

**Picture the Poet – Fusion Digital Gallery audio transcript:**

**Photographer Madeleine Waller on her portrait of Andrew Motion**

It was the first time I photographed Andrew Motion and it was actually a really memorable experience, because I had arranged to photograph him and then, really sadly, I found out my father had just died and I had to fly back to Australia. Actually I think he was sick at that point, so I had to cancel... I had set up all these appointments and I had to cancel them all.

When I went to meet Andrew he was so lovely and it was almost like a therapy for me because he'd had a similar experience recently.

I think it was his home. We sort of had a look around the house and I think I did a couple of head shots inside the house and I wasn't really happy with them and then we went out into the garden and he just sat down and I said 'oh that's quite nice' and we sort of took it from there really.

Quite a lot of the time when you're taking a portrait, you're sort of trying to set something up but if you just allow the person to sit for a minute they fall into a natural pose and I think that is what it was about.

It think that picture is quite reflect about the conversation, it does remind me very much, it's very thoughtful, and it feels like it's reflecting on the conversation that we were having.

**Madeleine Waller on her series 'Portraits of poets'**

I didn't really imagine it was going to be a big series. I thought I'd just start and see where I went from there.

It started with a conversation with my neighbour. She had recently joined a poetry group with John Stammers and she had told me about poetry readings in pubs, it just sounded like a really interesting place to start. I had a kind of perception about poets and poetry being a bit inaccessible, kind of academic, and slightly intimidating. And so there was a part of me that wanted to find out why I felt like this. It's the way I approach a lot of my work I guess, wanting to know or understand a bit more about something I don't know a lot about.

For this project particularly the locations were really important, because they came from the sitters. I had asked them all where they wanted to be photographed and what was a place that was special to them or their work. Most people had a special place, but some I photographed in their offices or their studios. Sometimes the places that people chose weren't terribly visual, so that was quite difficult to make things work in a very un-visual place, but mostly they were in really lovely locations.

I try really hard not to have a vision of how a picture should be, because there are mostly always obstacles like weather or the location. I spend a lot of time

talking to people trying to get an understanding of the person. It's difficult in such a short time, because normally you don't have a long time to photograph someone, but ultimately I want to make them feel relaxed and comfortable with me photographing them.

I almost prefer not to know too much about my subjects. In a way it keeps us on a level. I don't want to interpret too much of what I know about them into the picture; I'd rather it came from them.

My favourite poem, it's actually a bush ballad really. I was made to learn it by heart at school and I remember it really clearly, it's by Dorothea Mackellar. And the reason I love it so much, is it begins with a contrast of the English landscape with a rough, rugged Australian landscape. And I love living in London, but the thing I miss most about Australia, other than my family, is the feeling of the vast landscape that you don't get in the polite green grey English countryside, and this poem really expresses that in a very simple verse.

I think there are quite a number of similarities between photography and poetry. It's like any art form, it's an expression of emotion and an understanding of the world, and they're both composed and have spontaneous moments in them.