

GLADSTONE GALLERY

Victoria Kingdon, "The National Portrait Gallery unveils a new portrait of Malala Yousafzai," *Harper's Bazaar*, October 2, 2018

Harper's BAZAAR

The National Portrait Gallery unveils a new portrait of Malala Yousafzai

It is the first in a series of commissions granted to Iranian-born artist and filmmaker, Shirin Neshat



The National Portrait Gallery has unveiled a newly commissioned portrait of Malala Yousafzai, the female education activist.

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The portrait, which is now on public display, is the first in a series of three commissions granted to Iranian-born artist and filmmaker, Shirin Neshat, and supported by the Outset Contemporary Art Fund over a period of three years. Shirin Neshat is known for her early photographic works that explore questions of gender in relation to Islamic culture, as well as her later video works, which have departed from overtly political content or critique in favour of more poetic imagery and complex human narratives.

The first commission features a set of two photographic portraits of Malala, onto which Neshat has hand inscribed a poem, Malala II by the Pushto poet Rahman Shah Sayel from Peshawar, written in 2011. The poem draws connections between Malala of Maiwand, the Afghan national folk hero, and Yousafzai, praising them both.

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Jorge Herrera - Courtesy of the National Portrait Gallery

One of the portraits, of Malala seated at a school desk with an open book in front of her, will travel to Birmingham Museums, where it will be unveiled in 2020 as part of *Coming Home*, a new initiative, which will see fifty portraits from the National Portrait Gallery's collection travel to places across the UK they are closely associated with. After being shot on her school bus in October 2012 by a Taliban gunman, Malala recovered from her injuries in Birmingham and has remained there with her family since.

The photographs of Malala were taken at a London sitting in March of this year. On meeting the activist, the artist said: "I knew of Malala as an

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extraordinary young woman who had marvelled the world by her victory over death; her fierce fight for women's education and for winning the Nobel Peace Prize, all before she turned twenty years old. It was impossible not to feel intimidated ... Yet as she arrived at the studio to be photographed, I was immediately taken aback by her timid, gentle and innocent demeanour. To this day, when I look back on our encounter, I am left with impressions of humility, wisdom and a rare sense of inner beauty."

Of her portrait being featured in the prestigious gallery, Malala commented, "I am honoured to have my portrait included in the National Portrait Gallery alongside some of Britain's most influential writers, artists and leaders. I hope it will remind visitors that girls everywhere are fighting for change in their communities and countries — their stories must also be heard."