

**MARY BEALE**  
**Portrait of a seventeenth-century painter,  
her family and her studio**

**21 September 1999 to 30 January 2000**

Mary Beale was the most prominent and prolific female portrait painter in seventeenth-century England. Autumn 1999 marks the 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary of her death and to celebrate her achievements, the Geffrye Museum will be staging an exhibition of her life and work, continuing an association which began with the first ever exhibition on Mary Beale, mounted by the Geffrye in 1974.

Mary Beale is perhaps the best-documented artist to have worked in seventeenth-century Britain. An extraordinary wealth of manuscript material survives, from which an intimate portrait can be gained of her daily life, her studio practice, her family and her circle of close friends. The latter was a learned one, including poets and divines, members of the Royal Society and prominent clergymen, including the future Archbishop of Canterbury, John Tillotson, and the future Bishop of Salisbury, Gilbert Burnet. The diary of Samuel Woodforde, who lived with Mary and her husband, Charles, in their apartment off Fleet Street in the early 1660s, builds an intimate picture of their daily activities and concerns, as do the letters written to them by their friends, including the miniaturist Thomas Flatman, when they briefly moved from London to Hampshire at the time of the Great Plague.

Included in the exhibition will be Mary's hitherto unpublished *Discourse on Friendship* (British Library). Dedicated to Elizabeth Tillotson, wife of John Tillotson, it brings into focus Mary's views on marriage and gender equality. A pious and God-fearing woman, her views were governed by religious doctrine which, because of Eve's sin, placed woman second. Yet, through the divine virtue of friendship, Mary saw female salvation. God created Eve, she says, as 'a wife and friend but not a slave', and she believed that, through true friendship, equality between the sexes would be restored.

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Mary saw friendship as an honest and equal partnership and the exhibition will examine the ways in which this belief is reflected in her portraiture, her studio practice and her role as a female professional. Portraits of family and friends will predominate, their honesty of portrayal seeming to mirror Mary's statement that 'Flattery...is a kind of mock friendship'.

Mary viewed her marriage as an equal partnership, as she did her professional career and the management of her studio. The immensely detailed notebooks kept by her husband, Charles, reveal that her studio was a family workshop, with her husband managing the accounts, providing pigments and materials and priming her canvases, and her sons, Bartholomew and Charles II, acting as studio assistants. New evidence shows that her husband's role also extended into the realm of alchemical experimenter. His hitherto unstudied manuscript *Experimental Secrets found out in the way of Painting* (Glasgow University Library) details his pigment-making 'tryalls', which were possibly financially motivated. He adapted recipes to increase the bulk of special pigments such as red lake, which were the money-making pigments for which Mary's clients were charged extra, and which he sold to other artists. Technical investigations of Mary's portraits will, for the first time, place the documentary evidence in context.

An innovative educational programme of lectures, craft workshops and children's activities will accompany the exhibition (please see details overleaf). An exhibition highlighting the work of contemporary Hackney-based textile designer, Rachael Howard, which opens on 6 October 1999, will run concurrently and the Autumn events programme will use these two exhibitions as "bookends" to celebrate four centuries of women in art and design.

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5 July 1999

Programme of Events/...

## MARY BEALE EXHIBITION - PROGRAMME OF EVENTS

### ADULT EVENTS

#### **Evening lecture: A Woman's Perspective**

This lecture will look at the world through Mary Beale's eyes by examining the social-historical background of life in the seventeenth-century, with particular emphasis on the role of women and their place in society and at home. Art Historian Hallie Rubenhold will also explain why the bohemian Beale household, with a woman as its main financial provider, might have been considered radical in Stuart London.

*Tuesday 9 November, 7.00 - 8.00pm*

*Tickets £4.00 in advance or £5.00 at the door (please check availability on the day)*

#### **An Evening with Mary Beale**

Actress Dawn Purkiss will give an intimate portrayal of the personal side of Mary Beale against a projected backdrop of her paintings. This performance will bring Mary to life as she shares the details and concerns of her everyday life: the challenges of running her own business; her relationship with her business manager, who also happened to be her husband; and her insights into the role of women in society and on the importance of friendship.

*Tuesday 23 November, 7.00 - 8.00pm*

*Tickets £4.00 in advance or £5.00 at the door (please check availability on the day)*

### CHILDREN'S ACTIVITIES

#### **Meet Mary Beale**

A special event where families can learn about the home life of Mary Beale and what it was like to be a famous painter and a mother in seventeenth-century England. 'Mary' will explain how oil paintings are made, with special emphasis on the role of children as sitters and assistants in her studio. The performance will last approximately 40 minutes.

*Saturday 23 October, 2.00pm and repeated at 3.30pm*

*For 8 - 12 year olds. Tickets £1.00, must be booked in advance.*

#### **Every Picture tells a Story: Half-term Workshop**

This exciting week will focus on a celebration of 400 years of women in art and design, using the Mary Beale exhibition as inspiration. A range of innovative activities will include painting miniature portraits, designing fabric banners and making pastels.

*Tuesday 26 to Friday 29 October, 10.30am to 12.45pm and 2.00 to 4.00pm*

*Holiday activities are free for individuals and families. All children under eight must be accompanied by an adult. Places are allocated on a first-come, first-served basis 30 minutes in advance of the workshop. Quizzes are available all day in the museum.*

#### **Look at me!: Workshop for 3-5 year olds**

A fun workshop for children and their carers to explore self-portraiture and make their own special picture.

*Saturday 30 October, 2.00pm and repeated at 3.15pm*

*Admission free*

Notes to Editors/...

## NOTE TO EDITORS

1. The exhibition has been curated by Tabitha Barber, a specialist in seventeenth-century paintings at the Tate Gallery. She has written a book to accompany the exhibition.
2. For further information or transparencies, please contact Nancy Loader, PR Officer, or Christine Lalumia, Deputy Director, on 0171 739 9893.
3. The Geffrye Museum presents the quintessential style of English urban middle class interiors from 1600 to the present day through a chronological sequence of period rooms. The museum is set in the former almshouses of the Ironmongers' Company, elegant 18th century buildings with a modern extension designed by Branson Coates Architecture. It is surrounded by tranquil gardens, including an award-winning walled herb garden and a new series of period garden rooms.
4. The Geffrye Museum is an independent charitable trust, grant-aided by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport. The Trust actively seeks to attract donations and corporate sponsorship to support the museum's services and development plans.
5. 

<b>Admission:</b>	<b>FREE</b>
<b>Opening Hours:</b>	<b>Open</b> Tuesday - Saturday 10am - 5pm Sundays & Bank Holiday Mondays 12 - 5pm
	<b>Closed</b> Mondays (unless Bank Holiday), Good Friday, Christmas Eve, Christmas Day, Boxing Day, New Year's Day
<b>Travel:</b>	<b>Tube</b> Liverpool Street, then bus 149 or 242 Old Street (exit 2), then bus 243
	<b>Buses</b> 149, 242, 243, 67
	<b>Parking</b> Meter parking in neighbouring streets