

Face to Face

WINTER 2021

National
Portrait
Gallery



INTRODUCING OUR NEW PARTNER – NISSEN RICHARDS STUDIO

by Pippa Nissen

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BELOW

*The Rake's Progress at
the Staatsoper Hannover,
Germany*

FOR US, ONE OF THE HIGH POINTS OF 2020 was our appointment as Interpretation Designers for the transformation of the National Portrait Gallery. To introduce us properly, Nissen Richards Studio is a London-based multidisciplinary design studio working across architecture, exhibition and graphic design, as well as narrative development. Our beginning, in 2010, was a fusion between architecture and theatre design, a combination that has given our work both unique creative flair and a commitment to the quality of craft. Since we first started out, we have built our experience through working with many inspiring cultural organisations

both in the UK and internationally, including the V&A, the Courtauld Gallery, the National Trust, the Staatsoper Hannover and the National Library of Norway.

As a studio, we're interested above all in designing spaces that evoke emotional responses and tell stories. We have a background in theatre and architecture – I took an MA in Theatre Design at the Slade School of Fine Art, but I am also a qualified architect. We are fascinated by how storytelling can weave itself through design. Storytelling unlocks people's experiences and shapes how they associate with the spaces around them.



BELOW FROM TOP

**The Great Room at the
Courtauld Gallery**

Image by Nissen Richards Studio

**The new museum at
Wordsworth Grasmere**

Photo © Gareth Gardner

The *Inspiring People* project will have a far-reaching effect on the National Portrait Gallery, and we were absolutely thrilled to join the project's creative team, working alongside Jamie Fobert Architects. There is something very interesting about a gallery that is essentially about people – we respond to other human beings, so there is a natural starting point. Through our design work, we have tried to harness this idea to create person-to-person encounters, making connections between the sitters of portraits and us, the viewers. The project will provide the unique opportunity to redisplay the entire Collection, upgrade the gallery spaces and enhance the existing architecture and decorative features. But it is also an opportunity to introduce new and innovative ways of bringing the stories of portraits and portraiture to life.

This is not our first transformation project, of course. We have worked on many projects within museums, art galleries and historic places that have required a total rethink of the collection display and the visitor experience, in the same way as we are now rethinking the Gallery.

At Wordsworth Grasmere for example, the great English Romantic poet William Wordsworth's home in the Lake District, we designed a new journey through the different spaces that make up the site, including William and his sister Dorothy's home Dove Cottage, the gardens and a redesigned



museum. The final part of the project was completed in May this year and visitors seem to be enjoying the experience. Our new interpretation and exhibitions within the museum and Dove Cottage allow visitors to connect with Wordsworth and his life and poetry in ways that make them think and feel, and we particularly enjoy being able to immerse visitors and connect them emotionally to a subject in this way.

BELOW

The tower at Sutton Hoo's burial ground

Photo © Gareth Gardner

Our work for the National Trust's Sutton Hoo, which recently reopened, also involved a complete transformation of the visitor experience. The challenge here was for visitors to understand and imagine an Anglo-Saxon royal burial ground, set within a long-gone Anglo-Saxon world. New routes throughout the site encourage you to experience and look at the landscape in a directed way where we thought carefully about how visitors understand elements of the history



RIGHT

Pippa Nissen

Photo © Gareth Gardner



of the landscape by moving through it. The landmark contribution to the transformed experience, however, was a new viewing tower located by the Anglo-Saxon burial ground. Nestled within the pine trees that line the burials, it gives you a unique view that makes the burial mounds stand out.

We are currently also working on the gallery design and wayfinding for the Courtauld Gallery, which reopens later this year after undergoing a major transformation. This unique and wonderful project has been terrifically interesting and has seen us involved in rethinking how the gallery can best present its internationally renowned art collection.

We really look forward to seeing the design for the National Portrait Gallery come together over the next year and beyond. It is a thrilling transformative journey for the Gallery, but also for us, as a studio.

Pippa Nissen studied Architecture at Cambridge University and took an MA in Theatre Design from the Slade School of Fine Art. This unique fusion is one of the many elements that sets the practice she founded in 2010 apart. Nissen Richards Studio's multi-disciplinary skillset includes architecture, exhibition design, interpretation, theatre and graphic design.