



FRONT COVER STORY

# LUMINARY DRAWINGS

By Nina Mae Fowler

The National Portrait Gallery in London has unveiled a new commission of portrait drawings of some of the UK's leading film directors by London-born artist Nina Mae Fowler. The portraits went on public display for the first time on 12 April and can be seen until 1 October 2019.

Fowler's work often investigates fame, desire and our relationship with cinema. For this commission, she invited directors Amma Asante, Paul Greengrass, Asif Kapadia, Ken Loach, Sam Mendes, Nick Park, Sally Potter, Sir Ridley Scott and Joe Wright to choose a film of particular significance to them. During the sittings, Fowler projected the film of their choice, and recorded their reactions on camera and through loose sketches, with their faces lit by the light of the screen in an otherwise darkened space. The intimate scale of the works draws the viewer into the minds of the people behind the lens, conveying the inspiration felt by the directors when watching great cinema.

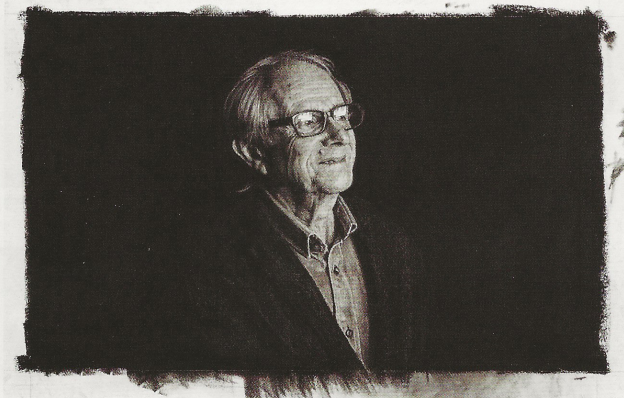
Fowler watched recordings of the sittings frame by frame to extract stills that would form the basis of the final charcoal drawings. She has chosen not to reveal the directors' film choices. She had said: "The beauty of these sittings was twofold; firstly, the directors lost any sense of being watched or portrayed as they were too engrossed in the film, secondly, we experienced the film together, which created conversation, laughter and an immediate bond between strangers. I want the viewer to wonder what film the directors are watching and to seek the answers in their faces. The only clues the viewer has are their reactions, the exact frame (documented in the titles) and the light thrown on them by the films themselves." [v](#)

All works © National Portrait Gallery.  
Photographed by Douglas Atfield.

National Portrait Gallery, St Martin's Place,  
London WC2H 0HE. Tel: 020 7306 0055.  
Open daily 10:00-18:00. Friday Lates until  
21:00. Admission free. Nearest Tube:  
Leicester Square or Charing Cross.



(01:44:48) **Sally Potter.** "Being watched while watching was an interesting reversal. I often strive for invisibility as a director. I am there to look, not to be looked at. The portrait somehow looks the way I feel - hidden (in this case behind my hand and glasses) but beady-eyed. I recognise myself in a way I rarely do in a photograph."



(20:30:17) **Ken Loach.** "This was a delightful project but also an original one. It was easy to be drawn into a film that I know well, but was pleased to enjoy again. What a treat!"



(01:40:25) **Amma Asante.** "It has been both a privilege and a fascinating experience to sit for Nina. Her work somehow captures what a photograph cannot. There is a mystique that I find utterly compelling and beautiful."