

# The Queen: Art and Image



Lightness of Being by Chris Levine © Chris Levine

Whatever your feelings towards the monarchy are, one thing can be agreed on, the presence of Queen Elizabeth II has remained strong since her reign began in 1952.

In 2012, the Queen will celebrate her Diamond Jubilee. To mark this, a major exhibition has opened in the capital, bringing together some of the most remarkable and resonant images of Queen Elizabeth II from the sixty years of her reign.

[The Queen: Art and Image](#) is the most wide-ranging exhibition of images in different media devoted to a single royal sitter. It combines formal painted portraits, media pictures and official photographs with powerful responses by contemporary artists, exploring traditional representations and works that extend the visual language of royal portraiture.

As you enter the exhibition at the [Scottish National Gallery](#), a video of the Queen's 1953 Coronation can be seen and heard. The black and white film shows a young Princess Elizabeth taking to the throne, reminding you just how long she has been Head of State and also how much technology has progressed since.

The exhibition is divided into decades, starting with the 1950s, showing the first press picture of Britain's new Queen returning from Kenya after hearing of her father's death in 1952. In the same year, the new monarch also posed for photographer Dorothy Wilding no less than fifty-nine times. The finest of these images were sent to every embassy in the world and still appear on our bank notes and stamps today. The Queen also delivered her first Christmas Message in 1952.

A photograph of a family in their living room listening to the speech shows how the new royal entered the homes and lives of the British public.



Queen Elizabeth II  
by Eve Arnold ©  
Eve Arnold

In the 1960s, photographer Eve Arnold captured an image of the Queen laughing under an umbrella, depicting her as a glamorous yet approachable person. Cecil Beaton's 1968 photographs of the monarch and her family show the importance of domestic values to the sovereign, just like any other proud parent. In the same decade, these accessible portrayals of Queen Elizabeth II were contrasted by Pietro Annigoni's colossal painting, showing Her Majesty wearing the robes and insignia of the Order of the British Empire.

The 1970s section features a photograph taken by Patrick Lichfield of a relaxed Queen laughing on HMY Britannia. This informal image again enhanced public appeal to the 'ordinary' royal. However, in the same decade, Jamie Reid created the controversial poster for the Sex Pistols' single 'God Save the Queen', which is also displayed.

Throughout the exhibition, various official and unofficial photographs of the Queen demonstrate the magnitude and diversity of her role; from official state visits to India and Kenya to meeting the Spice Girls and presenting the World Cup to the England football team.

The 1980s sees the shift of public attention and media interest from the Queen to Diana, the new Princess of Wales. It marks the start of a celebrity culture surrounding the monarchy, as well as an increasingly intrusive press. Andy Warhol's signature pop art prints show the Queen's face and suggest that the 'public face is pure artifice'.



The Queen by Justin  
Mortimer © Justin Mortimer

In the 1990s, the royal family faced the tragic death of Princess Diana. A potent photograph of the Queen and Prince Phillip amidst a sea of flowers illustrates the impact of Diana's death not only on the royal family but on the world. In contrast to this sad image, a 1999 photograph of the Queen having tea with a local family in Castlemilk, Glasgow, again shows the monarch as an accessible public figure. This decade also saw the modern portrait of the Queen by Justin Mortimer, where her head appears to be floating away from her body. Although the public response was adverse, the Queen went on to commission the artist to paint the Lord Chamberlain.

The final section of the exhibition shows how a diverse range of artists have represented the image of Queen Elizabeth II. The 2001 Lucian Freud oil on canvas shows the monarch wearing the same diamond diadem as she did when she posed for Wilding almost fifty years earlier. The youth and glamour of the Queen in Wilding's painting is contrasted by her age and experience shown in Lucian's portrayal. Sculptor Hew Locke's Medusa is featured and shows the traditional image of the royal contrasted with modern consumer culture, as the Queen's head is made from metal beads, toy animals and plastic dolls. Slightly haunting is Kim Dong Yoo's Elizabeth vs. Diana, where the face of the Queen is composed of 1, 106 pictures of Princess Diana. One of the most stunning images of the Queen is Chris Levine's print on lightbox, which displays the Queen closing her eyes in a split moment where the public persona became a private individual.



Medusa by Hew  
Locke © Arts  
Council

Collection, South  
Bank Centre

The Queen: Art and Image documents the changing nature of representations of the monarch and how images of the Queen serve as a lens through which to view shifting perceptions of royalty. A visual biography spanning sixty years, this exhibition celebrates and explores the startling range of artistic creativity and media-derived imagery that the Queen has inspired. It also probes the relation of this imagery to a world of changing values during a reign that has engaged the attention of millions.

*[The Queen: Art and Image](#)*

*Scottish National Gallery*

*Edinburgh 25 June–18 Sept 2011*

*Sponsored by Turcan Connell*

*Admission £7 (£5)*

*Tickets available online at [www.nationalgalleries.org](http://www.nationalgalleries.org)*