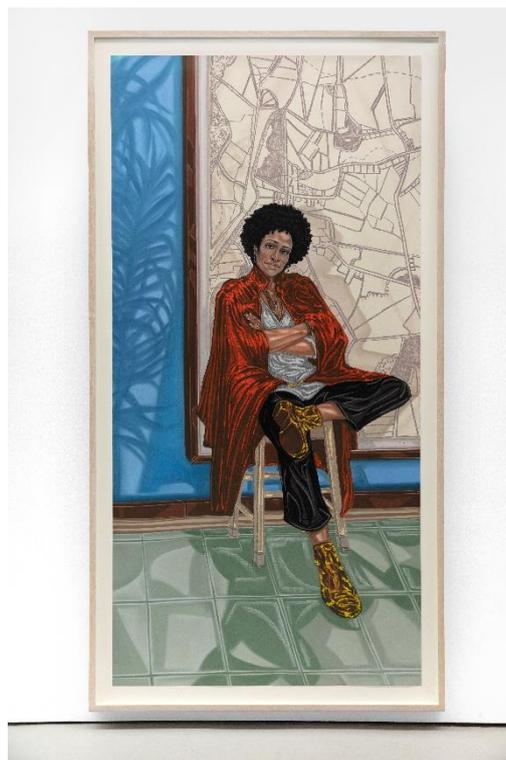


Press Release

Monday 6 July 2020

National Portrait Gallery Commissions New Portrait of Zadie Smith by Toyin Ojih Odutola

*Portrait will go on display in Zadie Smith's home borough of Brent as part of
Brent 2020 London Borough of Culture*



***Sadie* (Zadie Smith) by Toyin Ojih Odutola, 2018-19, Pastel, charcoal, pencil and graphite on paper © Toyin Ojih Odutola. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York. Purchased with generous support from Zekiye Cingillioglu**

The National Portrait Gallery, London has commissioned a new portrait of one of Britain's best known writers, Zadie Smith by Nigerian born artist, Toyin Ojih Odutola. The full-length portrait, which joins the Gallery's Collection, is available to view online on the Gallery website alongside an exclusive interview with Smith and Ojih Odutola by Katy Hessel, art historian and founder of The Great Women Artists Instagram account. The portrait will go on public display in the Brent Museum

and Archive, where Smith grew up in North West London, in December 2020 as part of Brent 2020, London Borough of Culture.

Read the interview with Zadie Smith and Toyin Ojih Odutola npg.org.uk/ZadieSmith

Ojih Odutola is, in Smith's words, the 'central light in a thrilling new generation of black artists.' In her portrait of Smith she has included a range of subtle details. Shapes and shadows evoke palm trees which reference Smith's Jamaican heritage and a large map of North West London is in the background. Ojih Odutola chose the title, "Sadie," to signify the foundations of Smith's life, as a woman from North West London with firm roots in Jamaica and England. She is drawn in a relaxed pose, donning her natural hair, to show an assured, talented woman on her own terms.

Zadie Smith was born in Brent, London in 1975 and was brought up in Willesden. At the age of 14, she changed her name from Sadie to Zadie. The first member of her family to go to university, Smith studied English at King's College, Cambridge. She became a household name with the publication of her first novel *White Teeth* (2000), which picked up a host of awards including the Whitbread First Novel Award. Her subsequent books include *NW* (2012), *Swing Time* (2016) and the collection of essays, *Feel Free* (2018).

Born in Ife, Nigeria in 1985, Toyin Ojih Odutola moved to America aged five. Known to portray members of her family and friends, she predominantly draws imaginary characters for the purpose of her storytelling. Many of her portraits contain contradictory elements – improbably angular interiors and landscapes collaged from around the globe – to formulate images which resist any specificity of place or time. Detailed and labour intensive, her drawings are particularly striking for the dense patterning of skin that makes every face a glowing, moving topographical landscape.

Public collections holding work by Ojih Odutola include the Museum of Modern Art, New York, The Whitney Museum of American Art, The Metropolitan Museum of Art and the National Museum of African Art (Smithsonian). Her acclaimed 2017-18 solo show, *To Wander Determined* at The Whitney Museum of American Art presented an interconnected series of fictional portraits, chronicling the lives of two aristocratic Nigerian families. Ojih Odutola's first UK solo exhibition *A Countervailing Theory* will open in August 2020 at The Curve at Barbican.

This is the first work by Ojih Odutola to enter the National Portrait Gallery Collection, purchased with generous support from Zekiye Cingillioglu, and the first work by Ojih Odutola to enter a British public collection. The Gallery holds three other photographic portraits of Smith in the Collection, taken at the beginning of her career in 1999, 2000 and 2002.

Quotes:

Dr Nicholas Cullinan, Director, National Portrait Gallery, London said: "We are delighted to have commissioned this beautiful and monumental new portrait of one of the greatest literary voices of our time by one of the most innovative and exciting artists working today. It also represents another significant step (among many more that are needed and planned over the next few years) in our ongoing commitment to increase both the representation of women and black sitters and artists within our Collection. We are therefore thrilled that this is the first work by Toyin Ojih Odutola to enter a British public collection. We are also pleased to be able to display the work in Brent as part

of our plans to share hundreds of portraits across the UK while the Gallery is closed for this redevelopment, and look forward to its return to a transformed National Portrait Gallery in 2023.

Zadie Smith said: “I feel so proud of Toyin, first and foremost. I know her art will have a tremendous effect on young people because I’m a grown ass woman and it’s had a tremendous effect on me. Becoming familiar with her images is like having something I missed and wanted in childhood delivered to me now, as an adult. And to be a Toyin creation myself, on the walls of the Portrait Gallery? It’s incredible. I still can’t quite believe it.”

Toyin Ojih Odutola said: “When I got the letter that I was to create a commission portrait of Zadie, I cried. The National Portrait Gallery is one of my favourite museums in the world, and Zadie is one of my all-time favourite writers. It was surreal. I took this commission to heart and wanted to create an homage to significant work this woman has done, but also a love letter to Black Britain. To show an accomplished, brilliant, self-assured person in her element, with her natural hair out and free, and legs squarely crossed, taking her place as she sees fit, looking directly at you—at all of us. This isn’t to say - yes, she belongs in this space, too; but rather - we all belong here, always have and always will.”

Lois Stonock, Artistic Director of Brent 2020 London Borough of Culture said: “We are delighted that the National Portrait Gallery will bring this newly commissioned portrait of Zadie Smith to Brent, her home, for the Borough of Culture. It will go on show at Brent Museum and Archives, where visitors can find out about the stories of Brent and its people both in the Museum and online.”

www.npg.org.uk/ZadieSmith

For further press information please contact: press@npg.org.uk

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.

www.npg.org.uk

Inspiring People

Inspiring People is the National Portrait Gallery’s biggest ever development since the building in St Martin’s Place opened in 1896. The project, supported by The National Lottery Heritage Fund will see a transformed National Portrait Gallery, including a comprehensive re-display and re-interpretation of the Gallery’s Collection from the Tudors to now across 40 refurbished galleries, combined with a complete refurbishment of the building, restoring historic features, creating a new and more welcoming visitor entrance and public forecourt on the building’s North Façade, and enhancing the Gallery’s accessibility.

The designs by Jamie Fobert Architects, working in partnership with Purcell, will also see the return of the Gallery’s East Wing to public use as the new Weston Wing, including restoring the original gallery spaces, the creation of new retail and catering facilities and its own dedicated entrance at street level; and a new Learning Centre for visitors of all ages with studios, breakout spaces and high quality practical facilities. The Gallery’s existing entrance will also remain, with new step-free access.

In order to complete the project efficiently and to safeguard visitors, members of staff and the Collection, the Gallery in St Martin’s Place will temporarily close to the public from 29 June 2020 until spring 2023, while essential building works take place. During this time the Gallery will share its unique Collection of portraits with the nation in a major programme of activities across the UK, supported by The National Lottery Heritage

Fund and a major new grant from Art Fund. Beginning in 2020, this ambitious nationwide programme will show hundreds of works from the National Portrait Gallery's Collection, some of which are rarely loaned, through a series of partnerships and collaborations during the period of redevelopment.

Brent 2020, London Borough of Culture

Brent is The Mayor's London Borough of Culture for 2020. Our programme will explore the stories, art and emotions that hold life in Brent together, uncovering and celebrating the borough's untold tales and unheard voices. We are the home of Zadie Smith, reggae, English football and its captains. We have London's oldest road, the biggest Hindu Temple outside India, the Kiln Theatre and Mahogany Carnival Design. We are where city becomes Metroland; where roads, waterways and railways cross; where outsiders fight for their place. We are Jayaben Desai, George Michael, Cyrille Regis, Keith Moon, Rachel Yankey, Janet Kay, Twiggy, Bob Marley and Trojan Records. It is from this alchemy that our year of culture comes. Brent is more than a borough of culture: This is the Borough of Cultures.