

## News Release

Monday 20 May 2019

### CECIL BEATON'S DAZZLING BRIGHT YOUNG THINGS BROUGHT TOGETHER FOR THE FIRST TIME IN MAJOR NEW EXHIBITION

*Rarely exhibited prints by renowned photographer Cecil Beaton to go on display at National Portrait Gallery London in spring 2020*



L-R: *Mrs Freeman-Thomas* by Cecil Beaton, 1928. © The Cecil Beaton Studio Archive at Sotheby's; *Cecil Beaton* by Paul Tanqueray, 1937. National Portrait Gallery, London © Estate of Paul Tanqueray; *The Bright Young Things at Wilsford* by Cecil Beaton, 1927. © The Cecil Beaton Studio Archive at Sotheby's

#### *Cecil Beaton's Bright Young Things*

National Portrait Gallery, London

12 March – 7 June 2020

Cecil Beaton's portraits from a golden age will be brought together the first time in a major new exhibition opening at the National Portrait Gallery, London, in March 2020. Featuring around 150 works, many of which are rarely exhibited, *Cecil Beaton's Bright Young Things* will explore the extravagant world of the glamorous and stylish 'Bright Young Things' of the twenties and thirties, seen through the eye of renowned British photographer Cecil Beaton.

Through the prism of Beaton's portraits the exhibition will present the leading cast, to many of whom he would become close, and who in these early years helped refine his remarkable photographic style - artists and friends **Rex Whistler** and **Stephen Tennant**, set and costume designer **Oliver Messel**, composer **William Walton**, modernist poets **Iris Tree** and **Nancy Cunard**, glamorous socialites **Edwina Mountbatten** and **Diana Guinness (née Mitford)**, actresses and anglophiles **Tallulah Bankhead** and **Anna May Wong**, among many others. Brought to vivid life each of them has a story to tell. There are the slightly less well known too – style icons **Paula Gellibrand**, **the Marquesa de Casa Maury** and **Baba**, **Princesse de Faucigny-Lucinge**, the eccentric composer and aesthete **Lord Berners**, modernist poet **Brian Howard**, part model for *Brideshead Revisited's* mannered 'Anthony Blanche', ballet dancer

**Tilly Losch** and **Dolly Wilde** Oscar's equally flamboyant niece. Also featured are those of an older generation, who gave Beaton's career early impetus: outspoken poet and critic **Edith Sitwell**, the famously witty social figure **Lady Diana Cooper**, artist and Irish patriot **Hazel**, **Lady Lavery**, and the extraordinary, bejewelled **Lady Alexander**, whose husband produced Oscar Wilde's comedies and who became an early patron of Beaton's.

Cecil Beaton's own life and relationship with the 'Bright Young Things' will be woven into the exhibition, not least in self-portraits and those by his contemporaries. Socially avaricious, he was a much-photographed figure, a celebrity in his own right. Beaton's transformation from middle-class suburban schoolboy to glittering society figure and the unrivalled star of *Vogue*, revealed a social mobility unthinkable before the Great War. He used his artistic skills, his ambition and his larger-than-life personality to become part of a world that he would not surely have joined as a right. Throughout the twenties and thirties his photographs place his friends and heroes under perceptive, colourful and sympathetic scrutiny.



L-R: **Anna May Wong** by Cecil Beaton, c.1929. © The Cecil Beaton Studio Archive at Sotheby's; **Baba Beaton as 'Heloise' in 'Great Lovers Pageant'** by Cecil Beaton, 1927. National Portrait Gallery, London; **Oliver Messel** by Cecil Beaton, 1932. © The Cecil Beaton Studio Archive at Sotheby's

The exhibition will bring together loans from national and international collections and in particular an extensive loan from the Cecil Beaton Studio Archive at Sotheby's. Highlights will include vintage prints of Beaton's earliest subjects, his glamorous sisters **Nancy** and **Baba**; the *Vogue* portrait of his friend **George Rylands** as 'The Duchess of Malfi', published when he was a student, and which set him on the road to fame. There are glimpses from high-spirited revels at country house weekends, including a rare vintage print of the leading lights dressed as eighteenth-century shepherds and shepherdesses on the bridge at Wilsford Manor, regarded now as *the* quintessential depiction of the Bright Young Things. In town, parties, charity balls and pageants were enlivened by an almost maniacal zeal for the theatrical and the extravagant in costume and attitude.



L-R: **George 'Dadie' Rylands** by Cecil Beaton, 1924. © The Cecil Beaton Studio Archive at Sotheby's; **Tallulah Bankhead** by Cecil Beaton, 1932. Museum of the City of New York, gift of Hope Williams, 1973 © National Portrait Gallery, London; **Self-Portrait** by Rex Whistler, c.1934. National Portrait Gallery, London

In addition to Beaton's own portraits, the exhibition will also feature paintings by friends and artists known to Beaton including **Rex Whistler, Henry Lamb, Ambrose McEvoy, Christopher Wood** and **Augustus John**; portraits of Beaton by **Paul Tanqueray, Dorothy Wilding, and Curtis Moffat**; as well as letters, magazines, invitations, scrapbooks, book jackets and other ephemera.

Dr Nicholas Cullinan, Director, National Portrait Gallery, London said: "We are delighted to announce this major new exhibition for spring 2020 and to bring together for the first time so many of Beaton's dazzling photographs, high on art and artifice, which beautifully capture the original and creative world of the Bright Young Things."

Robin Muir, Curator of *Cecil Beaton's Bright Young Things* said: "The exhibition will bring to life a deliriously eccentric, glamorous and creative era of British cultural life, combining High Society and the avant-garde, artists and writers, socialites and partygoers, all set against the rhythms of the Jazz Age."

The exhibition will be curated by Robin Muir, Curator of the *Vogue 100: A Century of Style* exhibition at the National Portrait Gallery in 2016 and a Contributing Editor to *Vogue* (to which Beaton himself contributed for over 50 years)

### ***Cecil Beaton's Bright Young Things***

12 March – 7 June 2020 at the National Portrait Gallery, London

Tickets without donation from £17 - £20

Tickets with donation from £19 - £22

Free for Members and Patrons

[npg.org.uk](http://npg.org.uk)

### **£5 tickets**

Every Friday £5 tickets are available to anyone aged under 25. Proof of age will be required.

Every Monday to Wednesday from 10.00 – 11.00 all concession tickets will be priced at £5.

Spring Season 2020 sponsored by Herbert Smith Freehills LLP

### **Publication**

The exhibition is accompanied by a fully illustrated hardback catalogue, featuring around 150 beautifully reproduced works by Cecil Beaton and his contemporaries. In addition to the works illustrated there is an essay by Robin Muir, and biographies for each of the 'Bright Young Things'. The catalogue will be available from 12 March 2020 via the Gallery shops and online [npg.org.uk/shop](http://npg.org.uk/shop)

The exhibition will tour to the Millennium Gallery, Sheffield from 25 June – 18 October 2020 and The Wilson, Cheltenham's art gallery and museum from 14 November 2020 – 28 February 2021.

**For further press information please contact:** Laura McKeach, Senior Communications Manager, National Portrait Gallery, Tel. 020 7321 6620, [lmckeach@npg.org.uk](mailto:lmckeach@npg.org.uk)

### **Notes to Editors:**

#### **Cecil Beaton**

In a long life, Cecil Beaton (1904-80) was a man of varied and outstanding talents. As a young photographer he recorded London and New York society and the golden age of Hollywood. He was *Vogue's* chief photographer for several decades, among the great chroniclers of fashion, and a significant portrait photographer. During the Second World War his documentary work on the realities of conflict and its aftermath, revealed him as a photographer of great compassion. As a lifelong cultural and social commentator his observations on taste, decoration and stylish living were eloquent; as a diarist he was often devastatingly forthright; as caricaturist his drawings were razor-sharp and as an essayist he was witty and fluent on a range of subjects. He was a set and costume designer for theatre and film of world renown (and for which he won three Oscars); a self-taught and enthusiastic horticulturalist, a painter and illustrator, a designer of clothes, book jackets and interiors. He is also known as a

photographer of the Royal Family, whom he propelled, visually, into the modern age. This wide-ranging career — for which Beaton was knighted in 1972 — lost momentum only when he suffered a debilitating stroke. Everyone of consequence had sat for him from Greta Garbo to Picasso, Augustus John to Queen Elizabeth II, Winston Churchill to Audrey Hepburn, Coco Chanel to David Hockney, Marilyn Monroe to Andy Warhol.