

## Audio Practice – Portraits of six Pioneering Women Commented

<https://www.npg.org.uk/collections/explore/the-making-of-a-pioneer>

Only the introductions are transcribed. But that's enough to practice! 😊



**Mary Wollstonecraft**

by John Opie

oil on canvas, circa 1797

NPG 1237

<https://soundcloud.com/toastmagazine/mary-wollstonecraft-the-making-of-a-pioneer>

John Opie's portrait of Mary Wollstonecraft hangs in Room 18 of the National Portrait Gallery; a woman in high-waisted white dress and soft hat, her gaze falling somewhere off to the right. The sitter's pose reveals little of her revolutionary life and the progressiveness of her views. She was a radical thinker, a feminist, journalist and author, famed particularly for her 1792 work *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, in which she discussed the novel idea that the sexes should be considered equal. "I do not wish them to have power over men," she wrote of women, "but over themselves."

When she sat for Opie, Wollstonecraft was pregnant with her daughter, the writer Mary Shelley. Wollstonecraft died days after her daughter's birth, and in the years that followed her role in the feminist movement became largely forgotten.

In 1974, Claire Tomalin wrote her first book, a biography of Wollstonecraft, kindling huge interest in Wollstonecraft's life and works. Laura Barton visits Tomalin at her home near the river in Richmond to discuss Wollstonecraft's remarkable legacy.



### Germaine Greer

by Dame Paula Rego

pastel on paper laid on aluminium, 1995

NPG 6351

<https://soundcloud.com/toastmagazine/germaine-greer-the-making-of-a-pioneer>

The portrait of the Australian academic, writer and broadcaster Germaine Greer, by Paula Rego shows its subject filling the canvas, legs apart. Her hands are rough from gardening and she is dressed in her favourite Jean Muir dress and old, silver shoes. The portrait's lack of flattery appealed to Greer: "A portrait that is kind is condescending. The last thing I would want is for Paula to condescend to me, and it's the last thing she would think of doing."

A major voice of second wave feminism, in 1970 Greer published *The Female Eunuch*, which argued that traditional family structures repress women's sexuality. Still one of the most widely-read feminist texts, it has never been out of print.

Greer has long courted controversy, and is regarded by many as a combative and frequently frustrating icon of feminism. A *New Statesman* column once stated that Greer "doesn't get into trouble occasionally or inadvertently, but consistently and with the attitude of a tank rolling directly into a crowd of infantry."

For all of this, Greer remains a crucial and powerful figure in the development of feminist thinking. One *Guardian* commentator put it: "As it goes with pioneering figures, there is much to doubt and dismiss; yet we are still indebted to them, as we are to Greer, for taking risks in the first place."

Greer is 80 now, still writing, still vocal. On a midweek morning Laura Barton visits her at her home in Essex. There they discuss Greer's current works and her plans to return to her homeland, leaving behind the garden that she has been creating for the last three decades.\*

Image: Germaine Greer by Paula Rego. Pastel on paper laid on aluminium, 1995. © National Portrait Gallery, London. Discover more pioneering women from the National Portrait Gallery Collection in the book *100 Pioneering Women*, featuring portraits of remarkable women from the last five centuries.

\*Please note, this episode contains strong language from the start.



## Vanessa Bell

by Duncan Grant

oil on canvas, circa 1918

NPG 4331

<https://soundcloud.com/toastmagazine/vanessa-bell-the-making-of-a-pioneer>

\*EXTENDED EPISODE\* Vanessa Bell's portrait is on display in Room 31 at the National Portrait Gallery. Painted by her lover and life partner Duncan Grant somewhere around 1918, it shows her in an easy, contemplative pose, wearing a floral red dress and holding a pale pink rose.

The creative talent of Bell is often overshadowed by that of her sister, Virginia Woolf, and other members of the Bloomsbury Group, to which she belonged. More recently, her work has been reappraised and reconsidered, celebrated for its experimental, often radical force and raw sensuality.

On a brisk Autumn day, Laura Barton heads to Charleston, the country home of the Bloomsbury Group, where the furniture and walls are still covered in Bell's designs. There she meets the curator Dr Darren Clarke, head gardener Fiona Dennis, and Bell's granddaughter, the writer Virginia Nicholson.

Charleston Farmhouse is open to the public from Wednesday to Sunday, 10–5pm.

Image: Vanessa Bell by Duncan Grant. Oil on canvas, circa 1918. © National Portrait Gallery, London.



## Emily Brontë

by Patrick Branwell Brontë

oil on canvas, arched top, circa 1833

NPG 1724

<https://soundcloud.com/toastmagazine/emily-bronte-the-making-of-a-pioneer>

Emily Brontë's portrait, by her brother Patrick Branwell Brontë, hangs in Room 24 at the National Portrait Gallery. For many years the painting was lost, and only discovered in 1906, folded on top of a cupboard in Ireland. Today, it is one of the most popular works in the collection.

Emily is best known as the author of *Wuthering Heights*, first published in 1847 under the pseudonym Ellis Bell. It is regarded as a pioneering text, drawing on themes of the Gothic genre; a love story that also touches on issues of domestic violence, alcoholism, neglect, and sexual obsession, against a backdrop of a wild Yorkshire landscape.

Laura Barton travels to the Brontë Parsonage in Haworth to meet the museum's learning officer Sue Newby and the New York Times bestselling graphic novelist and illustrator Isabel Greenberg, whose forthcoming book *Glass Town* explores the childhood imaginary world of the Brontë sisters. Together they discuss the unique, unconventional spirit of Emily.

Thank you to The Unthanks who granted us permission to include their beautiful music, which turns Emily's poetry into song. Words by Emily Brontë. Music by Adrian McNally. Performed by The Unthanks.

Image: Emily Brontë by Patrick Branwell Brontë. Oil on canvas, circa 1833. © National Portrait Gallery, London.



## Shami Chakrabarti

by Gillian Wearing

gelatin silver print, 2011

NPG 6923

<https://soundcloud.com/toastmagazine/shami-chakrabarti-the-making-of-a-pioneer>

Gillian Wearing's portrait of Shami Chakrabarti, taken with a large-format camera, shows its sitter holding a wax mask of her own face. Wearing has said that the idea was inspired by Chakrabarti's own comment about her "mask-like" public persona, often interpreted as "grim, worthy and strident".

A barrister, and former director of the civil rights group Liberty, Chakrabarti is now a Labour Party politician, and a member of the House of Lords. In her frequent appearances on the BBC's Question Time and Radio 4's Today Programme, among others, she has been consistently passionate and committed in her defence of civil liberties, particularly in areas of anti-terrorism measures and immigration. More recently she has been at the heart of the complex debate surrounding the UK's departure from Europe.

Laura Barton meets Chakrabarti in a park close to the House of Lords, where even on a dreary autumn morning demonstrators have gathered at the gates with placards.

This podcast is a collaboration between TOAST and the National Portrait Gallery. All views expressed are the subject's own, and not necessarily those of TOAST or the National Portrait Gallery.



## Pauline Boty

by Pauline Boty

stained glass, circa 1958

NPG 7030

[https://soundcloud.com/toastmagazine/paulinebotywithalismsmith\\_themakingofapioneer](https://soundcloud.com/toastmagazine/paulinebotywithalismsmith_themakingofapioneer)

You can see Pauline Boty's self-portrait on display in Room 31 at the National Portrait Gallery. A striking work of stained glass, it is an early piece from what would be a short career. Though she died at the age of just 28, in her brief, vibrant life she made a wonderfully varied contribution to the world of British pop art and culture. After decades in the shadows, Boty has recently been rightfully placed among the masters of the movement, from Peter Blake to Richard Hamilton.

Laura Barton meets the writer Ali Smith in front of Boty's portrait, where she is joined by the curator Lucy Dahlsen. Smith's book *Autumn* helped ignite a new appreciation and love for Boty's work — its intelligence, mischief, feminist stance, and distillation of 1960s London. As Smith says, "when you are anywhere near her work in the flesh you feel the life, you feel the energy."

This podcast is a collaboration between TOAST and the National Portrait Gallery, London.