

## **PRESS RELEASE**

### **Stories to be told in nationwide portrait events**

A unique project celebrating the diversity of our common humanity through a series of live portrait sittings with high profile sitters in well-known venues, will take place this summer and autumn across the country.

*Portraits Untold* will see acclaimed award winning disabled artist, Tanya Raabe-Webber undertake live portrait sittings that fuse digital and traditional drawing and painting techniques. The sittings will see the artist in conversation with the sitters and in some cases collaborating, as they explore what it is to be human through the stories of the lives and the work of the sitters. The conversations will also explore how art and the artistic process is central to the representation of, discussion about and about our thinking on cultural diversity and contemporary society.

A total of four sitters have been invited to be the subjects at the live events including acclaimed virtuoso percussionist Dame Evelyn Glennie, Stoke City FC mascot and subject of the BBC BAFTA award winning film *Marvellous* Neil Baldwin, artist filmmaker and recipient of BAFTA's life time achievement award John Akomfrah OBE and star of Channel 4's *The Divine David* and avant-garde performance artist David Hoyle.

The live events will take place at Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery (John Akomfrah, 16<sup>th</sup> July), National Portrait Gallery (Evelyn Glennie, 22<sup>nd</sup> July), Stoke City Football Club (Neil Baldwin, 19<sup>th</sup> September) and National Trust property Beningbrough Hall (David Hoyle, 1<sup>st</sup> October). Each sitting will take place in front of a live audience in these well known public venues, as well as being streamed live to online audiences. Both the physical and online audiences will be invited to participate in the event, join in the dialogue and explore diversity whilst also developing their own creative responses in the form of drawings, both on paper and through digital drawing apps on their smart phones and tablets.

Artist Tanya Rabbe-Webber, said: "As a disabled artist, the notion of my own diversity drives my interest in people and the exploration of the human condition and the belief that everyone has the potential to be creative if given the opportunity.

I am well known as a painter of people, however I have wanted to develop a way to engage audiences more fully in the subject matter of my work and also within its physicality. I have developed this project with Independent Producer Mandy Fowler and the venue partners to enable creativity to be as accessible as possible.

Portraits Untold has been devised to reach new audiences through the use of online platforms as well as public events, opening dialogue with audiences about the presentation of diversity and disability within contemporary portraiture and enabling physical and online audiences to engage in the production of new work. I am thrilled at the calibre of the sitters and the venues that we are able to deliver this exciting project with.”

The project has been funded by Arts Council England through lottery funding.

Abid Hussain, Director, Diversity, Arts Council England said: “Art and culture give us a great lens through which to see contemporary culture and diversity. Tanya’s portraits – and the creative responses they inspire - will offer a fascinating look at the differences and similarities between people’s experience of the world around us. I’ve followed Tanya’s incredible artistic journey for over a decade and am delighted to see her continue to develop her practice which is now increasingly exploring the digital realm. Her work exemplifies the Creative Case for Diversity.”

Dr Chris Creed from the Digital Humanities Hub at the University of Birmingham has collaborated with the team to explore new ways around how digital technology can be creatively incorporated into live experiences.

Dr Creed said: “ This unique project has allowed us to apply our research around assistive technology and its use by disabled artists into the exciting environment of live portrait sittings, developing innovative ways to facilitate shared artist and audience experiences”.

Liz Smith, Director of Participation and Learning, National Portrait Gallery, London, said: “We are delighted to welcome Tanya Raabe-Webber and Evelyn Glennie and to be a partner in Portraits Untold. Many portraits in the Gallery’s Collection are the result of collaborations and conversations between the artist and sitter, however for

audiences today these are now quieter in the viewing experience. This major project restages the intensity of making a portrait sitting in a truly participative model. It will provide the opportunity for audiences to observe how an artist creates a portrait over 6 hours, join the conversation and participate by creating their own drawings surrounded by the Gallery's portraits. It will add particular vibrancy to the Gallery's already popular Friday night drawing programme which attracts over 200 people per week by enabling audiences to participate in new and different ways."

Sitter, musician, Evelyn Glennie, said: "What I find fascinating about Tanya's work is how open she is to exploring new expressions in her paintings. She listens not only to the person she's portraying but also to the environment where she's painting. In the end, we have a shared experience that turns the portrait into a piece of storytelling. I really look forward to see how my story unfolds on Tanya's painting."

Grace Davies, Contemporary Arts Programme Manager at the National Trust said: "We are very excited to be part of this innovative national project, and to be able to host both Tanya Raabe-Webber and David Hoyle at Beningbrough Hall - two talented creative practitioners. Portraiture, craftsmanship and innovation are all part of Beningbrough's rich history and so this initiative offers an opportunity to continue in this tradition and create new stories."

The Big Draw, the driving force behind The Big Draw Festival - the world's biggest celebration of drawing are also a partner within the project. Kate Mason, Director, The Big Draw said: ""We live in a world increasingly dominated by visual imagery and digital media with tantalising opportunities just over the horizon. We can speculate where digital technologies and their implication, and application for what denotes art in our contemporary culture make take us, but it remains a constantly shifting and rapidly evolving landscape with kaleidoscope pathways where almost anything seems possible.

"Against this flux we share our collective experience of what it means to be human with all its commonality and vast differences and diversity. We are delighted to support 'Portraits Untold', a unique project led by artist Tanya Raabe-Webber. Her skill in exploring the fusing of digital and traditional drawing techniques uniquely lends itself to the dual narrative as storyteller for the everyday in all its quirkiness, as

well as a mirror to reflect the extraordinary possibilities for creativity as we all move forward in the digital unknown."

Bristol based company Hatch & Twine will be responsible for the delivery of the interactive digital platforms and live streaming.

For more information please visit <http://portraitsuntold.co.uk/>, Like the Facebook Page <https://www.facebook.com/PortraitsUntold>, Follow the Twitter Account <https://twitter.com/PortraitsUntold> and Instagram account <https://www.instagram.com/PortraitsUntold/>

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**Notes to editors:**

**Tanya Raabe Webber**

Tanya Raabe-Webber is an acclaimed disabled artist challenging the notion of identity within contemporary portraiture, often creating portraits of high profile disabled people during live sittings in high profile public art galleries and venues.

The winner of Ability Media International Award, Visual Arts in 2010 and DaDa International Festival, Visual Arts Award 2008, Tanya has also appeared on the BBC programme The Culture Show, undertaking a live televised portrait of the actor, musician and performance artist Mat Fraser and was recently shortlisted for The National Diversity Awards Lifetime Achievement.

Her recent collection Revealing Culture : HeadOn - Portraits of the Untold was delivered through a partnership between Tate Modern, Tate Liverpool and Wolverhampton Art Gallery, where live portrait sittings took place during a series of residencies in these venues, sitters including Tom Shakespeare Sociologist - Bioethicist, Baroness Jane Campbell of Surbiton, D.B.E, Active Crossbench Peer in the House of Lords and Sir Bert Massie CBE Former Chair of the Disability Rights Commission.

She has worked on many commissions including Architects Inside Out: Tate Modern

and Art Matters: Tate Britain and most recently co-presented her collaborative research with Project Ability at the Contemporary Outsider Art: the global context conference in Melbourne Australia.

### **Digital Humanities Hub, University of Birmingham**

The Digital Humanities Hub focuses on collaborative working across the Arts and Humanities with cultural and heritage organisations, digital and creative industries and academics to develop collaborative and innovative digital prototypes.

<http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/facilities/digitalhumanitieshub/about/index.aspx>

### **Beningbrough Hall, Gallery & Gardens**

Built in 1716, Beningbrough Hall is a grand red brick mansion just north of York. Today, the hall is looked after by the National Trust and home to part of the National Portrait Gallery's collection of 18<sup>th</sup> century portraits, whilst the garden boasts labyrinth paths, grand borders, hidden woods and a working walled kitchen garden.

Visit: [www.nationaltrust.org.uk/beningbrough](http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/beningbrough)

### **National Portrait Gallery, London**

Founded in 1856, the aim of the National Portrait Gallery, London is 'to promote through the medium of portraits the appreciation and understanding of the men and women who have made and are making British history and culture, and ... to promote the appreciation and understanding of portraiture in all media'. The Gallery holds the most extensive collection of portraits in the world. With over 1000 portraits on display across three floors, from Elizabeth I to David Beckham, the Gallery has something for everyone. Artists featured range from Holbein to Hockney, and the Collection includes work across all media, from painting and sculpture to photography and video. As well as the permanent displays, the Gallery has a diverse and ever-changing programme of exhibitions and events that promote an understanding and appreciation of portraiture in all forms. [npg.org.uk](http://npg.org.uk)

### **The National Trust**

The National Trust looks after more than 250,000 hectares of countryside, 775 miles of coastline and hundreds of historic places across England, Wales and Northern Ireland. For more information and ideas for great value family days out go to:

<http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/>

### **Birmingham Museums Trust**

Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery is part of Birmingham Museums Trust, an independent charity that manages the city's museum collection and venues on behalf of Birmingham City Council. It uses the collection of around 800,000 objects to provide a wide range of arts, cultural and historical experiences, events and activities that deliver accessible learning, creativity and enjoyment for citizens and visitors to the city. Most areas of the collection are designated as being of national importance, including the finest collection of Pre-Raphaelite art in the world. Attracting over one million visits a year, the Trust's venues include Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery, Aston Hall, Blakesley Hall, Museum Collections Centre, Museum of the Jewellery Quarter, Sarehole Mill, Soho House, Thinktank and Weoley Castle. [www.birminghammuseums.org.uk](http://www.birminghammuseums.org.uk)

### **Stoke City Football Club**

Stoke City Football Club was formed in 1863 and is the second oldest professional football club in the world and one of the founding members of the Football League.

**Arts Council England** champions, develops and invests in artistic and cultural experiences that enrich people's lives. We support a range of activities across the arts, museums and libraries – from theatre to digital art, reading to dance, music to literature, and crafts to collections. Great art and culture inspires us, brings us together and teaches us about ourselves and the world around us. In short, it makes life better. Between 2015 and 2018, we plan to invest £1.1 billion of public money from government and an estimated £700 million from the National Lottery to help create these experiences for as many people as possible across the country. [www.artscouncil.org.uk](http://www.artscouncil.org.uk)

### **The Big Draw**

Founded in 2000, (formally The Campaign for Drawing) The Big Draw is an arts education charity that promotes visual literacy and the universal language of drawing as a tool for learning, expression and invention. The charity leads a diversified programme encompassing advocacy, empowerment and engagement, and is the founder and driving force behind The Big Draw Festival - the world's biggest

celebration of drawing.

The Big Draw manages collaborative research projects, campaigns and educational conferences on visual literacy, digital technology and STEAM. We support professional and emerging artists through The John Ruskin Prize and exhibition, and through events, awards, and competitions, we create platforms for each and everyone who wants to draw. [www.thebigdraw.org](http://www.thebigdraw.org)

**Media:**

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