John Donne Appeal
Stories from the Gallery’s history
Searching for Shakespeare
My Favourite Portrait by Tristram Hunt
Special offer from the Royal Shakespeare Company
Often I have found a Portrait superior in real instruction to half-a-dozen written “Biographies”… or rather I have found that the Portrait was a small lighted candle by which Biographies could for the first time be read.”

So wrote Thomas Carlyle in 1854 in the years leading up to the founding of the National Portrait Gallery in 1856. Carlyle, with Lord Stanhope and Lord Macaulay, was one of the founding fathers of the Gallery, and his mix of admiration for the subject and interest in the character portrayed remains a strong thread through our work to this day. Much else has changed over the years since the first director, Sir George Scharf, took up his role, and as well as celebrating his achievements in a special display, we have created a timeline which outlines all the key events throughout the Gallery’s history. Our first exhibitions during the Anniversary year reflect two of these events. The famous Chandos portrait of William Shakespeare was the first to enter the Collection and Searching for Shakespeare offers the first chance to compare the seventeenth-century ‘contender’ portraits of this world-renowned figure. There is more on this elsewhere in this issue, but I hope that examination of the image of our greatest playwright will not only allow us to celebrate our founding portrait (through the generosity of Lord Ellesmere) but also to focus on how we undertake research on the works in the Collection and bring out the results for wider public enjoyment.

Icons and Idols, celebrating twenty-five years of commissioning contemporary portraits, shines a spotlight on one of the particular facets of the Gallery’s work that makes it such a compelling place to visit. Commissioning new works of art is an unusual activity for a national museum. The risks of disappointment or failure are considerable. But the successes offer a wonderful chance for a wider public to think about the many different aspects of achievement in Britain in recent years, with delightful results, from the portrait of Dame Iris Murdoch by Tom Phillips to that of Mo Mowlam by John Keane (both of which are included in the exhibition), or recently completed commissions such as J.K. Rowling by Stuart Pearson Wright or Dame Cicely Saunders by Catherine Goodman.

One of the central themes of the Anniversary is the development of the Collection: how we enhance it with new acquisitions, how we research the portraits in the Collection and how we share the Collection around the country and offer new forms of access to information about the subjects and their images. We have made ‘Collecting for the Future’ the title of the Anniversary Appeal and we will dedicate what we raise to new acquisitions, both historical and contemporary. Your support will be invaluable for this, and I hope we can involve you in supporting the Collection through the Appeal.

I hope that you will enjoy the many special displays, exhibitions and events that make up the Anniversary season, and will encourage your friends to join us as Members, Associates and Patrons. As always, I thank you for your continued support.
We are looking forward to being part of the events and celebrations taking place during 2006, and wish the Gallery another hugely successful 150 years.

SOME HIGHLIGHTS OF 2006:

150TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY

For further information on all these events visit the Gallery’s website on www.npg.org.uk

LEFT
Self-portrait with Mae West, 1985 Christmas card by Angus McBean © Angus McBean Estate

TO MARK THE OCCASION of the 150th Anniversary the Gallery is mounting a year-long special programme of displays, exhibitions, music, talks, conferences and events to explore its history, to celebrate its many achievements and to look ahead to the future. These include:

Sir George Scharf, until 18 June 2006. Display of photographs and drawings relating to the artist and scholar Sir George Scharf, the first Director of the Gallery.

150 Years: The National Portrait Gallery 1856–2006, 11 February–10 September 2006. An impressive timeline focusing on key episodes, incidents and ‘firsts’ from the Gallery’s 150 years, on display on the Ground Floor.

Beningbrough Hall and Gardens, the Gallery’s regional partner in Yorkshire, will reopen on 3 June 2006 after refurbishment, funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund. Making Faces: New Approaches to Georgian Portraiture, an academic conference, will take place on 17 and 18 November 2006.

A set of Royal Mail commemorative stamps will be issued in July 2006 to mark the 150th Anniversary; they will illustrate ten of the Gallery’s most popular images from the Collection.

PRS Foundation – ‘Art of Noise’. The Performing Rights Society Foundation is the UK’s largest independent funding body for new music. To celebrate the 150th Anniversary, a series of four new works has been commissioned and curated jointly with the Gallery. See website for more details.

Angus McBean: Portraits, 5 July–22 October 2006. The first museum retrospective of the work of McBean, one of the twentieth century’s most significant British portrait photographers.

Times Literary Supplement Anniversary Lecture Series celebrates the anniversaries of renowned literary figures in collaboration with the Gallery: Michael Holroyd on George Bernard Shaw (1856), Billie Whitelaw and Dan Gunn on Samuel Beckett (1906), A.N. Wilson on John Betjeman (1906), Max Beerbohm (1956), speaker to be confirmed.

We hope that you will have the opportunity to enjoy one of the many Anniversary events, and we look forward to welcoming you to the Gallery during the year. For further information please see the Gallery’s quarterly leaflet or visit the website.

Alexandra Finch
DIRECTOR’S ASSISTANT

THE INTERNATIONAL LAW FIRM Herbert Smith LLP is delighted to be the National Portrait Gallery’s 150th Anniversary Partner. This represents a continuation of our partnership with the Gallery and follows on from our successful sponsorships of the Cecil Beaton and Lee Miller retrospective exhibitions.

We have enjoyed a variety of staff activities at the Gallery over the last two years – from attending previews of new exhibitions to taking part in photographic workshops. As well as the extensive possibilities available for entertaining clients, it was these staff benefits and those available to our community partners which were central in our decision to develop our relationship with the Gallery further.

Staff who mentor students from local schools have been able to get involved in photographic projects with their mentees, and children at other schools with which we work have had the opportunity to attend workshops tailored to their teaching curriculum. What has been especially rewarding is that as well as meeting their educational needs we have been able to provide these children with some special memories.

FROM THE ANNIVERSARY PARTNER

LEFT

We are looking forward to being part of the events and celebrations taking place during 2006, and wish the Gallery another hugely successful 150 years.
MY FAVOURITE PORTRAIT

TRISTRAM HUNT

Tristram Hunt is a lecturer in history at Queen Mary College, University of London. He is the author of Building Jerusalem: The Rise & Fall of the Victorian City (Weidenfeld & Nicolson).

PART OF THE INTRIGUE of portraiture is that one can admire the composition without necessarily caring greatly for the character on the canvas. So it is with Bryan Organ’s playful, telling, even predictive portrait, ‘His Royal Highness Prince Charles, Prince of Wales’. Commissioned in 1980, long before the worst of the Wales’s tribulations (indeed, even before their marriage), it masterfully catches the awful nature of being heir to the throne. In Alan Bennett’s apposite phrase, it is a predicament rather than a position.

Lolling on a field chair, Prince Charles is simply waiting. And in that pose, Organ brings to the fore the youth yet age, the authority yet the futility of Prince Charles’s situation.

As such, the work is part of a broader narrative about modern British monarchy. Cut off from Charles by a high Windsor green wall, the Union flag flops disconsolately. Empire and England seem visibly to be retreating – all the more so given that the portrait often hangs in the faded glory of the high-Victorian portico (far from the modernism of the Ondaatje Wing) alongside Pietro Annigoni’s confident, imperious depiction of a supremely regal Queen Elizabeth II.

What of Charles himself? He jauntily swings his leg and appears relaxed in casual sporting gear. But his eyes avoid your gaze and seem instead to focus on events over your shoulder. Perhaps his thoughts are with George VI staring back from the other corner.

But, read another way, Organ’s portrait is a subtle celebration of the modesty of a modern prince. Gone are the symbols of war and empire, the outfits and medals. Instead, we are left with an all too human figurehead sitting on the verge of some truly anni horribiles which will test the man and his monarchy to the hilt. The enigmatic skill of the painting is that it is all those things and more.

MY FAVOURITE PORTRAIT

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THE PHOTOGRAPH (left), dating from circa 1901, shows the twenty men who looked after security at the Gallery. They were all called Attendants, but they were classified in different ranks. Those sitting down are First-Class Attendants, while those standing are Second-Class Attendants. Almost all the men were Army or Navy pensioners. The man standing on the far right-hand side is Mr Darbon, the Head Attendant. Amongst the group you can distinguish, by their helmets, four regular police constables, who would support the Attendants by regularly dropping in at the Gallery as part of their beat.

The security of the Gallery has always been paramount. The threat to the building and the Collection has changed over the years. Early on, in 1909 there was the tragedy of the murder and suicide of Mr and Mrs Dawson, while in July 1914 the suffragette Mrs Ann Hunt took a butcher’s cleaver to Sir John Everett Millais’s portrait of Thomas Carlyle (shown on page 1), claiming that it was a revenge attack for the re-arrest of Mrs Emmeline Pankhurst. During the Second World War the building, fortunately almost entirely evacuated, was hit several times by incendiary bombs. More recently, in 1981 Bryan Organ’s painting of Diana, Princess of Wales was badly damaged when it was slashed by a member of the public.

Today the threat comes from a different direction altogether – the great throng of visitors. The increasing popularity of the Gallery brings with it more dust and dirt, more incidents of people “accidentally” touching the pictures.

Nowadays security is a round-the-clock business, maintained by a team of eighty people, some of whom are in the other photograph and many of whom work part-time. While we look after security, we try to look after most visitors’ requirements too. This keeps us all more than busy, but we love doing it and we are as proud of our jobs as our 1901 predecessors were.

Hugo Penning
FRONT OF HOUSE MANAGER

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Hugo Penning
FRONT OF HOUSE MANAGER
In 2006 the National Portrait Gallery celebrates its 150th Anniversary. This article commemorates the event by focusing on two contrasting episodes from the Gallery’s history.

In August 1914, when Britain went to war with Germany, it had initially been assumed that the conflict would be a brief and glorious affair, but a year later it was becoming obvious that this was not the case. As fears of aerial attack grew and the Gallery’s buildings were taken over by the War Office, the decision was made to close to the public in October 1915.

Until this time the most highly regarded portraits had been stored in the basement. Now every effort was made to secure the collections. More portraits were moved to basement storage and those that remained in the galleries were removed from the walls and carefully packed behind sandbags. The services of the Metropolitan Police – charged with safeguarding the collections during peacetime – were withdrawn. Effectively, the custody of the Gallery and collections became a civilian responsibility, and as such all male attendants were sworn in as Special Constables, with the Director as an Inspector.

In 1917 London was subject to heavy German bombing. Documents in the Gallery’s archive record that ‘the firing of anti-aircraft guns on the night of Monday 24 September was the heaviest experienced during any attack by enemy aircraft since the war began. Pieces of shell casing were picked up everywhere and bombs were dropped on Devonshire House; the Ritz Hotel; Wardour Street; in front of the Bedford Hotel, and Southampton Row: here many were killed.’

After these attacks, plans were made for safer storage. In 1918, the portraits were transferred to the National Library of Wales in Aberystwyth and the Underground stations of Aldwych and King Edward Street. The threat of invasion was taken so seriously that the government advised the Director: ‘At Aldwych Tube which is, as you know, used by the National Gallery, the men are armed with revolvers. You will perhaps ask for a similar precaution to be taken at King Edward Street.’

Fortunately, the exile was brief and soon after peace was declared later that year the portraits returned. The experience had proved a useful rehearsal for the Second World War and demonstrated the Gallery’s resilience in times of conflict.

The second episode recounted here reflects a very different period in the Gallery’s history. In the late 1950s it was a relatively subdued institution. Alongside the Director, there were only five other administrative staff and very few outward-looking activities took place. As Sir Roy Strong (Director, 1967–73) recalls in an essay entitled The National Portrait Gallery: the missing years: ‘The old belief prevailed, that the prime purpose of the Gallery was to be a guardian and not a purveyor of information.’

In this environment, exhibitions were rare. The annual show – which invariably opened on Boxing Day in the hope that it might get some press coverage – generally consisted of the portraits purchased during that year, hung in a single line along three walls. However, this was about to change.

In 1963 Strong, then Assistant Keeper, embarked upon the Gallery’s first ever loan exhibition, ‘The Winter Queen: Elizabeth, Queen of Bohemia’ opened to the public in November that year. It consisted of the British loans to an exhibition in Heidelberg and featured a design that was quintessentially Sixties in style: wallpaper from Coles of Mortimer Street; photographic blow-ups of contemporary engravings; much butter muslin; and cork lettering painted gold.

As Strong recalls, ‘the public came and were enchanted’, many of them requesting that the Gallery ‘give us more exhibitions like this from time to time’ (as reflected by letters in the Gallery’s archive). When the event closed in 1964 it had attracted an additional 10,000 visitors.

‘The Winter Queen’ was a turning point in the Gallery’s history and marked a change in its reputation. It was quickly followed by a series of equally innovative and exciting exhibitions, and by the time Strong left at the end of 1973 to take up the directorship of the Victoria and Albert Museum, the National Portrait Gallery was the place to visit. The exhibitions programme started by Strong remains at the heart of the Gallery’s work today.

A timeline featuring some of the significant events in the Gallery’s 150-year history is on display as a central feature on the Ground Floor from 11 February until 10 September 2006.

Charlotte Brunskill
Records Manager
SEARCHING FOR SHAKESPEARE
2 March–29 May 2006
Wolfson Gallery
Sponsored by Credit Suisse

At the centre of the exhibition alongside the Chandos portrait, we have brought together five key portraits previously thought to derive from the seventeenth century. These portraits were all regarded at different times as being a contender as a life-time portrait of Shakespeare. In preparation for the exhibition, several of these portraits have been subject to exhaustive technical analysis to confirm the date and authenticity, and the results of this groundbreaking research are published in the accompanying catalogue.

We have been very fortunate in securing some wonderful loans, including paintings, rarely lent manuscripts, early books and items of seventeenth-century costume from museums and private collections.

Surprisingly, the founding portrait of the National Portrait Gallery, known as NPG number 1, was not of a monarch or a member of the nobility but a portrait long considered to represent England’s greatest poet and playwright, William Shakespeare (1564–1616). It was offered to the nation in 1856 by Lord Ellesmere in an exemplary act of benefaction. As the most important candidate for consideration as a contemporary portrait of Shakespeare from the life, the painting, known as the ‘Chandos’ portrait, has graced the covers of several shelves of books on the playwright and has become an icon in its own right.

The identity of the sitter in the Chandos portrait is difficult to prove with absolute certainty. However, the portrait has a long history as an acclaimed image of Shakespeare and was once owned by Shakespeare’s godson, Sir William Davenant. Other evidence, particularly on the emergence of author portraiture in the late 1590s and the 1600s, is suggestive, but the identity is likely to remain unproven. Shakespeare’s image is instantly recognisable and readily appropriated throughout the world, from books and banknotes to pub signs, but do we know what he really looked like? The answer to that question is reasonably straightforward, because two images produced shortly after his death must have been seen and approved by friends and family. The Stratford-upon-Avon memorial bust was installed after 1620 and the 1623 engraving of Shakespeare by Martin Droeshout was almost certainly based on an earlier portrait, indicating that Shakespeare would have had his portrait painted during his lifetime.

The starting point for the exhibition Searching for Shakespeare was the history of the Gallery’s first portrait, but the exhibition also explores the twin themes of portraiture and biography with reference to one very remarkable individual. The exhibition both presents new research on the complex subject of Shakespeare portraiture and explores the existing material evidence about the playwright’s life from his early years in Stratford-upon-Avon to his arrival in London and eventual career as a celebrated playwright.
collections in Britain and America. As the Gallery holds the largest public collection of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century British portraits, we are particularly well placed to explore the surviving material evidence from Shakespeare’s own time. The exhibition therefore focuses upon the period of his life and explores the world he and his contemporaries knew, rather than the many later mythologies that grew up around our national poet in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

The show offers an unprecedented opportunity to see much of the surviving sixteenth- and seventeenth-century documentary evidence on Shakespeare’s life. It includes rarely seen historical documents such as a parish register (recording his birth and death) and his original will. These ordinary traces of an extraordinary life that began well over 400 years ago are very moving, and the body of evidence found in both the exhibition and the accompanying catalogue provides new insights into his life. The exhibition also includes brilliant portraits of Shakespeare’s contemporaries, his fellow actors and playwrights, and poets such as Ben Jonson and John Donne, together with courtiers such as Henry Wriothesley, the young and glamorous Earl of Southampton, who became his patron.

The preparations for this show have been painstakingly undertaken over three years. The Gallery has collaborated with more than twenty scholars in various specialisms: historians, literature scholars, manuscript specialists and experts on costume and the decorative arts. The exhibition opens at the Gallery in London on 2 March 2006 and runs until the end of May; it travels to the Yale Center for British Art in New Haven between June and September 2006. An illustrated book accompanies the exhibition, with essays from Stanley Wells, James Shapiro, Tarnya Cooper and Marcia Pointon.

Tarnya Cooper
16TH CENTURY CURATOR

We gratefully acknowledge advice from:
Stanley Wells (Chairman of Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, Stratford-upon-Avon)
Robert Bearman (Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, Stratford-upon-Avon)
Erin Blake (Curator of Works of Art, Folger Shakespeare Library, Washington DC, USA)
Paul Edmondson (Head of Education, Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, Stratford-upon-Avon)
Andrew Gurr (Professor of English, University of Reading, Reading)
Mark Rylance (Actor and Director of the Shakespeare Authorship Trust)
Sally-Beth Mclean (REED, Records of Early English Drama, Toronto, Canada)
Lena Orlin (University of Maryland, USA)
Patrick Spotiswoode (Director of Education, Shakespeare’s Globe Theatre, London)
Jenny Tiramani (Costume Designer)

FROM LEFT
Grafton portrait
by an unknown artist, 1588
The John Rylands University Library, The University of Manchester
© Reproduced by courtesy of the Director and the University Librarian, The John Rylands University Library, The University of Manchester
This portrait shows a man painted in 1588, aged twenty-four. He is an exact contemporary of William Shakespeare, but there is no evidence to suggest that this man is the playwright.

Henry Wriothesley,
3rd Earl of Southampton
attributed to John de Critz the Elder, 1603
The Duke of Buccleuch & Queensberry, KT
Shakespeare’s only known patron. Shakespeare dedicated two long poems to him, in 1593 and 1594.

Drawing of the Swan Theatre in London
by Arendt van Buchell after a sketch by Johannes de Witt, circa 1596-7 © University Library, Utrecht
This extraordinary drawing shows the interior of the Swan Theatre around 1596. It is the only surviving record of the interior of an Elizabethan theatre and it has not previously been lent for public display.

Parish Register: Baptism of Susanna Shakespeare
26 May 1583
By kind permission of the Vicar and Parochial Church Council, Holy Trinity Church, Stratford-upon-Avon
The register provides evidence of Shakespeare’s birth in 1564, those of his brothers and sisters, and those of his three children, together with the record of his death. This page records the baptism of Shakespeare’s first-born child Susanna.
THE GALLERY IS LAUNCHING with the support of the Art Fund, a major appeal to acquire a remarkable portrait of the metaphysical poet John Donne (1572–1631). This highly acclaimed painting is the earliest, most important portrait of the poet in oil. It shows Donne as a handsome young man and probably dates from his years as a student at the Inns of Court in London. This was a period of intense creativity when Donne wrote many of his most celebrated poems. The highly charged, often erotic *Elegies* were written around this time and display a youthful disregard for social convention, reveling in amorous pursuits and intrigue.

Donne was one of the most talented writers of his age and his work, which encompassed metaphysical poetry, verse letters, essays and sermons, came to be widely celebrated following publication after his death. Some of his most famous works included *The Baill*, *The Flea* and *A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning*. He studied at the University of Oxford and the Inns of Court, where he began to write poetry indebted to both spiritual and classical sources. Originally from a devout Roman Catholic family, some time in the 1590s Donne converted to the Protestant religion. In 1615 he was ordained as a minister of the Church of England and later became the Dean of St Paul’s, London.

This extraordinary portrait shows Donne playing the role of a melancholic lover and it has been described by Sir Roy Strong as ‘the most famous of all melancholy love portraits’ and by the English literary critic Dame Helen Gardner as ‘the most striking portrait we have of any English poet’. The picture was almost certainly part of a campaign to conquer a reluctant heart, or painted for a lover. A contemporary viewer observed that the painting was ‘all enveloped with a darkish shadow, his face and feature hardly discernable’. This mysterious effect is explained by the presence of an inscription that translates from the Latin as ‘O Lady lighten our darkness’. The composition is extraordinary for a picture of this period and John Donne must have been closely involved in the commissioning process. The academic Kate Gartner Frost has argued that the painting ‘is as much a product of Donne’s creative imagination as … the Satires and the early *Elegies*’.

For a sixteenth-century painting, the portrait has an astonishing history as it has remained in one family collection since it was bequeathed in John Donne’s will to his friend Robert Kerr, later 1st Earl of Ancram (1578–1654). He describes it as ‘that Picture of myne wch is taken in Shaddowes and was made very many yeares before’. For many years the portrait was lost but in 1959 it was rediscovered in the Ancram family collection after it had been mislabelled as the medieval poet ‘Duns Scotus’.

The portrait would be an exceptionally important acquisition for the Gallery and would become an assured highlight of the Collection. The Gallery needs £1,652,000; it has until the end of June to acquire this picture.

Tarnya Cooper
16TH CENTURY CURATOR

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John Donne is one of the greatest writers in the English language, and very few contemporary portraits of him survive. This would be reason enough for the National Portrait Gallery to buy this picture; its innate qualities make it indispensable. Broodingly suggestive of Donne’s intellectual vigour as well as his witty sensuality, it is also a picture of great intrinsic beauty and the bewitching evocation of an age. The National Portrait Gallery is its natural home.

Andrew Motion
Poet Laureate

Here take my picture; though I bid farewell,
Thine, in my heart, where my soul dwells, shall dwell.
’Tis like me now, but I dead, ’twill be more,
When we are shadows both, than ’twas before.

*Elegy V*: Lines 1–4

© Courtesy of the Executors of the estate of the late Lord Lothian

**John Donne**
by an unknown English artist,
c.1595

THE JOHN DONNE APPEAL
TO BE INVITED TO HAVE one’s portrait painted for the National Portrait Gallery is the privilege of a lifetime, but to contribute to the choice of the artist can make it bewildering. I felt as if I had been given, at the age of ten, the run of the confectionery department at Fortnum & Mason. But what, I wondered, as Sandy Nairne showed me round the contemporary collections in the Gallery, would any of these brilliant young artists make of me? Not much, I thought; and if they did, it would redound to their credit rather than mine. But Andrew Festing was clearly not only a portrait painter at the head of his profession but an unpretentious craftsman who could be relied on to obtrude his own personality. Further, he was someone from my own world: a countryman, the son of a wonderfully maverick Field Marshal, he had himself been a regular soldier. He would know where I was coming from, and sessions with him, I reckoned, would be fun. They certainly were.

Originally I had ideas far above my station. I was determined that the portrait would show what a grand person I was. I would pose on the terrace of Somerset House, where at King’s College I had spent the most constructive part of my career. I would wear my doctor’s scarlet gown, and display as many decorations as I could crowd in. Andrew came to lunch and gently dissuaded me. Such a picture, he pointed out, would show the background and the robes, rather than me. But who was I? What had I spent my life doing? Teaching. OK, so wear a gown, but a sober one, my working clothes, as it were. Decorations? Nobody could object to the Order of Merit, but anything else would be definitely over the top. Somerset House, he thought, might appear in a Canaletto on the wall behind me, but eventually he rejected that as a distraction, as he did a military print. Instead he selected an eighteenth-century print of a lemon of which I have always been fond and that I hope will puzzle future generations of scholars.

Andrew conducted the sittings with military precision. On Monday the whole was sketched in. Tuesday was devoted to the head, Wednesday to the torso, Thursday to the hands, and Friday to finishing the whole thing. The Festings provided lunch and sparkling conversation. From 9 am to 1 pm and 2 pm to 5 pm I sat obediently, reflecting how the greatest men and women in history had had to spend such hours, obeying the slightest commands of the humble artists who were immortalising them – and the greater they were, the more hours they had had to spend thus. I watched amazed as gradually there emerged on the canvas, like a developing print, not just a likeness of me, but me in essence. I felt like Adam on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, being called into being through God’s command. Had I really existed, I wondered, before Andrew had created me?

I hope that the portrait will give others as much pleasure as it does me. Posterity has not been short-changed.

ANDY WARHOL is widely recognised as one of the most significant artists of the late twentieth century, and Ten Portraits of Jews of the Twentieth Century is among his most important achievements. However, twenty-six years after this enigmatic series of portraits was created and first exhibited, numerous questions remain about the artist’s intentions and the work’s meaning.

A pantheon of great thinkers, politicians, performers, musicians and writers, Warhol’s great sequence of portraits of ‘Jewish geniuses’ was originally shown at The Jewish Museum, New York, in 1980. Arching across the century, the breadth of endeavour represented by these figures is formidable. Indeed, the selection seems calculated to touch every aspect of human experience. The line-up comprises Sarah Bernhardt, the celebrated French stage actress; Louis Brandeis, the first Jewish judge to be appointed to the Supreme Court of the United States; Martin Buber, the renowned philosopher, story-teller and pedagogue; Albert Einstein, one of the greatest scientists of the century; Sigmund Freud, the hugely influential founder of the psychoanalytic school of psychology; the Marx Brothers, celebrated comedians of vaudeville, stage and cinema; Golda Meir, one of the founders of the State of Israel; George Gershwin, the distinguished American composer; Franz Kafka, the major German novelist; and Gertrude Stein, the important American writer, poet and playwright.

Even so, the critical response in 1980 was decidedly mixed and, at times, intensely hostile. The New York Times was unsparing: ‘The show is vulgar, it reeks of commercialism, and its contribution to art is nil.’ In sharp contrast Art Forum argued, ‘the paintings are staggering’, and it noted ‘an unexpected mix of cultural anthropology, portraiture, celebration of celebrity, and study of intelligentsia – all at the same time’.

The debate is set to continue when the portraits, which are on loan from a private collector, are exhibited at the National Portrait Gallery – the first time this controversial series has been shown in this country.
THE NATIONAL PROGRAMME

The Gallery has been developing and extending its National Programme since the Trustees agreed a formal national strategy in 2003. Since then it has been building on partnerships with its regional partners, on the already strong programme of touring exhibitions and through collaborations with museums and galleries around the country. It also has a long-term loans programme and lends works on a short-term basis to venues and exhibitions around the country and abroad. In many cases the Gallery’s Learning and Access department works collaboratively with its partners: as an example, members of the department provide training for teachers and volunteers and suggest ideas for resources and activities.

Montacute House in Somerset, Beningbrough Hall in Yorkshire and Bodelwyddan Castle in North Wales, the Gallery’s three regional partners, are all celebrating the 150th Anniversary of the National Portrait Gallery. Montacute will be presenting a visiting portrait of Phineas Pett, a seventeenth-century shipbuilder, to be displayed when the house reopens in the spring. Along with the portrait, additional family activities and tours by staff from the Gallery are highlighting works from the Collection. Until 12 February Bodelwyddan Castle is showing the exhibition Faces of Wales, a collaboration with the National Portrait Gallery and the National Museum Wales, followed by the Welsh Portrait Award, of which our Director, Sandy Nairne, is a judge. The Castle opening times can be found on its website: www.bodelwyddan-castle.co.uk

2006 sees the relaunch of Beningbrough Hall with the major development Making Faces opening in June. The addition of a lift provides access to a whole floor of newly developed interpretation and activities. A feature dedicated to Making Faces will appear in the next issue of Face to Face.

The Gallery has again been awarded funding this year by the DCMS/DfES Strategic Commissioning Fund as part of a national programme designed to enable regional museums to work in partnership with national institutions. Funding will support a programme of education and audience development work at Montacute House and Beningbrough Hall as well as new collaborative projects with regional museums and galleries.

As part of the Gallery’s touring exhibition programme, 2006 will see Norman Parkinson: Portraits in Fashion tour to the Lady Lever Art Gallery in Liverpool between 10 June and 24 September, while Icons and Idols: Commissioning Contemporary Portraits will be visiting York in July. Later in the year, Angus McBean: Portraits will travel to Sheffield in December after its showing at the Gallery in London.

A ground-breaking partnership with the North-East Region, through the North-East Regional Museums Hub set up in 2004, is a key component of the National Programme and has enabled links to be made between many of the galleries and museums in this part of the country. Exhibitions last year included Norman Parkinson: Portraits in Fashion at the Bowes Museum, Callington and Nelson: Heroes of Trafalgar at South Shields Museum and Art Gallery and the 2005 BP Portrait Award at Sunderland Museum and Winter Gardens.

This year sees the opening of a contemporary photography exhibition, ‘Exposure’: Focusing on Photographs from the National Portrait Gallery. The curators, Julie Milne and Hugh Mulholland, from the Laing Art Gallery in Newcastle and the Ormeau Baths Gallery in Belfast respectively, have selected recent photographic acquisitions and commissions from the Gallery. Ellen McArthur, Dawn French and Jennifer Saunders, David Hockney and Ricky Gevais are among those whose portraits are on show and the exhibition has an underlying theme of people who have challenged convention, some of them prominent faces from the North-East and Belfast.

Another element of the partnership with the North-East is the exhibition Faces of Science: Photographs by James F. Hunkin, a selection of photographic portraits of prominent subjects drawn from the worlds of chemistry, earth science, engineering, life science, mathematics and physics, which comes to the Life Science Centre as part of Newcastle’s Science Festival.

Hunkin photographed 100 scientists with the brief to make science attractive to a new generation of aspirational schoolchildren and students. The choice of subjects ranges from established names such as the Nobel Prize-winners Sir John Sulston and Sir Harold Kroto to new talents such as Angus Lamond and Susan Gibson. Hunkin’s approach was to photograph his subjects on location, mainly out of their laboratories, in appropriate settings that reflected their scientific interests.

Both the exhibitions in the North-East have been made possible through the support of Deloitte, the Gallery’s Contemporary Photography Displays Partner.

Laura Down
NATIONAL PROGRAMMES MANAGER
VISITORS TO THE EXHIBITION

Cecil Beaton: Portraits

at the National Portrait Gallery in Canberra between 16 September and 27 November 2005 entered through a corridor hung with photographs Beaton took on his trip to Australia in the summer of 1968. This small group of portraits formed an antipodean introduction to the touring centenary exhibition and included Beaton’s portraits of the Governor General, Lord Casey, and his artistic wife Maie (with the photographer’s Panama hat perched on her head), the elegant Lady Natasha Johnston, wife of the British High Commissioner, and Winifred Darling, the mother of the Australian National Portrait Gallery’s Founding Patron, Gordon Darling.

The Australian touch in Beaton about the Bush introduced Australian visitors to Beaton the diarist. The wall text included extracts from his 1968 diary in which he admitted to finding Australia ‘a country and people which bring out the best in one’s nature. No anxiety, no nervous exhaustion, no worry in fact, certainty about the rosy future.’ On the other hand for Beaton there was ‘obviously nothing very exciting, or galvanising’ in the parts of Australia he saw.

Cecil Beaton: Portraits proved to be exciting and galvanising for visitors to the Gallery in Canberra. Exhibition viewers remarked frequently on the range of Beaton’s travel, the grandeur of his incessant curiosity and the huge variety of the subjects who came before his camera. If Australians knew anything of Beaton it was as a portraitist of the Royal Family. Visitors were less familiar with his portraits of subjects as diverse as Picasso, Harold Pinter (above) and Greta Garbo (right).

As in London, the theme of the Beaton private view in Canberra was ‘black and white with a touch of red’. Yet the hit of the evening was the appearance of two members of the Gallery staff decked out in extravagant dresses of cellophane and looking as though they had just stepped out of a Beaton party piece of the 1920s. Hugo Vickers, Beaton’s biographer, added to the experience of the exhibition in Canberra when he delivered the Gallery’s annual lecture, this year on the life and work of the photographer. With appropriately Beatonesque timing, this event took place at the same time as the unveiling of the Gallery’s latest commission, Jaiwei Shen’s full-length portrait of HRH Mary, Crown Princess of Denmark. Unlike Britain, Australia has few opportunities to create court portraiture. In his portrait of the Tasmanian-born princess, the painter has subtly brought together the Amalienborg Palace with a view of the Sydney Opera House, the masterwork of the Danish Jørn Utzon. These elements create a setting for a subject whom Beaton would, without doubt, have loved to have the opportunity to photograph.

For the Gallery in Canberra, the Cecil Beaton exhibition was the most recent expression of an ongoing collaborative partnership. In 2000 (when the Gallery in Australia was in its earliest infancy) the National Portrait Gallery in London sent an exhibition of recent portraits under the title The Best of British. That exhibition included some of the Gallery’s best-known recent commissions including Yolanda Sonnabend’s portrait of Stephen Hawking, Tom Phillips’s portrait of Dame Iris Murdoch and James Lloyd’s Sir Paul Smith. The display of these portraits in Canberra could not have been more timely, for the Australian Gallery was at the beginning of its programme of commissioning contemporary artists to create portraits. As in London, this programme has been crucial in creating a connection between portraiture and contemporary life. Again in 2000, our two galleries collaborated on Polly Borland’s Australians, a project shown in London and Canberra as part of Australia’s celebrations of the Centenary of Federation.

In a very short time the Gallery in Canberra has developed as a significant cultural institution; exhibitions such as the Beaton one and the earlier showing of Cartier-Bresson’s portraits, Fête-à-fête, have helped to build its profile in the public mind. The announcement in December 2004 of funding for a dedicated building has led to the selection of an architect, Richard Johnson, and a design for the Gallery to be built over the next few years. Unlike the central metropolitan setting of the National Portrait Gallery in London, the site chosen for the Australian Gallery is an open field adjacent to the architectural edifice of Canberra’s High Court and a stone’s throw from the National Gallery of Australia. In the development of the Gallery in Australia we have been encouraged by the exemplars and the practical assistance of Sandy Nairne and his predecessors Charles Saumarez Smith and Sir Roy Strong.

Australia’s National Portrait Gallery will be distinctly Australian but we are committed to ensuring that the Gallery is as vibrant, contemporary and well-loved as our much older sister institution in London. One aspiration for the new Gallery is to represent both architecturally and museologically some distinctly Australian characteristics, one of which Beaton described in 1968 as a ‘complete lack of self-consciousness, so that people are without protective covering, and show themselves openly to be what they are’.

Andrew Sayers
DIRECTOR OF THE NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY CANBERRA
Spring Offer for Gallery supporters

SPECIAL TICKET OFFER

£10 off top-price ticket (normally £35) in the Stalls and Dress Circle seats for Monday to Friday evening performances of As You Like It from 8 to 17 March 2006.

To book call the Novello Theatre on 0870 950 0940 and quote ‘NPG MEMBERS OFFER’.

£1 booking fee per ticket applies. Offer is subject to availability and cannot be used in conjunction with any other offer or discount.

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Unanimously acclaimed by the critics when it opened last year in Stratford-upon-Avon, AS YOU LIKE IT now transfers to London for a limited run of 28 performances only. Set in the Forest of Arden, Shakespeare’s vibrant comedy of life and love is directed by Associate Director Dominic Cooke.

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Daily Telegraph

‘An intelligent, enchanting production by Dominic Cooke, where each of Shakespeare’s words is delivered with respect by a wonderful cast’

Sunday Telegraph

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