

Scottish Portrait Awards has found a new home

The Scottish Arts Trust and National Galleries of Scotland have announced that the 2026 Scottish Portrait Awards will be hosted at the Portrait gallery for the first time.

This exciting new home for the 2026 awards will bring deserved attention to the many talented contemporary portrait artists in Scotland today. Applications to participate in the 2026 Scottish Portrait Awards will open on 1 September 2025 and close 15 January 2026. Submissions are open to anyone over the age of 16 on 1 November 2026 and born or living or studying in Scotland, regardless of experience.

The Scottish Portrait Awards are excited to welcome television presenter and journalist Kirsty Wark as Guest Judge. With an impressive broadcast career, Kirsty presented BBC Two's Newsnight for 30 years before going on to anchor BBC Radio 4's arts and culture programme, Front Row. Kirsty joins a stellar line-up of highly respected artists and photographers who will select the works for the exhibition.

Joining Kirsty will be Guest Photography Judge Albert Watson OBE, one of the world's most successful fashion photographers. Known for his iconic portraits including those of Alfred Hitchcock and Steve Jobs, Watson's portrait of Sir Sean Connery is part of Scotland's national collection. Also joining the panel is Calum Stevenson, who was shortlisted for

the Scottish Portrait Awards in 2020. Calum went on to be the youngest artist and first Scot to win Sky Arts Portrait Artist of the Year in 2021.

Organised by the Scottish Arts Trust, the awards celebrate Scottish talent and creativity. Around 120 works will be selected for the fine art and photography exhibitions which will be held in National Galleries Scotland: Portrait from Autumn 2026 – Spring 2027. All entries will be in the running for cash prizes totalling £16,000 which will be presented by the Scottish Arts Trust along with the opportunity to win one of two commissions for works that will join Scotland's national collection. The Scottish Arts Trust also runs a bursary scheme that will provide free entry to a number of artists who require any assistance. Details on the bursary scheme and how to enter the awards and can be found at scottishartstrust.org/portrait

The Scottish Portrait Awards exhibition will also include 50 works selected from the free-to-enter Scotland Now! Phone Portrait Award. Anyone aged 16 years or over and living in Scotland can enter with recent phone portraits taken in Scotland of someone who lives in Scotland. The Scotland Now! Award, which also carries a cash prize, launched in 2024 and attracted over 1,500 entries in its first year.

The Scottish Portrait Awards has been running since 2017 and is organised by the Scottish Arts Trust, a small charity largely managed by volunteers. Since its inception, the awards have discovered and recognised almost 500 incredible artists whose work features in the Scottish Portrait Awards online archive. Many of the artists have continued to advance their careers with exhibitions and commissions. Previous award winners include many celebrated artists including Helen Wilson, Robin Gillanders and Graeme Wilcox.

National Galleries of Scotland have a longstanding relationship with the Scottish Portrait Awards with former

judges from the galleries including Imogen Gibbon, Deputy Director and Chief Curator, Portraiture and Ben Harman Senior Curator, Photography. Michael Youds was working as a gallery attendant at the National Galleries of Scotland when he won the Scottish Portrait Award in Fine Art in 2019. Youds now has two works in Scotland's national collection.

As well as celebrating contemporary Scottish artists, the awards also provide an opportunity to shine a light on some of the stories of the sitters in the portrait. Last year saw Jennifer Charlton become the first female winner of the MPB Scottish Portrait Award in Colour Photography with her winning photograph from a series titled *A Hidden Community*. The sitters in her images were all volunteers – a mixture of friends and strangers who each courageously shared their stories on mental health, demonstrating how we live in a hidden community where mental health doesn't discriminate. Since winning the award, Jennifer has become a media spokesperson for Women's Aid.

Kirsty Wark, Scottish Portrait Awards Guest Judge said, *"The Portrait gallery in Edinburgh is home to contemporary portraits and famous faces from Scotland's past. It's really exciting to have the opportunity to shine a spotlight on some Scotland's amazing up and coming talented artists. I am thrilled to be part of the judging panel and to be supporting the great work of the Scottish Arts Trust."*

Sara Cameron McBean, who is a Scottish Arts Trust trustee and had the original idea for the Scottish Portrait Awards, said. *"Ten years ago, a group of us were sitting around a table planning the creation of this new platform that would celebrate and promote portraiture in Scotland. We had no money and no staff. Our dream was always that the Scottish Portrait Awards would eventually come to the Portrait Gallery."*

Imogen Gibbon, Deputy Director and Chief Curator of Portraiture at National Galleries of Scotland

said: *“Portraiture can transform the ordinary into the extraordinary. The success of the Scottish Portrait Awards lies in the multitude of stories behind and conveyed through each and every portrait. This will be one of the most ambitious exhibitions of contemporary Scottish portraiture of its time. We are making the announcement early because we want as many artists as possible to be aware of the opportunity to see their work hanging in the Portrait Gallery.”*

Calum Stevenson, Scottish Portrait Awards Fine Art Judge, **said:** *“The impact of the Scottish Portrait Awards are enormous, I was thrilled to have my self-portrait accepted for the exhibition in 2020 and I know that experience helped build my confidence when I entered and won the Sky Arts Portrait Artist of the Year in 2021.”*

Gordon Mitchell RSW RSA RGI, Director, Scottish Portrait Awards and Fine Art Chair, **said:** *“The Scottish Portrait Awards offer Scottish artists the best opportunities for exposure, engagement and recognition of work, and for some, career-changing impact. There couldn’t be a more fitting partner than National Galleries Scotland: Portrait to ensure more visitors have the opportunity to come face-to-face with the leading portraiture of the day.”*

Simon Murphy, Chair of Photography, **said:** *“The Scottish Portrait Awards is a fantastic opportunity for everyone to get involved regardless of experience. The resulting exhibition will give a unique insight into contemporary portraiture in all its diversity”*

Entries to the Scottish Portrait Awards 2026 open 1 September 2025 and close 15 January 2026, find out more at [Scottish Portrait Awards – Scottish Arts Trust](#)



The Scottish Portrait Awards will be shown at the Scottish

National Portrait Gallery in 2026.

L-R are Imogen Gibbon Curator of Portraiture at National Galleries of Scotland, Gordon Mitchell RSW RSA RGI, Director, Scottish Portrait Awards and Fine Art Chair, Kirsty Wark Guest Judge, television presenter and journalist, Sara Cameron McBean, Scottish Arts Trust trustee who had the original idea for the Scottish Portrait Awards and Calum Stevenson Scottish Portrait Awards Fine Art Judge and former shortlisted artist.
PHOTO Julie Howden