

News Release

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National Portrait Gallery Unveils Newly Commissioned Portraits of Leading Film Directors

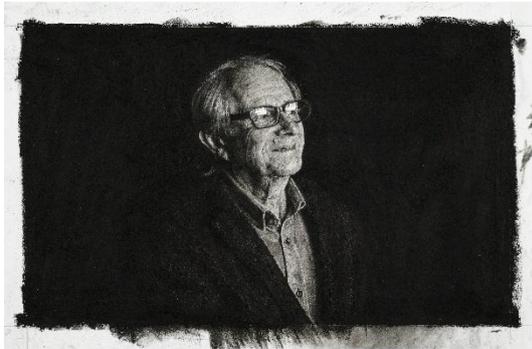
*Portraits of Amma Asante, Paul Greengrass, Asif Kapadia, Ken Loach, Sam Mendes,
Nick Park, Sally Potter, Sir Ridley Scott and Joe Wright go on display for first time*



Images clockwise from top left: (29:04:37) Ridley Scott by Nina Mae Fowler, 2018-19; (39:44:02) Sam Mendes by Nina Mae Fowler, 2018-19; (01:44:48) Sally Potter by Nina Mae Fowler, 2018-19; (00:21:22) Joe Wright by Nina Mae Fowler, 2018-19. All works © National Portrait Gallery. Photographed by Douglas Atfield

The National Portrait Gallery, London, has unveiled a major new commission of portrait drawings of some of the UK's leading film directors by London-born artist Nina Mae Fowler. The portraits have gone on public display for the first time in a new display *Luminary Drawings: Portraits of Film Directors by Nina Mae Fowler* (12 April – 1 October 2019).

Fowler's work often investigates fame, desire and our relationship with cinema. For the commission, she invited directors Amma Asante, Paul Greengrass, Asif Kapadia, Ken Loach, Sam Mendes, Nick Park, Sally Potter, Sir Ridley Scott and Joe Wright to choose a film of particular significance to them. During the sittings, Fowler projected the film of their choice, and recorded their reactions on camera and through loose sketches, with their faces lit only by the light of the screen in an otherwise darkened space.



Images L-R: (20:30:17) Ken Loach by Nina Mae Fowler, 2018-19; (01:40:25) Amma Asante by Nina Mae Fowler, 2018-19. All works © National Portrait Gallery. Photographed by Douglas Atfield

Fowler watched the films of the sittings frame by frame to extract stills that would form the basis of the final charcoal drawings. Intriguingly the artist has chosen not to reveal the directors' film choices. The intimate scale of the works draws the viewer into the minds of the people behind the lens, conveying the inspiration felt by the directors when watching great cinema.



Images clockwise from top: (00:52:33) Asif Kapadia by Nina Mae Fowler, 2018-19; (00:58:51) Nick Park by Nina Mae Fowler, 2018-19; (29:53:14) Paul Greengrass by Nina Mae Fowler, 2018-19. All works © National Portrait Gallery. Photographed by Douglas Atfield.

Quotes:

Dr Nicholas Cullinan, Director, National Portrait Gallery said: “We are delighted to have unveiled this unique commission, which has been a long-term ambition for the Gallery to help strengthen our representation of the talent and diversity within the film industry in the UK today.”

Nina Mae Fowler, artist, said: “The beauty of these sittings was twofold; firstly, the Directors lost any sense of being watched or portrayed as they were too engrossed in the film, secondly, we experienced the film together, which created conversation, laughter and an immediate bond between strangers. I want the viewer to wonder what film the directors are watching and to seek the answers in their faces. The only clues the viewer has are their reactions, the exact frame (documented in the titles) and the light thrown on them by the films themselves.”

Amma Asante, (*A Way of Life, A United Kingdom, Where Hands Touch*), said: “It has been both a privilege and a fascinating experience to sit for Nina. Her work somehow captures what a photograph cannot. There is a mystique that I find utterly compelling and beautiful. “

Paul Greengrass, (*The Murder of Steven Lawrence, United 93, The Bourne Ultimatum*), said: “I've never sat for a portrait, so it was a strange experience to say the least! Directors are more used to studying others, than being studied, but I was swept along by Nina's conviction that she could create a unique group of portraits that anthologise a diverse group of British film makers at a time when the British film community is in a rich period of growth. And, second, through 'observing the observers' create a collective study of obsession, which is ultimately what filmmaking is all about.”

Ken Loach, (*Cathy Come Home, Kes, I, Daniel Blake*), said: “This was a delightful project but also an original one. It was easy to be drawn into a film that I know well, but was pleased to enjoy again. What a treat!”

Asif Kapadia, (*The Warrior, Senna, Amy*), said: “I was so surprised, honoured and excited when I learnt that Nina Mae Fowler was going to draw my portrait for the National Portrait Gallery. It was a strange feeling to be studied, I'm obviously used to being behind the camera, or I'm the one studying people for years when in the edit suite as I make my films, so this was an unusual situation. I've now seen the drawing and I think it's really fantastic, it's me!”

Sam Mendes, (*American Beauty, Road to Perdition, Skyfall*), said: “Being watched has never been so much fun.”

Nick Park (*The Wrong Trousers, A Close Shave, Chicken Run*) said: “The format for this sitting was very unique and inspired – the idea to get me to watch my favourite movie while having my portrait sketched was very effective - I was absorbed and unaware of being observed and my every reaction, expression and nuance being noted.”

Sally Potter, (*Orlando, Yes, The Party*), said: “Being watched while watching was an interesting reversal. I often strive for invisibility as a director. I am there to look, not to be looked at. The portrait somehow looks the way I feel - hidden (in this case behind my hand and glasses) but beady-eyed. I recognise myself in a way I rarely do in a photograph.”

Sir Ridley Scott (*Alien franchise, Gladiator, Blade Runner*), said: “I was not keen on sitting for a portrait because I dislike being photographed intensely. But Nina persevered and is a hard one to turn down. She sent me a book on her work, and I was blown away. She explained her technique and how she worked to enable people to sit still for the session. In my case, she wanted me to watch the first film I ever saw. I think it worked out.”

Joe Wright (*Pride and Prejudice, Atonement, Darkest Hour*), said: “I thoroughly enjoyed Nina’s process. Having me watch one of my favourite movies whilst I sat for her meant that I wasn’t too self-conscious. The relationship between viewer and movie is strangely intimate, and I think Nina’s portrait captures that intimacy.”

Luminary Drawings: Portraits of Film Directors by Nina Mae Fowler

12 April – 1 October 2019

National Portrait Gallery London npg.org.uk

Admission FREE

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Notes to Editors:

Biographies:

Nina Mae Fowler (b.1981) is best known for her sumptuously detailed large-scale drawings and installations. Her work interrogates themes of celebrity, beauty, power and sexuality and is preoccupied with Hollywood’s ‘Golden Age’. Fowler has been shortlisted for numerous prestigious prizes and awards, including the Jerwood Drawing Prize (2015 & 2010), Aesthetica Art Prize (2014), Drawing Now Award (2014), Young Masters Prize (2012) and the BP Portrait Award (2008). Past commissions have included portraits of evolutionary biologist Professor Richard Dawkins and biographer Dame Hermione Lee. Her works have been exhibited internationally, including frequent solo exhibitions in London, Paris and Leipzig, and are held in private and public collections including New College, Oxford, UK and the ‘Try-me’ collection, a public foundation in Richmond, Virginia. In 2018 David Lynch’s establishment Silencio in Paris held a retrospective of Fowler’s work.

Amma Asante (b.1969) originally trained in dance and drama at the Barbara Speake Stage School in London and appeared in the television school drama *Grange Hill*. Leaving acting in her late-teens, she began writing in her early 20s and founded her own production company. Her critically acclaimed directorial debut *A Way of Life* (2004), which she also wrote, won Asante the Carl Foreman Award for Outstanding Debut Feature at the 2005 BAFTA Awards. It was followed by *Belle* (2013), inspired by the eighteenth-century portrait of Dido Elizabeth Belle and her cousin Lady Elizabeth Murray, *A United Kingdom* (2016) and *Where Hands Touch* (2018). *A United Kingdom* was the first film by a black director to open the BFI London Film Festival, in October 2016. British-born to Ghanaian parents, Asante was appointed MBE in 2017 for services to film.

Paul Greengrass (b.1955) is known for documentary-style thrillers characterised by realism and the use of hand-held cameras. His films include *Resurrected* (1989), *The Murder of Stephen Lawrence* (1999), which won the BAFTA TV Award for Best Single Drama, multi-award winning *Bloody Sunday* (2002), *United 93* (2006), for which he won the BAFTA Award for Best Director, as well as three films in the popular *Jason Bourne* franchise (2004–16) and *22 July* (2018). His 2013 film *Captain Phillips* garnered six nominations at the 2014 Academy Awards. In 2008, he co-founded Directors UK, a professional organisation of British filmmakers, through which he has championed the need for the film industry to be more diverse and inclusive. In 2017, he received the British Film Institute Fellowship in recognition of his outstanding contribution to film.

Asif Kapadia (b.1972) studied at the Royal College of Art, where he created the award-winning short *The Sheep Thief* (1997). His first feature film *The Warrior* (2001), shot in Rajasthan and the Himalayas, won two BAFTA awards and established Kapadia's visually striking technique. He has since become a vital name in documentary film, winning BAFTA Awards for *Senna* (2010) about the Brazilian Formula One racing driver Ayrton Senna and an Academy Award and BAFTA for *Amy* (2015), which charted the life of British singer Amy Winehouse. His forthcoming feature documentary *Diego Maradona*, about the controversial footballer, continues his exploration of the lives of 'child geniuses'.

Ken Loach (b.1936) was born in Nuneaton. He attended King Edward VI Grammar School and went on to study law at St. Peter's Hall, Oxford. After a brief spell in the theatre, Loach was recruited by the BBC in 1963 as a television director. This launched a long career directing films for television and the cinema, from *Cathy Come Home* and *Kes* in the sixties to *Land and Freedom*, *Sweet Sixteen*, *The Wind That Shakes The Barley* (Palme d'Or, Cannes Film Festival 2006), *Looking for Eric*, *The Angels' Share* and *I, Daniel Blake* (Palme d'Or, Cannes Film Festival 2016).

Sam Mendes (b.1965) founded and ran the Donmar Warehouse in London for ten years. He was the founding director of The Bridge Project and Neal Street Productions. His work has been seen at the National Theatre, RSC, Royal Court, Old Vic, Young Vic, BAM, the West End and on Broadway. Film includes *American Beauty*, *Road to Perdition*, *Jarhead*, *Revolutionary Road*, *Away We Go*, *Skyfall*, *Spectre* and the upcoming *1917*. Awards include Academy Award Best Director, BAFTA Award, Golden Globe Award Best Director, 2 Tony Awards, 5 Olivier Awards, the Olivier Special Award, 3 Evening Standard Awards, Empire Inspiration Award, Directors Guild of America Award and the Shakespeare Prize. He has also won the Director's Guild Award for lifetime achievement.

Nick Park (b.1958). The creator of *Wallace and Gromit*, Park is a renowned animation director. Park studied animation at the National Film and Television School, where he first developed the characters for Wallace and Gromit. He has won Academy Awards for the films *Creature Comforts* (1989), *The Wrong Trousers* (1993), *A Close Shave* (1995) and *The Curse of the Were-Rabbit* (2005). His other films include *Chicken Run* (2000) and *Early Man* (2018).

Sally Potter (b.1949) made her first 8mm film aged fourteen. She has since written and directed eight feature films, as well as many short films (including *Thriller* and *Play*) and a television series, and has directed opera (*Carmen* for the ENO in 2007) and other live work. *Orlando* (1992), Potter's bold adaptation of Virginia Woolf's classic novel, first brought her work to a wider audience. It was followed by *The Tango Lesson* (1996), *The Man Who Cried* (2000), *Yes* (2004), *Rage* (2009) and *Ginger & Rosa* (2012). Her latest feature, *The Party*, was released in 2017. Potter's films have won over forty international awards and received both Academy Award and BAFTA nominations. She has had full career retrospectives of her film and video work at the BFI Southbank, London, MoMA, New York, and the Cinematheque, Madrid. She was awarded an OBE in 2012.

Sir Ridley Scott (b.1937). A prolific director, Scott has created a highly acclaimed body of work since his breakthrough film *Alien* (1979). His subsequent films range in subject matter and setting and include science fiction film *Blade Runner* (1982), *Thelma & Louise* (1991), Academy Award-winning drama *Gladiator* (2000), *The Martian* (2015) and *All the Money in the World* (2017). Scott was knighted in 2003 for services to the film industry and in 2018 received the BAFTA Fellowship Award for lifetime achievement.

Joe Wright (b.1972) initially acted professionally and took classes at the Anna Scher Theatre School. He studied at Camberwell College of Arts and then at Central St Martins, where he created installations and short films. His shorts were brought to the attention of the BBC, which led to his directorial debut aged twenty-six with the BBC's mini-series *Nature Boy* (2000). He went on to direct feature films *Pride and Prejudice* (2005), which won the BAFTA Award for Most Promising Newcomer, *Atonement* (2007), which won the BAFTA Award for Best Film, *Hanna* (2011) and *Darkest Hour* (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