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100 YEARS FROM SUFFRAGE: ALL-FEMALE PHOTOGRAPHIC PORTRAIT TAKEOVER IN PARLIAMENT

To mark 100 years since some women achieved the right to vote, an all-female photography initiative is creating new portraits of all 209 women MPs, shot exclusively by women photographers. These will be displayed in a free public exhibition in Parliament at Portcullis house, opening on 14 December – 100 years to the day that the first women cast their votes in the 1918 general election.

‘209 Women’ is a national artist-led project to celebrate the centenary of women’s suffrage and champion the visibility of women, particularly in environments that are still largely male-dominated. A collective of 209 women photographers from all across the UK has formed, volunteering their time to make and mark history.

The project is presented in association with luxury brand Aston Martin Lagonda and Power of Women Series, and supported by Montessori St Nicholas. It is delivered in partnership with Open Eye Gallery, Liverpool City Council, The Royal Photographic Society and The Sorority. The core team behind the exhibition is Hilary Wood (Founder/Director of ‘209 Women’ and photographer), Tracy Marshall (Director of Development and Partnerships at [Open Eye Gallery](#)), Cheryl Newman (Artist, curator and former Director of Photography of the Telegraph magazine) and Lisa Tse (Brand Consultant, TV Producer and founder of women’s club The Sorority), and is supported by Ambassador Rosemary Reed, Executive Producer and Founder of Power of Women series).

Helen Pankhurst, great granddaughter of leading suffragette Emmeline Pankhurst, said: *“This exhibition, 209 Women, is an opportunity to have all current women MPs overlook Portcullis House, an integral part of the Westminster estate, where so much networking and political decisions are made.*

“The exhibition will for once put women centre stage, acting as a reminder to never leave women out of the equation, on behalf of all citizens but particularly the 51% of the population who have been so unequally represented.

“To represent and be presented for what we are - as women, by women - is a very special thing. This is what 209 women is all about.”

On 14 December 1918 women voted for the first time, and in the same year the first female MP was elected. Launching 14 December 2018, ‘209 Women’ marks that significant moment in history whilst also highlighting the ongoing need for further gender equality across society.

[‘209 Women’](#) will be displayed at Portcullis House, Houses of Parliament, from 14th December to February 2019. After that, it will travel North to [Open Eye Gallery](#) in Liverpool.

Hilary Wood, founder and curator, said:

“The idea for the exhibition came from my own experiences of gender inequality. I’ve worked mainly in male-dominated fields for the past 18 years. I’ve got two daughters and I wanted to be part of changing things so that they grow up in a society that is more gender equal. Since 1918, 4,503 men have been elected to the UK parliament - compared to just 491 women. On the centenary year of women’s suffrage, I wanted to celebrate how far we’ve come, but I also want to bring awareness to continued gender inequality by championing the visibility of women in power. This exhibition will bring visibility to those women that are part of making the fundamental changes to women’s equality.”

Although the suffrage movement achieved the first votes for women, there is still a long way to go to cement a culture of true gender equality across all spheres of society in the UK, particularly in positions of power. Women MPs only form 32% of the House of Commons.

The project began as a voluntary endeavour, but the team has been working closely with Open Eye Gallery to secure fees for the artists. The initial crowdfunder to raise support for the artists ran over the summer, and now the team is welcoming individual exhibition patrons, [limited to 209 places](#).

Tracy Marshall, Director of Development and Partnerships at Open Eye Gallery, said:

“Photography has become one of the primary ways that we reflect and communicate our vision of the world. Through images, we gain a sense not only of how things are, but also how things could be. This project carries so much potential in communicating our vision of gender parity in the corridors of power, pointing to a society where policy is made with people of all genders in mind. That’s why everyone at Open Eye Gallery is behind this national collaboration of artists and politicians, all the way: to light up the way to a future where gender is no obstacle – in art, in business, in politics and in every other pursuit.”

Alison McGovern MP, chair of the Speaker’s Advisory Committee on Works of Art said:

“The women’s movement has never been about one person’s achievement: it is about all of us. This project carries out that vision, including all kinds of women from all kinds of backgrounds. It is a subtle but very true statement of equality.”

“The focus in politics has rightly been on getting a critical mass of women involved. But it is the same issue in many sectors, including art itself. The works will show that women can and ought to be portrayed in all their diversity. There is no one way to be a woman artist, to be a woman politician, to be a woman.”

Nikki Rimmington, Aston Martin Lagonda Vice President and Chief Planning Officer said:

“In the year that Aston Martin Lagonda became the only listed British car company, the need for us to take corporate leadership in support of innovation and sustainability is clearer than ever. To that end we are incredibly excited to support, alongside the Power of Women Series, such a timely and empowering showcase of successful female leaders in Politics. Whether in our support of women in engineering or through our pioneering approach to training, development and apprenticeships, the goals of this exhibition and our own are strongly aligned and we are proud to support as joint headline sponsors.”

Rosemary Reed, Executive Producer and Founder of the Power of Women Series, adds:

“The Power of Women is honoured to be supporting 209 Women alongside Aston Martin Lagonda. With a track record of consistently pioneering in male-dominated industries, we are committed to shifting perceptions and helping advocate for gender equality. The Power Of Women series will celebrate modern female achievement like no other show before it, and we are delighted to be supporting 209 Women to champion the representation of women in power.”

Lisa Tse, Founder and President of The Sorority said:

“Sorority members are iconic inspirational women from around the world and The Sorority is proud to support 209 Women. It is a vital project in representing the women in power and celebrating the centenary of women achieving the right to vote.”

Commenting on the 209 Women exhibition Leonor Stjepic, Chief Executive Officer of Montessori St Nicholas said:

“An unsung achievement of Sylvia Pankhurst is her influence in creating one the UK’s first Montessori nurseries, the Mother’s Arms in Bow - she wanted to support mothers who were working to support the war effort with childcare, good conditions and fair pay. Many children using the nursery came from deprived backgrounds, and soon flourished as they explored ideas independently and at their own pace. The nursery was one of the East London Suffragettes’ most successful projects staying in operation after the war ended and it’s a privilege to be drawing upon this link today.”

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For press enquiries, interviews, or further visuals, contact: Jacob Bolton at Open Eye Gallery:
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Website: <https://www.209women.co.uk/>

EDITOR'S NOTES

HILARY WOOD: (Director & Curator)

Hilary Wood is the founder and curator of '209 Women'. She also created the first image of the series, Alison McGovern MP, from which this initiative evolved. She is now joined by 208 UK based female photographers to complete the series. She felt that the initiative should be a collaborative campaign to champion the visibility of women, reflective of the great collective effort that brought success to the Representation of the People Act 1918 that gave women the vote, an empowering moment, and the first step towards equality for women. Hilary has worked in photography for 18 years as a university lecturer and photographer.

BACKGROUND ON WOMEN MPs:

[This briefing paper](#) provides a list of all the women who have ever been elected to the House of Commons, since the passage of the *Parliament (Qualification of Women) Act 1918*, which allowed women to stand as parliamentary candidates from 1918.

Of the 650 seats in the House of Commons, 209 are held by women MPs, the highest number ever. At the 2017 General Election, 208 women were elected - a record number. Following the election of Órfhlaith Begley on 3 May 2018, the total number of women MPs increased to 209. However, when Heidi Alexander resigned on 9 May 2018, the number dropped back to 208. It returned to 209 with the election of Janet Daby in Lewisham East (Heidi Alexander's former seat), on 14 June 2018.

In total, since 1918, there have been 491 women MPs compared to 4503 men in the same time frame. This list provides the names of the women MPs in order of first election, the party they were first elected for, the constituency or constituencies they represented and their dates as MPs.

OPEN EYE GALLERY:

(Open Eye Gallery, founded in 1977, is an independent, not-for-profit photography gallery based in Liverpool. One of the UK's leading photography spaces, it is the only gallery dedicated to photography and related media in the North West of England. Open Eye Gallery works with people to explore photography's unique ability to connect, to tell stories, to inquire, to reflect on humanity's past and present, and to celebrate its diversity and creativity.

Open Eye Gallery has consistently championed photography as an art form that is relevant to everyone. As well as presenting a programme of international, high-quality exhibitions we also house a permanent Archive containing photographs from the 1930s to the present day. We support established and emerging artists, developing practical, critical and professional skills among photography practitioners; we also offer training and development opportunities to people within our local community.

Open Eye Gallery is supported by Arts Council England and Liverpool City Council. It is a National Portfolio Organisation.

THE SORORITY:

The Sorority is a pioneering private society for the world's inspiring professional women. Bringing together the women of the future, the club is an influential circle of trusted individuals, created to foster collaboration and represent the very best of modern day women.

Sorority members are iconic inspirational women from around the world from businesswomen and entrepreneurs to leaders and pioneers. The spirit of the club encourages a mutually collaborative spirit to nurture and support the success and fulfillment of each of its members.

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