square, holds the most extensive collection of portraits in the world. With over 1000 portraits on display, across three floors, from Elizabeth I to David Beckham, the Gallery has something for everyone. Artists featured range from Holbein to Hockney, and the Collection includes work across all media, from painting and sculpture to photography and video. As well as the permanent displays, the Gallery has a diverse and ever-changing programme of exhibitions and events that promote an understanding and appreciation of portraiture in all forms. www.npg.org.uk

National Portrait Gallery, St Martin's Place WC2H 0HE, opening hours Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Saturday, Sunday: 10am – 6pm (Gallery closure commences at 5.50pm) **Late Opening:** Friday: 10am – 9pm (Gallery closure commences at 8.50pm) **Nearest Underground:** Leicester Square/Charing Cross **General information:** 0207 306 0055 **Recorded information:** 020 7312 2463 **Website/Tickets:** www.npg.org.uk