

At the King's Gallery – Royal Portraits

A new exhibition of portraits of members of the royal family opening on Friday at the King's Gallery spans 100 years of photography to the present day.

Her late Majesty Queen Elizabeth II is featured in many of the photos, both as a younger woman and in her later years. In one photograph by Julian Calder from 2010 she is depicted standing in the heather near Balmoral in full regalia as Chief of the Chiefs and Sovereign of the Most Ancient and Most Noble Order of the Thistle. Senior Curator of Photographs and exhibition curator, Alessandro Nasini, said that one of the important aspects of the photo is the “very dramatic sky” and said he understands that “literally two minutes after the shoot was finished the heavens opened. I think it is a lovely photograph.”

This work was exhibited previously in the Scottish National Portrait Gallery, but others have not been seen publicly before.

According to Mr Nasini there are around half a million photographs dating back to 1840 when the collection was started by Queen Victoria and Prince Albert who he said were “both passionate and enthusiastic about photography”. He said: “They acquired a lot of photography. And luckily for us, the collection grew and grew over the years, it continues to grow to this day.

“So I was very fortunate it was a big pool of material to choose from. I decided to start from the 1920s to the 2020s to give a century of photos.

“Soon after the First World War, technological advancements in the printing process made it possible to reproduce the photographic image much more cheaply and easily through mass media. Newspapers, and also fashion and style magazines such as Vogue, Harper’s Bazaar, Tatler and so on, in return produced a huge demand for the photographic portrait. Many studios were booked up, especially in London, specialising in society portraiture.”

Mr Nasini hopes that visitors to the exhibition will enjoy the experience of seeing some of the original prints up close – and opportunity which is rare mainly for conservation reasons.

Curator of the new exhibition at The King’s Gallery Alessandro Nasini told us about the 1.6m high portrait of HM The King which is one of nearly 100 photos and negatives on show at The Palace of Holyroodhouse

[\[image or embed\]](#)

– [The Edinburgh Reporter \(@edinreporter.bsky.social\)](#) [27 February 2025 at 23:54](#)

There are photos in the exhibition by Yousaf Karsh who Mr Nasini said was a friend of the late Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh. It was one of the photos by Karsh of a young Queen Elizabeth II that is deemed “reputation making”.

The Duke can be seen in several photos, including alongside The Queen at the Coronation in 1953.

One of the most striking images in the exhibition is produced at scale, some 1.6 metres high, and shows HM The King

photographed at Birkhall by Nadav Kander. This photograph was not commissioned by the sitter, but by Time magazine signifying an important change from earlier photos which were arranged by the subject who then had some control over the resulting photograph.

Changes in the technology are referred to in the exhibition with negatives and other archival material showing how the photo was created and manipulated even before digital photography. A photo by US photographer Annie Liebowitz is shown twice – once with the actual background and the other with a union jack behind Queen Elizabeth II.

Bringing together more than 90 photographic prints, proofs and documents from the Royal Collection and the Royal Archives, the exhibition – which follows a successful run in London – will also consider the artistic and technological advances in photography as it evolved into a recognised art form.

Royal Portraits: A Century of Photography opens on Friday at The King's Gallery, Palace of Holyroodhouse and will run from 28 February – 7 September 2025.

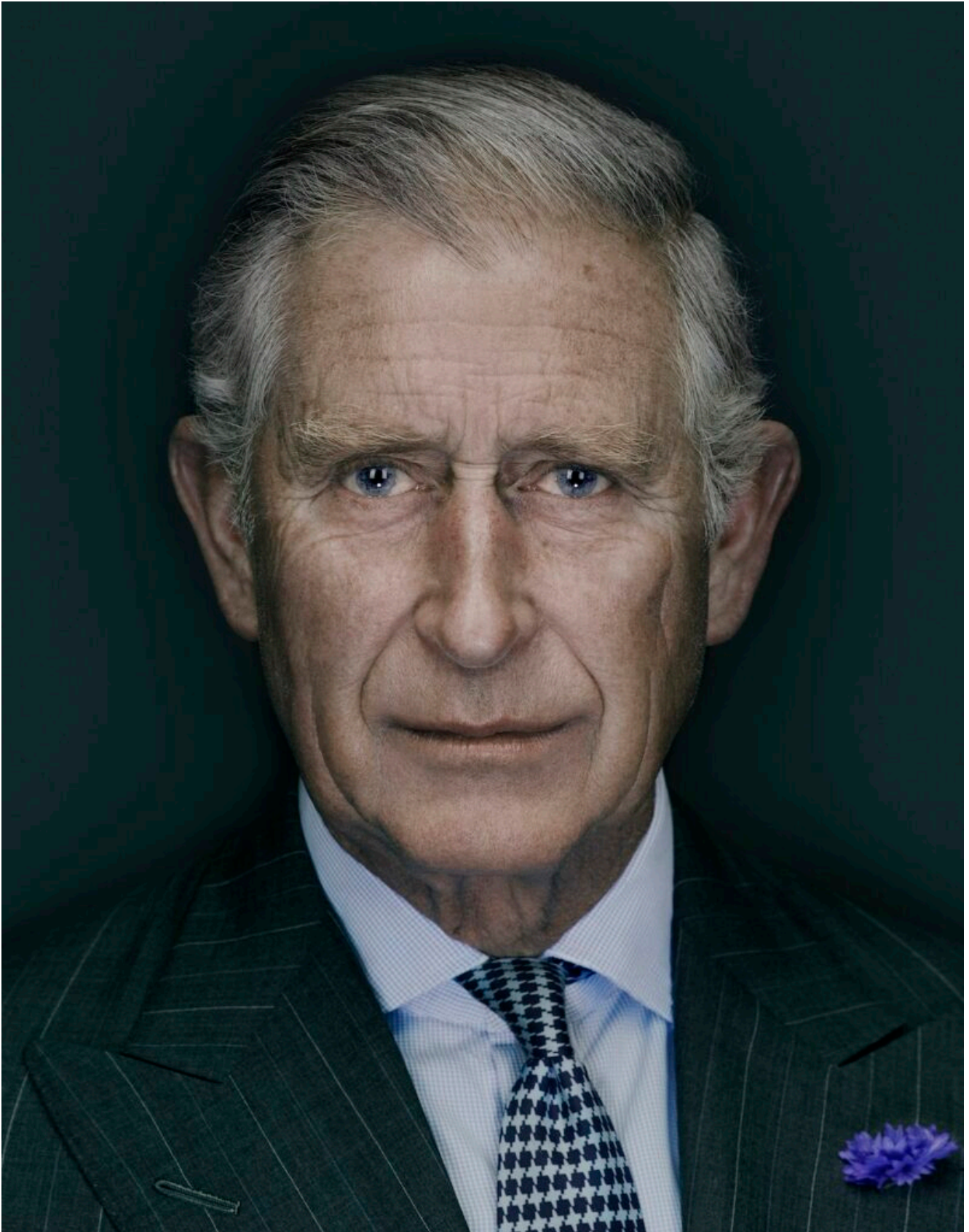
The King's Gallery will continue to offer £1 tickets to this exhibition for visitors receiving Universal Credit and other named benefits. Further concessionary rates are available, including discounted tickets for young people, half-price entry for children (with under-fives free), and the option to convert standard tickets bought directly from Royal Collection Trust into a 1-Year Pass for unlimited re-entry for 12 months.

An accompanying programme of events will include:

- **[Snapshots: Gallery Short Talks](#)**: A series of regular short talks taking an in-depth look at a different photograph each week and the story of its creation (6 March – 4 September).
- **Student Sessions: Curation and Conservation**: An exciting

opportunity for students in arts, heritage, and culture to hear from curator Alessandro Nasini, Senior Curator of Photographs, and Ashleigh Brown, Paper and Photographic Conservator, about what goes into an exhibition through interactive talks, workshops, and group discussion (27 March).

- **Curator's Introduction**: Alessandro Nasini, exhibition curator, will discuss the development of the exhibition and his personal highlights (11 April and 15 August).
- **Royal Portraits in the Press**: In this in-person lecture, Helen Lewandowski, Assistant Curator of Photographs, will discuss how iconic royal images have been shared in the media, from the printed press to social media (2 May).
- **Rankin: In Conversation**: An exclusive digital event with exhibition curator Alessandro Nasini in discussion with renowned photographer Rankin, covering his techniques, work, and experience working with the late Queen (6 June).



Nadav Kander,
King Charles III, when the Prince of
Wales, 2013
Credit line:
© Nadav Kander



Dorothy Wilding,
Queen Elizabeth II,
1952

Credit line:

© Royal Collection Enterprises Limited

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Snowdon,

Princess Margaret,
1967
Credit line: ©
Photograph: Snowdon / Camera
Pres



Hugo Burnand,

King Charles III

, 2023

Credit line:

© Photo: Hugo Burnand/Royal Household



Rankin,
Queen Elizabeth II (Union Flag),
2001

Credit line: ©
Rankin, 2001



Julian Calder,
Queen Elizabeth II, Queen of Scots, Sovereign of the Most
Ancient and Most Noble
Order of the Thistle and Chief of the Chiefs, 2010
Photo credit
Julian Calder/Camera



: A snapshot reproduced on an information panel within the exhibition gives a behind the scenes insight into the sitting.

Paul Whybrew,

Queen Elizabeth II during her sitting with Calder, 2010