



HISTORIES
OF HOME

Understanding
British Portraits

Decoding the domestic interior in British portraits

Wednesday 28 June 2017, 10.00 — 16.40

A collaborative seminar by the Histories of Home SSN and the Understanding British Portraits professional network, chaired by Frances Borzello

Venue: The Geffrye Museum of the Home, 136 Kingsland Road, London E2 8EA

Programme

10.00—10.30 **Registration and refreshments**

10.30—10.40 Welcome from chairperson Frances Borzello

10.40—11.00 **Dr Tara Hamling, Senior Lecturer in Early Modern History, University of Birmingham**
Dis-located domestic space and the English visual tradition 1550-1650

11.00—11.20 **Angela Cox, MPhil candidate, Department of History of Art, Birkbeck College, University of London, and independent art historian**

A Jacobean Household: The Portrait of Sir Thomas Lucy III and his Family (mid-1620s)

The patriarchal figure of Sir Thomas Lucy (1585-1640) sits comfortably in an opulent domestic interior along with his wife, Alice Spencer (d.1648), their seven children and their nurse. Although the portrait is clearly a dynastic image, yet instead of inscriptions of ages and dates, family crests and mottoes, there are material objects which convey to the viewer the life-style of a wealthy Jacobean gentleman. Furthermore, the portrait articulates a set of moral virtues and contemporary values considered to be worthy of emulation. This paper will explore the visual conventions by which the artist expressed a complex range of meanings in a single monumental image.

11.20—11.40 **Dr. Kate Retford, Senior Lecturer in History of Art, Birkbeck College, University of London**
Real Rooms, Invented Rooms: Interpreting the Eighteenth-Century British Conversation Piece

One of the key characteristics of the eighteenth-century British conversation piece was the amount of canvas given over to a detailed setting: perhaps a locale in a landscape park, or a position in front of a hearth in an elegant drawing room. In a few cases, a setting will represent a space in the sitters' home in notably accurate detail. However, many are 'tweaked' versions of those homes, while others show rooms that were entirely invented by the artist. My paper will consider this range of scenarios, and some of the reasons behind it.

11.40—12.00 **Clare Freestone, Associate Curator of Photographs, National Portrait Gallery**
Domestic interiors in portraits from the National Portrait Gallery's Photographs Collection

A selection of twenty photographs drawn from the Gallery's Photographs Collection from the nineteenth to twenty-first centuries. Including examples from JP Mayall's *Artists at Home* (published 1884) and Gered Mankowitz's commissions for the Sunday Times feature *A Room of My Own* (1980s), the talk will aim to show, through different genres of photography (published, commissioned, snapshot, personal) the domestic interior as recorded in portraits of artists, writers and other NPG sitters. Several women practitioners will be included: Olive Edis, Eveleen Myers, Lady Ottoline Morrell and Ida Kar.

12.00—12.30 **Chaired discussion with the morning speakers**

12.30—13.30 **Light lunch and time to visit the Geffrye Museum galleries**

13.30—13.50 **Dr Hana Leaper, Paul Mellon Centre Fellow, and Deputy Editor of *British Art Studies*
*Carving Limins: from the Victorian Past to the Modernist Future***

Vanessa Bell's early self-portraits transplant her own image from the Victorian drawing room to the modernist studio. Her contemporary portraits of friends and family likewise depict these sitters in images that reference the domestic interiors Bell created for the Omega workshops – rooms designed to herald a new age of freedom and fun.

13.50—14.10 **Andrew Tift, portrait artist**

Andrew Tift is a portrait artist who likes to place his sitters within a specific context and environment which both reflects and reinforces the sitters identity. He will discuss examples of his own work from the past 20 years in relation to portraiture and interior and explain what he was aiming to achieve. Andrew will use paintings relating to his own personal life and experience together with commissioned portraits depicting public and private figures in their spaces.

14.10—14.30 **Benjamin Sullivan, portrait artist**

The 21st Century Portrait

The interior continues to play a key role in the painted portrait. Focusing on his own work from the past two decades, Ben will discuss the decision-making process relating to these works and how they contextualise those being portrayed.

14.30—15.00 **Chaired discussion with afternoon speakers**

15.00—15.30 **Refreshments**

15.30—15.50 **Eleanor John, Director of Collections, Learning & Engagement, and Emma Hardy, Collections Manager, Geffrye Museum**

The uses (and abuses) of portraits as evidence for the domestic interior at the Geffrye

This talk will examine the ways in which portraits set in interiors have formed a key source of evidence for the Geffrye's period rooms, as well as their use more broadly in thinking about the identities and values of sitters.

15.50—16.10 **Olivia Murphy and Vanessa Weibel, Audience Development Co-ordinators, Geffrye Museum**

Moving portraits: digital pathways to teaching and learning

The presentation will highlight the Geffrye's most recent Arts Council England-funded digital families programme. A particular focus will be the recent development of a new family trail and workshops which use an app created by tech company GAMAR to animate some of the collection's twentieth-century portrait paintings to engage families and children. Olivia and Vanessa will explain why portraiture was chosen to be the focus of the digital families' work, the challenges faced and valuable lessons learned.

16.10—16.30 **Chaired discussion with afternoon speakers, evaluation, and close**

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Tickets are £15 each, please see the booking form for details.

Further details, programme, and booking form available at:

www.britishportraits.org.uk/events and <https://historiesofhomessn.wordpress.com/>

There are some complimentary tickets for members of the Understanding British Portraits network who are staff at Accredited collections. Travel grants are also available for all delegates. Please see the above links for full details.



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