

**Display of the first
coin portrait of
Her Majesty The Queen
Elizabeth II to mark the
Platinum Jubilee**

Mary Gillick: modelling The Queen's portrait

2 June – 31 July 2022

Press images: <https://tinyurl.com/29h798ct>

In celebration of Her Majesty The Queen's Platinum Jubilee in June, the British Museum will open a new, free display centring around female artist Mary Gillick's (1881–1965) portrait of Elizabeth II. This was for **the first ever coin featuring The Queen**, designed 70 years ago in 1952 and issued in 1953. **The Asahi Shimbun Display *Mary Gillick: modelling The Queen's portrait*** will showcase the production and reception of the coin, shining a light on the excitement around the young Queen's first depiction on British currency.

Gillick's portrait of The Queen combined modern design with Italian Renaissance influences, building on her experience as a medal maker. A female artist bringing a modern style to traditional coinage was hailed by many as a fitting start to The Queen's reign. Her **iconic design remained in circulation on coins in the UK until the 1990s**. In addition, the design has been adapted for use on British commemorative stamps since 1966 and still appears on the Maundy money given out by The Queen each Easter, indicating its continued importance.

Philip Attwood, curator of the display said: "The Platinum Jubilee presents the British Museum with a marvellous opportunity to celebrate the life and work of Mary Gillick, a sculptor whose name may not be known to many nowadays, but whose major work, the coin portrait of Queen Elizabeth II, filled the pockets and purses of the nation for decades. Revolutionary in its day due to the debt it owes to Renaissance medals, the design is today regarded as a classic."

Selected to design the coin from a cohort of invited artists, the identity of Gillick as the artist remained a secret for months. When details of the design were finally announced, the choice of a female artist in her seventies garnered great interest from the press and public. Gillick was thrust into the limelight, with photos of her posing with her design printed in newspapers all over the nation and abroad. Despite this initial interest and her long career as a sculptor, Gillick remains a much-neglected

artist. As well as commemorating The Queen, this exhibition will recognise Gillick's significant contributions to sculpture and medal design, exploring her life and work.

Gillick was admired by prominent figures in the art world, such as Sir Kenneth Clark. She trained at the Royal College of Art where she discovered Renaissance medals. A medal by the celebrated 'inventor' of the medal, the 15th century Italian painter Pisanello, will be displayed alongside her work. Gillick was inspired by what is often termed the golden age of medal design, modernising Pisanello's style to suit 20th century Britain. Other significant commissions such as a portrait of prominent suffragette Ida Wylie, commissioned by Wylie's lover Rachel Barrett, and depictions of an airman who shot down a Zeppelin over England during the First World War will also be on view along with preparatory drawings.

A highlight of the display will be items presented to the British Museum by the artist's family in 2005, which included medals created by Gillick from the 1910s to the 1950s, a set of large-scale plaster models of her portrait of The Queen, and documents relating to the new coins. Drawings and photographs loaned from the Henry Moore Institute will demonstrate the creative process in full.

This display is part of the celebrations marking Her Majesty The Queen Elizabeth II's Platinum Jubilee. On Saturday 11 June the Museum is holding **The Platinum Jubilee Party** with family friendly activities on offer. Visitors will have the chance to create their own Mary Gillick style portrait of The Queen in a workshop run by artist David Allsop. Individual portraits – taken with an onsite photobooth – will be decorated and made into an enormous collaborative card that will be sent to the Royal Household. Other activities include making decorative crowns with the independent jewellery brand Tatty Devine and a performance by London-based brass band No Limit Street Band. Free tickets are available to book on the Museum website: <https://www.britishmuseum.org/events/platinum-jubilee-party>

To coincide with the display, a beautifully illustrated publication, *Mary Gillick: sculptor and medallist*, written by Philip Attwood, will be published by Spink Books in collaboration with the British Museum in May 2022. Hardback, £25, ISBN 9781912667758.

Notes to editors

The Asahi Shimbun Displays *Mary Gillick: modelling The Queen's portrait* runs from 2 June to 31 July 2022 in Room 3 at the British Museum.

britishmuseum.org/exhibitions/mary-gillick-modelling-queens-portrait

Open Saturday – Thursday 10.00–17.00, Friday 10.00–20.30.

Last entry 80 mins before closing.

The Asahi Shimbun Displays are a series of regularly changing displays which look at objects in new or different ways. Sometimes the display highlights a well-known item, sometimes it surprises the audience with extraordinary items from times and cultures that may not be very familiar. This is also an opportunity for the Museum to learn how it can improve its larger exhibitions and permanent gallery displays. These displays have been made possible by the generous sponsorship of The Asahi Shimbun Company, who are long-standing supporters of the British Museum. With a circulation of about 6 million for the morning edition alone, *The Asahi Shimbun* is the most prestigious newspaper in Japan. The company also publishes magazines and books, and provides a substantial information service on the Internet. The Asahi Shimbun Company has a century long tradition of staging exhibitions in Japan of art, culture and history from around the world.



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Further information

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