

BP PORTRAIT AWARD 2019

Portraits from the
frontlines of fossil-
fuelled destruction



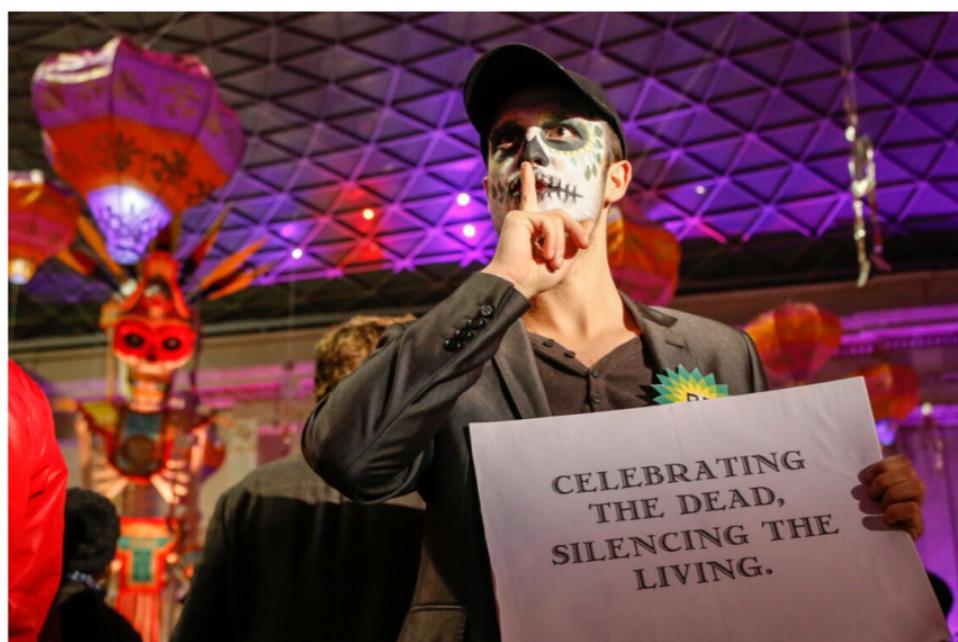
Benny Wenda by Dale Grimshaw

FOREWORD

For three decades, BP has been sponsoring the National Portrait Gallery while drilling, spilling, polluting and colluding. This special collection of portraits tells the story of BP's impacts, strategies and ongoing attempts to launder its reputation through arts sponsorship.

30 years is enough.

This year, for the first time, one of the judges of the BP Portrait Award has spoken out in opposition to the oil giant's co-option of this prestigious prize. This is a sign of just how toxic BP's brand has become. The climate crisis is here, and we are out of time. We have to act now. Please join us in encouraging the National Portrait Gallery to #DropBP.



Photography by Diane More

Signed,

BP Or Not BP?

LETTER TO NICHOLAS CULLINAN

Dear Nick,

It was a pleasure and a privilege to be asked to sit as a judge for this year's BP Portrait Award. I was impressed by and so enjoyed witnessing the care, rigour and humour displayed by you and my fellow judges. History has taught us the relevance of portraiture – the depiction of an individual can reveal so much about our shared present. Wouldn't our lives and times be so much poorer without the likes of Holbein, Frans Hals and Hockney?

However, I feel that I must express my discomfort about continuing to have BP as the sponsor of the award. There might have once been a case for partnering with BP, but it's clear to me that that moment has passed.

The evidence that our planet is rapidly changing - sparking mass extinctions, rising sea-levels, extreme weather and collapsing ecosystems - is undeniable. And BP is actively exacerbating that crisis, with no plan to stop producing massive amounts of fossil fuels for decades to come. I understand that BP's investments in renewable energies are a tiny proportion of its total investment - less than 3%; that it continues to explore for and bring into production vast new reserves of oil and gas; and that the total emissions from its operations continue to rise. While all this remains the case, the company is firmly part of the problem, not the solution.

I know how difficult fundraising is and how valuable an ongoing relationship with a major corporate sponsor can be. But in the case of BP, I feel that this is outweighed by the need to act urgently on the climate crisis we are now facing. Because this is such a high-profile sponsorship deal, I don't think it's possible to be neutral. Either we distance ourselves from one of the world's biggest fossil fuel producers and embrace the challenge of decarbonising, or we continue to give legitimacy to BP and its business activities that are seriously exacerbating the problem.

Recognising that we are in a climate emergency means taking steps that we might not have planned for and, for me, refusing to launder the oil industry's image is a step that the art world now needs to take. None of us are morally pure in this situation, but that doesn't mean we don't have a responsibility to try to do what's right.

I am very aware that there is a real squeeze on both public and private sources of funding for the arts at the moment, something that is a genuine concern both for artists and galleries. The art world needs to have a much bigger conversation about funding models, perpetual growth and what role large arts institutions should play in society. But in this instance, I think we need to follow our consciences, and it's clear to me that the time to act on climate change is now.

At a minimum, no corporate funder should compromise our artistic integrity. I therefore urge you, as a first step, to no longer allow a BP employee to sit on the award's judging panel. There should be no role for an oil company in the artistic decisions of any cultural organisation, and especially not in determining the winner of the world's leading portrait award.

This is the 30th year of BP sponsoring the Portrait Award, and I would argue that 30 years is enough. As the impacts of climate change become increasingly apparent, the Gallery will look more and more out of step by hosting an oil-branded art prize. Continuing to promote BP as the climate crisis intensifies will do unacceptable damage to the NPG's reputation, relationships and public trust. I urge you to commit now to finding an alternative.

I want to see an art sector that rises to the unprecedented challenge of climate change, and believe the National Portrait Gallery can be at the forefront if it steps up and makes the right decisions now.

Gary Hume

Judge, BP Portrait Award 2019



BOB DUDLEY
CEO, BP

BP is one of the world's biggest fossil fuel companies. Despite its current advertising campaign, which suggests the company is taking action on the climate crisis, 97% of its capital investments remain in oil and gas. There are no plans to significantly change this. Instead, BP has committed to invest £41 billion in new oil extraction over the next 10 years

BP claims it wants to be part of the clean energy transition but its business plan is based on a prediction that global oil use will only drop by 4% by 2030, and gas use will increase by 16%.

This would be a path to serious climate disaster; but for BP, profits come first.

In 2015, after paying the biggest fine in corporate history over its responsibility for the deadly Deepwater Horizon Disaster in the Gulf of Mexico, it was back to business as usual for Mr Dudley who announced: "we'll be able to spend more time on what we do well; which is finding, producing, developing, selling products in oil and gas."

In an episode of BBC Panorama that aired on June 3rd 2019, Mr Dudley refused to answer questions from a journalist on BP's unfolding role in a multi-billion pound corruption and bribery scandal in Senegal.



BENNY WENDA

West Papuan Independence Leader

West Papua is the western half of the island of New Guinea. It is a region with hundreds of Indigenous tribes and cultures but has been under Indonesian occupation since 1963. Its people have experienced decades of human rights abuses, with 500,000 people killed and their right to self-determination denied.

BP is one of Indonesia's largest foreign investors, running a massive liquefied natural gas project in West Papua. Benny has the following message for BP tonight:

"BP need to admit that they're operating in the middle of a genocide. They need to bring an end to the suffering. BP, you can't just say that you're only in West Papua for business.

"If you continue to work with this illegal occupation, then you're part of the problem. You fund the illegal Indonesian government. They misuse your funds to buy guns and equipment to kill my people. You take our raw materials, make money, and give some of it to the occupier. We West Papuans see none of the benefits.

"Whether it's human rights violations or global warming, BP's actions directly impact my people. My message to you, BP, is that this issue isn't going away, and if you continue not to recognise my people's suffering, then you are part of the problem. We West Papuans are the guardians of the planet. You are the enemy of this planet because you are destroying it."

"West Papua is the lung of the world, with the second biggest rainforest on the planet. Indonesia is ripping down our forests, destroying our land. If you save West Papua, you save the world from CO₂ emissions."

In 2018, journalist Michael Gillard secretly visited BP's West Papua operations. He reported in New Matilda magazine that BP security guards are colluding with the Indonesian military in the violent suppression of local protest against BP's operations. This portrait of Benny Wenda, by street artist Dale Grimshaw, was submitted for the BP Portrait Award in 2017 but was not shortlisted. Could any portrait of a person critical of BP ever be shortlisted for the portrait award while the company sits on the judging panel?



DES VIOLARIS

BP's Director of UK Arts, Culture and Paralympics

Des Violaris has worked for BP since 1995; before that she worked for a law firm. She has no professional background in the arts. Nonetheless, she is a permanent member of the judging panel for the BP Portrait Award.

Ms Violaris oversees BP's sponsorship deals with leading cultural institutions. This is intended to boost the company's image in the face of bad publicity over its oil spills, complicity in human rights abuses and massive contribution to the climate crisis. The oil industry is facing an existential threat as the world recognises the need to transition urgently away from fossil fuels. Sponsoring culture and sport is part of the company's strategy to continue business as usual.

The amount of money BP spends on arts branding is dwarfed by the amount it receives in subsidies and tax breaks from UK taxpayers. For example, in 2016 BP paid no tax in the UK - instead, it received over £200 million net from the public purse. This is more than 100 times what the company spends on sponsoring the arts each year.

Meanwhile, BP spends over £40 million per year lobbying to block climate change policies

Cherri witnessed the devastation to communities and wildlife along the Gulf Coast following BP's catastrophic Deepwater Horizon drilling disaster in 2010. It was the biggest oil spill in US history, killing 11 rig workers. Over the course of three months, nearly 5 million barrels of oil flowed into the Gulf of Mexico.

BP was found guilty of "gross negligence", leading to the biggest corporate criminal fine in history. It has so far paid out a staggering \$65 billion in fines, clean-up costs and damages, but the Gulf ecosystem and those who depend on it for their livelihoods continue to suffer from long-term health and economic effects.

The marine life has still not recovered. Recent studies have found that up to 167,600 turtles from five endangered species were killed as a result of the spill, and the contamination contributed to the Gulf's largest and longest dolphin die-off, leaving lasting reproductive problems amongst the population.

Cherri had this message for BP-sponsored cultural organisations in 2016:

"Since 2010, there are a lot more graves in the Gulf of Mexico than there were before, and that's just the truth. So anytime we see arts organisations take on BP as a sponsor, we want to make sure those institutions understand that they are sponsoring death. They are sponsoring death in our communities. And that's not just the illnesses of animals but the illnesses of people, and the continuation of oil coming on our shores.

"So I'm going to ask you on a personal level, to please help us to stop BP getting perks from our devastation, and please make sure that you remember what's happened to us here, because we can never forget it."



CHERRI FOYTLIN

*Indigenous journalist,
advocate and mother of six,
who lives on the Gulf
Coast in South Louisiana*



**NICHOLAS
CULLINEN**
*Director of the
National Portrait
Gallery*

It has been 30 years since the oil giant BP took over from the tobacco giant John Player as sponsor of the gallery's Portrait Award. In that time, the global climate crisis - fuelled heavily by BP - has intensified, with the annual rate of natural disasters almost tripling since the sponsorship began.

Despite this, the gallery has continued to give BP a veneer of respectability by associating its brand with the world's most prestigious portraiture competition - in return for barely 1% of the institution's annual income.

In 2017, research and campaigns group Culture Unstained submitted a formal complaint to the gallery, alleging that its BP deal conflicted with a clause in the institution's Ethical Fundraising Policy that precluded funders closely associated with regimes that violate human rights. They pointed to BP's close relationships with repressive governments in Azerbaijan, Egypt, Indonesia, Mexico, Algeria, Colombia and Angola, amongst others.

The gallery brushed off the complaint, saying "These guidelines are not drafted as mandatory". It has now replaced the policy with a new "Grants and Donations Policy", and the clause about human rights has conveniently disappeared.

Dr Cullinan hit the headlines recently with the gallery's decision to turn down a £1 million grant from the Sackler Trust, due to the family's connection to the opioid crisis. Clearly, the National Portrait Gallery can make ethical funding decisions when it wants to.



SAMIR FLORES SOBERANES
Mexican land defender. Killed February 2019.

Environmental activists and land defenders are increasingly persecuted for standing up against fossil fuels and other mega-projects that have drastic consequences for the environment and local communities. Latin America is the most dangerous region for these activists, with more than 100 killed each year. In many of these cases, state forces intertwine with corporate power and other local actors, and sometimes the finger has been pointed directly at BP. For example, BP has been accused of complicity in the kidnapping and torture of Colombian trade unionist Gilberto Torres.

In Mexico, BP has begun an aggressive expansion programme, with plans to set up 1,500 petrol stations across the country. Worryingly, it recently won the right to drill offshore in the ultra-deep waters of Mexico's Gulf Coast - despite the devastation to fishing communities and wildlife in the region already caused by the company's Deepwater Horizon drilling disaster in 2010.

In Mexico, BP benefits from the climate of repression which has cost the lives of land defenders such as Samir Flores Soberanes, who was murdered in February this year. Samir was a longstanding opponent of Proyecto Integral Morelos, a development which includes two new thermoelectric plants and a new natural gas pipeline, and risks contaminating water sources for Indigenous communities in the area. Also in Mexico, 16 Indigenous members of the CECOP (Council of Communities and Common Land) were imprisoned last year following violent repression for opposing the building of La Parota, a hydroelectric dam in the state of Guerrero, which would flood the territories of 21 Indigenous communities and displace 25,000 people.



PETER MATHER

BP's Regional President for Europe

Peter Mather is responsible for all of BP's activities in the UK. He has worked for BP all his adult life, and claims he has "green and yellow oil" flowing in his veins.

Mather admits that BP's sponsorship of the arts is a strategic business decision. He told the Times in 2016: "Where there is an option, naturally we are going to try to match a particular exhibition with somewhere we have an interest." Sure enough, every exhibition that BP has sponsored at the British Museum in the last five years has linked to countries where BP operates. This has given the company useful leverage at key moments, such as sponsoring:

* Indigenous Australia: Enduring Civilisations just as it was pushing to drill in the Great Australian Bight against Indigenous opposition in 2015

* a Day of the Dead festival of Mexican culture while (successfully) bidding for oil leases in Mexico in 2015

* an exhibition of Egyptian artefacts (ironically titled Sunken Cities) while benefiting from state repression of protest against its new gas operations in northern Egypt in 2016

* an exhibition of artefacts from the Russian permafrost while lobbying against sanctions on Russia that were preventing the company, with its 20% stake in Russia's state oil company, from drilling in the Arctic in 2017

* an exhibition about Assyria while facing protests against its operations in Iraq in 2018-19

Each exhibition gave BP the opportunity to wine and dine officials from these governments in the grand setting of the British Museum. Who will Mr Mather be schmoozing tonight at the National Portrait Gallery?



RAEDENA SAVEA *Pacific Climate Warrior*

“We are not drowning. We are fighting.”

Raedena is a Samoan climate activist. In 2017, as part of the Pacific Climate Warriors collective, she travelled to the Canadian tar sands - a hugely destructive fossil fuel project where BP has extraction and refining operations.

The tar sands are one of the world's leading sources of greenhouse gas emissions, and the Pacific Islands are one of the places most threatened by the climate crisis through more violent storms and rising seas. The Pacific Islanders met with Indigenous peoples in Canada who are fighting the expansion of the tar sands - an expansion which is being actively pushed by BP, through its membership of oil industry lobby groups.

Speaking on that trip, Raedena said:

“It was pretty overwhelming. I've never seen land so ripped apart like that before.

My automatic reaction was tears in my eyes, because of how it's impacting my homeland. I'm not sure if many of you know where Samoa is or the South Pacific, but it's home. To people like me.

“This is our time, my generation, to speak up for our people and the ways these types of industry are impacting us.”

George Giuvalu Nacewa, a Fijian climate activist who was also part of the delegation, said: “The way we live back home has changed dramatically because of the fossil fuel industry. People are suffering because of this. We in the Pacific face the impacts of climate change every day. Sea level rise, the changing weather patterns - just last week, there were two cyclones going through the Pacific. And it's because of expansions like this.

“We just need to keep this in the ground, keep fossil fuels in the ground, move towards renewable energy. So that we in the Pacific, who are also human beings and have the right to live, may stay above water.”

#DROPBP

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