

## News Release

Strictly Embargoed until 00.01 Friday 30 April 2021

### William Shakespeare and Queen Elizabeth I Travel to Korea in National Portrait Gallery Exhibition

*New major exhibition of some of the National Portrait Gallery, London's best-known works opens at the National Museum of Korea in Seoul, South Korea*



*National Portrait Gallery conservator in London uses video call technology to oversee the installation of the 'Chandos portrait' of William Shakespeare in the Gallery's Icons and Identities exhibition at the National Museum of Korea in Seoul. Photograph © Park Jung Hoon. Portrait: William Shakespeare, associated with John Taylor, circa 1600-1610, © National Portrait Gallery, London.*

The **National Portrait Gallery** is staging its first ever exhibition in Korea as ***Icons and Identities from the National Portrait Gallery, London*** opened this week at the **National Museum of Korea** from **29 April until 15 August 2021**. This major new exhibition is the first dedicated to western portraiture to travel to Korea and features seventy-eight of the National Portrait Gallery's most significant portraits, shown together internationally for the first time while the Gallery in London is temporarily

closed for a [major transformation](#). The exhibition will also travel to the Fries Museum in the Netherlands in September 2021.

The exhibition includes iconic works that normally feature in the Gallery's permanent displays in London, rarely if ever leaving the Gallery's walls, and some that have never been outside the UK since their acquisition into the Collection, such as Sir Anthony van Dyck's last self-portrait and the self-portraits of twentieth-century artists Doris Zinkeisen and Paule Vézelay.



*National Portrait Gallery conservator in London uses video call technology to oversee the condition checking and installation of portraits in the Gallery's Icons and Identities exhibition at the National Museum of Korea in Seoul. Photographs © Park Jung Hoon. Portraits L-R: Horatio Nelson by Sir William Beechey, 1800; Princess Elizabeth, Queen of Bohemia and Electress Palatine by Robert Peake the Elder, circa 1610. Both works © National Portrait Gallery, London*

*Icons and Identities* features some of the most well-known faces in British and international history, from Shakespeare and Queen Elizabeth I to Nelson Mandela, as well as acclaimed artists from Sir Peter Paul Rubens and Sir Thomas Lawrence to Lucian Freud, Marlene Dumas, Martin Parr and Shirin Neshat. It provides a fascinating insight into the representation of identity in portraits. The rich variety of methods utilised by artists to convey aspects of a sitter's identity, often multifaceted, is a thread that runs throughout the exhibition.

Among the works on display are portraits of Charles Dickens, the Brontë sisters, Isaac Newton, Ed Sheeran, David Beckham, David Bowie, Malala Yousafzai, together with the first picture to enter the Gallery's Collection, the *Chandos* portrait of William Shakespeare. Other highlights include the only known oil portrait of Mary Seacole by Albert Charles Challen, Michael Craig Martin's digital portrait of Dame Zaha Hadid, that uses computer software to make random colour changes to the line drawing of Hadid, and the grand portrait of The Capel Family by Cornelius Johnson that has never left the Gallery since its acquisition in 1970.

*Icons and Identities* moves away from a more traditional chronological approach and instead provides an overview of some of the key themes at the core of portraiture's fascination. Through a thematic presentation the exhibition encourages new thinking about the artistic and social purposes that portraits served, and continue to serve, and fresh insights into portraiture's variety of form and function. While recognising the iconic status of many of the sitters and the important historical contexts of the portraits, the groupings are designed to provoke connections and dialogues across six interrelated themes, and between sitters and artists across time and space. **'Fame'** explores the relationship between image and public renown; **'Power'** looks at the use of portraiture in promoting different forms of authority; **'Love and Loss'** reflects on the intimate connection between

portraiture, affection, and absence; **'Identity'** focuses on the various ways in which portraiture represents diverse identities; **'Innovation'** investigates the new ways of seeing and creating pioneered by significant Western portrait artists; and **'Self-portrait'** provides an insight into what occurs when artists turn their critical gaze on themselves.

The National Portrait Gallery is continuing to share its exhibitions and Collection with audiences across the UK while the building in London is closed for the [Inspiring People](#) redevelopment. Partner exhibitions include *Tudors to Windsors: British Royal Portraits* at the National Maritime Museum in Greenwich and *Cecil Beaton's Bright Young Things* at Sheffield's Millennium Gallery, both due to open in May this year. The *Taylor Wessing Photographic Portrait Prize 2021* exhibition will take place at Cromwell Place, a new arts hub in South Kensington, from 10 November 2021 until 2 January 2022. The Gallery is also continuing to loan works nationwide, through initiatives such as *Coming Home*, which sees portraits of iconic individuals from the Collection traveling to the towns and cities most closely associated with their subjects.

#### Quotes:

**Culture Minister Caroline Dinenage said:** "I am delighted these iconic portraits will be appreciated by visitors to the National Museum of Korea while the National Portrait Gallery's doors are temporarily closed. This is the first major international exhibition in Korea since the pandemic began and it highlights the importance of continued cultural collaboration between our two great countries."

**Dr Nicholas Cullinan, Director, National Portrait Gallery, London, said:** "*Icons and Identities* offers a once-in-a-generation opportunity to see a selection of the Gallery's most cherished portraits together internationally, while the building in London is temporarily closed for our *Inspiring People* redevelopment. During the closure period hundreds of works from our Collection will travel across the UK and overseas, and we are delighted to be able to share the Gallery's Collection in such an unprecedented way for new audiences across the world to enjoy."

**MIN Byoungchan, Director General, National Museum of Korea, said:** "In the midst of the global crisis caused by COVID-19 pandemic, we are very pleased to open a special exhibition introducing the masterpieces from the National Portrait Gallery. British art and its rich portraiture tradition will impress many visitors of the National Museum of Korea. I would like to express my deepest gratitude to the Director, Dr. Nicholas Cullinan, and the staff members of the National Portrait Gallery for collaborating with us to organize such a meaningful exhibition together."

**Tanya Bentley, National Portrait Gallery Curator of *Icons and Identities*, said:** "*Icons and Identities* marks a significant moment as the first exhibition dedicated to Western portraiture to travel to Korea and it is such a privilege to be able to share the National Portrait Gallery's rich Collection in this way. Visitors will be invited to engage with the stories of key individuals from British history as represented by artists across five centuries. Their portraits will be displayed thematically, exploring the many different functions and forms portraits have had throughout history and their continuing relevance today."

## ***Icons and Identities from the National Portrait Gallery, London***

29 April – 15 August 2021

National Museum of Korea, South Korea

<https://www.museum.go.kr>

### **Publication**

A new publication, *Icons and Identities*, will be published internationally to accompany the exhibition. The book, edited by Rab MacGibbon and Tanya Bentley, is an important introduction to the National Portrait Gallery's Collection, allowing readers to explore these beautifully reproduced works and draw their own connections across the six core themes from the exhibition. *Icons and Identities* is priced at £24.95 and available at [npgshop.org.uk](http://npgshop.org.uk) and all good bookshops.

**For press information contact:** National Portrait Gallery Press Office [press@npg.org.uk](mailto:press@npg.org.uk)

### **Notes to editors**

#### **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](http://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 has temporarily closed 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 in a major programme of activities across the UK and internationally. Beginning in 2020, this ambitious 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.