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Portraits of the Artist
The Queen’s Gallery, Buckingham Palace 4 November 2016 – 17 April 2017

The first-ever exhibition of portraits of artists in the Royal Collection examines the changing image of the creative genius through more than 150 paintings, drawings, prints, photographs and decorative arts. **Portraits of the Artist** explores themes such as the cult of the artistic personality, the artist at work and artists’ self-portraits.

From the 16th century, artists rose from the ranks of skilled artisans to a more elevated social status, a change in part influenced by royal patronage. The medieval tradesmen’s guilds were replaced first by workshops run by a master and subsequently by the first art academies. The lives of the most successful artists were recorded for posterity in the new literary genre of artists’ biographies. One of the most important collections of biographies from this period was Giorgio Vasari’s *Delle vite de’ piu eccellenti pittori, scultori et architettori* (1568), which described the lives of over 150 artists including that of the author. As artists became more prominent in society, a market developed for images of those deemed to be exceptional by virtue of their artistic talent. At the same time, artists increasingly saw self-portraiture as a way of demonstrating their skills to potential collectors and asserting their new standing in the world.

Images of artists became a valuable commodity, keenly acquired by monarchs and other influential patrons. The inventory compiled by Charles I’s Surveyor of Pictures in the late 1630s shows that three of the most important artists’ portraits owned by the monarch, including self-portraits by Daniel Mytens (c.1630) and Sir Peter Paul Rubens (1623), hung outside the King’s withdrawing room at Whitehall Palace. The 1666 inventory of Charles II’s collection lists 24 portraits of artists in ‘the Pafsage betweene ye Greene Roome and ye Clofet’. In this most intimate part of the royal apartments, accessible only to the King’s closest acquaintances and family, were Artemisia Gentileschi’s *Self-portrait as the Allegory of Painting (La Pittura)* (c.1638–9), Rubens’s self-portrait (1623) and portrait of his former assistant Anthony van Dyck (c.1627–8).

During the 17th century, general advancements in optics and practical developments in the production of mirrors enabled artists to be increasingly experimental and ambitious in their self-portraits. Artemisia Gentileschi used two mirrors to capture herself from an unusual angle for her powerful self-portrait as the personification of Painting, a remarkably unorthodox representation of a woman at this early date.
Artists frequently incorporated their own image into their works, as major players in historical and mythological narratives or through more subtle means. In *Judith with the Head of Holofernes* (1613), the painter Cristofano Allori appears as the decapitated Holofernes, his former lover Maria di Giovanni Mazzafiri is the murderous Judith, and her mother is Judith's maidservant. Jan de Bray's *The Banquet of Cleopatra* (1652) is a thinly disguised family portrait in which the artist casts his father Salomon de Bray, also a successful painter, in the role of Mark Antony.

Through the choice of costume, gesture, props and setting, a self-portrait enabled an artist to take on a variety of roles. After visiting the Levant in 1738–43, the painter Jean-Étienne Liotard adopted a style of clothing for which he was to become known as ‘Le Peintre Turc’. His unconventional appearance – the Moldavian fur headdress and long beard seen in his self-portrait miniature of 1753 – was thought by some to have contributed to his commercial success.

For young artists without the funds to pay a professional model, self-portraiture was a convenient way to practice their drawing skills. Annibale and Agostino Carracci’s self-portraits of c.1575–80 were probably produced by the teenage artists to hone their talents in this way. Some self-portraits appear to have been produced solely for the purpose of self-scrutiny. In a chalk drawing, possibly executed at the age of 80 in the final year of his life, Gianlorenzo Bernini records his hooded eyes and sunken cheeks with unflinching honesty.

The relationship between contemporaries in the art world is explored in the exhibition through representations of artists by their friends, admirers and pupils. Francesco Melzi’s chalk drawing of the aged Leonardo da Vinci (c.1515) is thought to be the most reliable surviving likeness of his teacher. Rubens’s portrait of his former assistant and lifelong friend Van Dyck shows the artist in three-quarter profile, his gaze averted to make him appear reflective, in contrast to the confident figure presented in Van Dyck’s self-portraits. The friendship between the engraver Francesco Bartolozzi and the painter Giovanni Battista Cipriani, Italian artists working in London, is recorded in charming pencil sketches that the pair made of each other in 1770 – one painting, the other dozing in a chair.

In the 19th century, romanticised episodes from the lives of famous artists from the past were popular subject-matter. Johann Michael Wittmer’s *Raphael’s first sketch of the ‘Madonna della Sedia’* (c.1853) depicts the fable of how the Renaissance master came to create one of his best-known works on the base of a wine barrel. Frederick Leighton’s monumental work *Cimabue’s Madonna Carried in Procession* (1855) encapsulates the Victorian artist’s belief that, during the Renaissance, great art was appreciated at all levels of society and artists were held in high esteem, their genius widely acknowledged.

Ends

*Portrait of the Artist* is at The Queen’s Gallery, Buckingham Palace, 4 November 2016 – 17 April 2017.

Visitor information and tickets for The Queen’s Gallery, Buckingham Palace: [www.royalcollection.org.uk](http://www.royalcollection.org.uk), T. +44 (0)30 3123 7301.
The accompanying publication, Portrait of the Artist by Anna Reynolds, Lucy Peter and Martin Clayton, is published by Royal Collection Trust, price £29.95.

Notes to Editors

Royal Collection Trust, a department of the Royal Household, is responsible for the care of the Royal Collection and manages the public opening of the official residences of The Queen. Income generated from admissions and from associated commercial activities contributes directly to The Royal Collection Trust, a registered charity. The aims of The Trust are the care and conservation of the Royal Collection, and the promotion of access and enjoyment through exhibitions, publications, loans and educational programmes. Royal Collection Trust’s work is undertaken without public funding of any kind.

The Royal Collection is among the largest and most important art collections in the world, and one of the last great European royal collections to remain intact. It comprises almost all aspects of the fine and decorative arts, and is spread among some 15 royal residences and former residences across the UK, most of which are regularly open to the public. The Royal Collection is held in trust by the Sovereign for her successors and the nation, and is not owned by The Queen as a private individual.

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