

WORCESTER ART MUSEUM

LOVE STORIES FROM THE NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY, LONDON **Opens at the Worcester Art Museum November 13**

Worcester is first stop on international tour while the National Portrait Gallery is closed for transformational Inspiring People redevelopment

Worcester, MA—September 28, 2021—This fall the Worcester Art Museum (WAM) opens *Love Stories from the National Portrait Gallery, London*, an exploration of the role of love in some of the greatest masterpieces of Western art. For over a year and a half, the COVID-19 pandemic has compelled people around the globe to be physically separated from loved ones. In tragic cases they have experienced loss and suffering. It is thus a timely moment to reflect on how portraits sustain us during long periods apart and preserve the memory of those no longer with us. As the first venue in an international tour organized while the National Portrait Gallery is closed for a major redevelopment, *Love Stories* at WAM is a rare opportunity for Americans to experience locally some of the National Portrait Gallery's treasures normally only seen in London. The exhibition opens at the Worcester Art Museum on November 13, 2021 and remains on view through March 13, 2022.

With around 100 masterpieces from the National Portrait Gallery, London—the most extensive portraiture collection in the world—*Love Stories* traces the role of portraiture on the changing face of love from sixteenth-century Renaissance-era painting to contemporary photography. Some of the world's most famous passionate affairs, long-lasting companionships, and, sadly, also heartbreaks are captured in the love stories of couples including, John Lennon and Yoko Ono, Oscar Wilde and Lord Alfred Douglas, Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Robert Browning, and Emma Hamilton and Lord Nelson, among others. Whether as love tokens, historical records, or enduring images that outlast human mortality, the works in *Love Stories* serve as visual records of spring flings and slow burns. Moreover, they record the diverse expressions of human affection and attachment. Through these paintings, sculptures, photographs, and drawings—created over a span of five hundred years—we can see that love and the relationships it forges take many different forms.

“Portraits are a visual record of a relationship, celebrating key moments like engagements and weddings, serving as memorials to the deceased, or expressing adoration or disdain for an absent or scorned lover,” said Matthias Waschek, the Jean and Myles McDonough Director of the Worcester Art Museum. “But while much has been written or sung about love, *Love Stories* is an opportunity to dive into this complex history through the visual arts, drawing on some of the most remarkable portraits that reflect this love back to the viewer, decades or even centuries later. We are excited to be collaborating with the National Portrait Gallery, London, to bring these great works of art, and their stories, to American audiences.”

The exhibition is organized in five sections. In the first section, “**The Artist and The Muse**,” the exhibition explores both the role of artist-and-muse as it was traditionally conceived, while also presenting the ways in which many artists have upset these conventions by playing with societal

norms in terms of age, gender, and race, among other elements. For example, the relationship between George Romney (1734-1802) and Emma Hamilton (1765-1815) would appear to exemplify the traditional artist-muse pairing, represented in the show with Romney's 1784 self-portrait and a painting of Hamilton made in approximately 1785. Hamilton captured Romney's imagination, and what initially began as a plan for commercial print-making using her image became a long-term artistic connection: over the following nine years, Romney depicted her more than 100 times, often as herself but also performing various roles, from naïve country girl to classical figures such as Medea, Circe or a Bacchante. Romney's portraits enhanced the celebrity of both artist and sitter, and Hamilton can be viewed as an active performer and collaborator, not merely a passive muse.

“Love and Creativity” brings forward classic pairings, couples who were famous for their own works of art, and for their mutual inspiration as much as their affections. One such example is Mary Beale's painting of her husband, *Charles Beale the Elder* (c. 1660) and her subsequent self-portrait (c. 1666). Beale was among a tiny number of successful and recognized female painters during this period; her adoring husband gave up his career to manage her studio. Notebooks from their family and work life reveal the extent to which business and love went hand in hand for the Beales: along with receipts and the preparations of art materials, Charles also described Mary as my 'Dearest & Most Indefatigable Heart'. In her self-portrait, she rests her hand on a canvas showing unfinished portraits of the couple's two sons.

Another infamous creative couple included in this section is Mary Wollstonecraft—author of the science fiction masterpiece *Frankenstein*—and the poet Percy Bysshe Shelley. Their turbulent, eight year relationship produced some of the most enduring and powerful works in English Literature, and ended tragically when Shelley drowned in 1822. They are shown here with Amelia Curran's 1819 painting of Shelley and Richard Rothwell's undated painting of Wollstonecraft.

In the third section, **“Portraying Partnership,”** the exhibition takes a deep dive into the role of portraiture in the shared lives and marriages of many couples, whether on their wedding day or in their later years. With the increased accessibility of photography—but long before camera phones and Instagram—artists could create images that were shared around the world, letting audiences feel like participants in the life events of celebrities. Photographs such as *The wedding of Nellie Adkins and Ras Prince Monolulu* (Peter Carl MacKay) (1931) taken by George Woodbine for the newspaper the *Daily Herald*, or *The wedding of Ringo Starr and Barbara Bach* (1981) photographed by Terry O'Neill, capture the happiness of these couples in the moment—and the images have become as much a part of history as the events themselves.

The fourth section is **“The Trials of Love,”** cataloging some of the most famous—and infamous—couples, people who found love amidst constrained circumstances, or whose love endured the deepest tragedy. The world may have been scandalized when King Edward VIII said he intended to marry American divorcée Wallis Simpson, but they were even more

surprised when he abdicated the throne in order to do so in 1937. Yet Dorothy Wilding's 1943 photograph *Wallis, Duchess of Windsor; Prince Edward, Duke of Windsor (King Edward VIII)* shows a couple smiling and quite clearly in love.

Decades later there was a different, if equally infamous, love affair: copious public reports of friction within The Beatles as a result of the increasingly consistent presence of Yoko Ono. Tom Blau's three photographs from 1969 of Ono and John Lennon preparing to kiss, staring into each other's eyes, first with eyes open and then with eyes closed, give an alternative perspective: the depth of their love is evident to any viewer. These works demonstrate precisely the ways in which love can be challenging or constantly challenged by the surrounding society.

The final section, all photography, delivers notable images of famous couples. "**Love and the Lens,**" includes photographs such as *Richard Burton and Dame Elizabeth Taylor* (1971) by Terry O'Neill, *Mick Jagger and Bianca Jagger* (1971) by Patrick Lichfield, *Mick Jagger and Jerry Hall* (1981) by Norman Parkinson, and *Prince Charles and Diana, Princess of Wales* (1981) by Patrick Lichfield, and *Meghan, Duchess of Sussex; Prince Harry, Duke of Sussex and family* (2018) by Alexi Lubomirski.

Dr Nicholas Cullinan, Director, National Portrait Gallery, London, said: "We're very excited to be sharing some of the Gallery's most cherished portraits with Worcester Art Museum while the building in London is temporarily closed for our Inspiring People redevelopment. *Love Stories* comprises some of the best portraits in our Collection dating from the sixteenth century to the present day and explores relatable themes, from romantic love, obsession and infatuation to tragedy and loss. At the heart of this exhibition are a series of real-life love stories that are universal and chronicle human experience. After such an unprecedented period of global change, we hope international audiences can come together in person and engage with this visual exploration of love in all its forms."

The exhibition will be accompanied by a beautifully illustrated book, published by the National Portrait Gallery, bringing these love stories to life through the perspectives of numerous authors, using material from the sitter's own letters, diaries and poetry while highlighting their connection to triumphs of painting, photography, theatre, music and literature. Written by National Portrait Gallery curators and invited specialists, the book's contributors include: **Louise Stewart**, former curator, 16th Century to Contemporary Collections, at the National Portrait Gallery, London; **Simon Callow**, actor, musician, writer and theatre director; **Peter Funnell**, former curator at the National Portrait Gallery, London; **Marina Warner**, novelist, short story writer and historian; and **Kate Williams**, author, historian and television presenter. The book is edited by **Lucy Peltz**, Head of Collections Displays (Tudor to Regency) and Senior Curator, 18th Century Collections of the National Portrait Gallery, London.

Love Stories is made possible through the generous support from the Fletcher Foundation. This project is also funded in part by the Ruth and John Adam, Jr. Exhibition Fund, Richard A. Heald Curatorial Fund, Don and Mary Melville Contemporary Art Fund, Michie Family Curatorial Fund,

John M. Nelson Fund, and Hall and Kate Peterson Fund. Related exhibition programming is supported by the Bernard G. and Louise B. Palitz Fund.

This exhibition is sponsored by Skinner Auctioneers and Appraisers.

About the National Portrait Gallery

The National Portrait Gallery was founded in 1856 to encourage through portraiture the appreciation and understanding of the people who have made and are making British history and culture. Today it promotes engagement with portraiture in all media to a wide-ranging public by conserving, growing and sharing the world's largest collection of portraits.

The Gallery in London is closed until 2023, while works take place on its transformational [Inspiring People](#) redevelopment. During this time, the Gallery is continuing to share its unique Collection of portraits through a programme of partnerships and activities across the UK and internationally. www.npg.org.uk

About the Worcester Art Museum

The Worcester Art Museum creates transformative programs and exhibitions, drawing on its exceptional collection of art. Dating from 3,000 BCE to the present, these works provide the foundation for a focus on audience engagement, connecting visitors of all ages and abilities with inspiring art and demonstrating its enduring relevance to daily life. Creative initiatives—including pioneering collaborative programs with local schools, fresh approaches to exhibition design and in-gallery teaching, and a long history of studio class instruction—offer opportunities for diverse audiences to experience art and learn both from and with artists.

Since its founding in 1896, the Worcester Art Museum has assembled a collection of 38,000 objects: from the ancient Near East and Asia, to European and American paintings and sculptures, and continuing with works by contemporary artists from around the world. WAM has a history of making large scale acquisitions, such as its Medieval Chapter House, the Worcester Hunt Mosaic, its 15th-century Spanish ceiling, and the Flemish *Last Judgment* tapestry. In 2013, the Museum acquired the John Woodman Higgins Armory Collection, comprising two thousand arms and armor objects. It continues to commission and present new works, such as 2019's exhibition [With Child: Otto Dix/Carmen Winant](#), which objectively explored pregnancy and birth in works by the German artist Otto Dix (1891-1969), and contemporary American visual artist Carmen Winant (b. 1983).

The Worcester Art Museum, located at 55 Salisbury Street in Worcester, MA, is open Wednesday through Sunday from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Admission is \$18 for adults, \$14 for seniors 65+ and for college students with ID. Admission is free for Museum Members and children ages 0-17. On the first Sunday of each month, admission is free for everyone. Museum parking is free. Tickets may be purchased in-person or in advance at worcesterart.org.

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