

The Speaker's Advisory Committee on Works of Art

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Web: <http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/other-committees/works-of-art/>

FOR ADVANCE NOTICE

Embargoed till midday 07 June 2016

A *New Dawn* for Parliament: light sculpture celebrating women's votes revealed

One hundred and fifty years to the day since the campaign for women's votes began, *New Dawn*, an artwork celebrating all the individuals involved, will be revealed this evening (07 June) in Westminster Hall, the oldest part of Parliament. *New Dawn* is located above the entrance to St Stephen's Hall, the site of numerous demonstrations, so that viewers of the artwork will literally stand in the footsteps of the hundreds of thousands of women and men who came to Parliament to fight for women's right to the vote.

New Dawn is a contemporary light sculpture by artist Mary Branson and a permanent addition to the Parliamentary Art Collection, as well as the first piece of abstract art commissioned for permanent display in the historic palace. Measuring over six metres high, the massive scale of *New Dawn* is intended to reflect the size of the campaign, and the unique hand-blown glass scrolls that make up its dawning sun reflect the many individuals who were involved in the movement and the special contribution they made to modern democracy.

The artwork draws on the visual language of Parliament itself. The scrolls are a direct reference to the Act Room at the Parliamentary Archives, where the legislation which brought women the vote and a say in the laws that govern them is stored. The glass scrolls are mounted on a portcullis structure – the principal emblem of Parliament – raised over the entrance to St. Stephen's Hall, symbolising women's long-awaited access to democracy. The circular scrolls combine with the metal portcullis to create 168 distinct 'Venus' symbols, representing the women who fought for their right to vote.

New Dawn has also been influenced by the campaigners it celebrates. The rainbow of colours used in the artwork reflects the numerous organisations that were involved in the struggle, including the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies, the Women's Social and Political Union, the Women's Freedom League and the Men's League for Women's Suffrage.

The title of the piece comes from the language of the campaigners themselves, many of whom conceived of the vote as offering a 'new dawn' for women.

The lighting of *New Dawn*'s sun shape will rise and fall over a twelve and half hour cycle, linked to the tide of the Thames. The ebb and flow of the illumination reflects the ever rising tide of change that campaigners were certain would bring women the vote in time. Each scroll is individually lit, and the appearance of the artwork will change moment to moment,

encouraging onlookers to consider the work more deeply and to reflect on the value of the vote and women's role in democracy.

New Dawn will be revealed on the 150th anniversary of John Stuart Mill MP presenting the first mass petition calling for women's votes in the House of Commons. This date is generally seen as the beginning of more than seventy year's campaigning for the vote, involving hundreds of thousands of people across the UK.

Mary Branson, artist, said:

"After two years of work it's a wonderful feeling to stand in Westminster Hall and see *New Dawn* lit up at last. She looks beautiful and seems to really belong in this remarkable space. I am truly honoured and humbled by all the support I have received from my team and the encouragement of so many people in this celebration of women's votes."

Caroline Nokes, Chair of the Speaker's Advisory Committee on Works of Art, said:

"Mary Branson's *New Dawn* is a moving celebration of the vast numbers of ordinary women and men who worked and struggled for the vote, the bedrock of modern democracy. With its complex layers of symbolism, *New Dawn* conveys and celebrates the scale and power of a mass campaign, while being a perfect visual fit for the ancient site of Westminster Hall."

John Bercow, Speaker of the House of Commons, said:

"On the 150th anniversary of John Stuart Mill's petition calling for the universal right to vote, *New Dawn* is a fitting tribute to the champions for liberty of the past, as well as an inspiration for future generations."

Baroness D'Souza, Lord Speaker of the House of Lords, said:

"The role that women have played in shaping our democracy, throughout the history of Parliament, has long been a subject close to my heart. Honouring the campaign for women's rights through art, and in particular through such a spectacular work as this, is something I wholeheartedly support. I hope the beauty of *New Dawn*, and the values it embodies, are appreciated by visitors to Parliament for years to come."

Now a permanent addition to the Parliamentary Art Collection, *New Dawn* will educate, inform and inspire the one million visitors who pass through Parliament's doors each year. Placed on the route to the public viewing galleries, as well as the public tour route, the majority of visitors to Parliament will pass under *New Dawn* as they enter the building. For those members of the public who specifically wish to see *New Dawn* there will be free, ticketed access to the artwork from 09.00-17.30 Monday to Saturday until 1 September 2016.

Parliament will launch a permanent online exhibition about *New Dawn* on 07 June, and Mary Branson will participate in a live chat on the UK Parliament Facebook at 14.00 on 08 June. Alison McGovern MP will also lead a digital debate under the hashtag #VotingWomen between 15.30-16.30 on 08 June. Digital debates are an opportunity for the public to get involved with and inform a House of Commons debate by sharing their thoughts and experiences with MPs. A summation of the debate will be sent to all MPs who participate in that day's adjournment debate, "**Women and the Vote,**" on **08 June**, at approximately **19.00**.

ENDS

Notes for editors:

1. Filming requests and interview bids contact 0207 219 0969 / hocmediacorporate@parliament.uk
2. Mary Branson holds a first class honours degree in Fine Art from the Surrey Institute of Art and Design and an MA in Art and Space from Kingston University. She was nominated for the Beck's Futures prize in 2005, and specialises in producing site-specific art installations. As Artist-in-Residence, Mary Branson explored the official records of Parliament and material relating to women's suffrage in Parliament's Works of Art and Archives collections and worked closely with academics, curators and other specialists, including MPs and Peers, to develop her understanding of the campaign, and how it interacted both with Parliament as a legislature and the Palace of Westminster as a physical location.
3. From 8 June – 1 September, there will be free ticketed access for members of the public who specifically want to see *New Dawn*. Tickets can be booked over the phone (020 7219 4114), on the parliamentary website www.parliament.uk/visiting, or in person at the ticket office in Portcullis House (marked number 5 on this map: <http://www.parliament.uk/documents/facilities/maps/colmap.pdf>).
4. There are a limited number of places available for a briefing with the artist, the Chair of the Works of Art Committee, and the Parliamentary curator on **Tuesday 7 June at 09.30**. Names can be added to the list at <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/house-of-commons-new-dawn-press-briefing-tickets-25717009267>, using the password NewDawn. Places will be confirmed by close of play on Monday 6 June, if not before.
5. Images of *New Dawn* are available at: <https://parliament.assetbank-server.com/assetbank-parliament/images/assetbox/c38df5ac-8b17-4207-a00c-da67c55bc7f3/assetbox.html>. Unless stated otherwise, photos should be credited to ©UK Parliament/Jessica Taylor. Images may not be edited or altered in any way. The link will be updated with images of the unveiling on the evening of 7 June. For any additional image queries, please contact: 0207 219 0969 / hocmediacorporate@parliament.uk
6. Parliament's Digital Service will launch a *New Dawn* app in late July 2016. The app will allow users to explore the history of the campaign for women's votes through *New Dawn* – bringing it to life via works of art, film footage, photographs, and audio clips of actors Imelda Staunton, Caroline Quentin, Fiona Shaw, Indira Varma, Natalie Press, Jim Carter, Katie Leung, Helen George, Amy Nuttall and Nathalie Emmanuel, as well as parliamentarians, giving voice to the most crucial figures of the campaign.
7. An online exhibition will go live on Parliament's website from **12.00** on Tuesday 7 June. The exhibition will be found at: www.parliament.uk/newdawn.
8. Parliament's Retail Service has developed a range of merchandise around *New Dawn*, including badges, postcards, scarves and fine jewellery. The range can be viewed here: <http://www.shop.parliament.uk/shopdisplayproducts.asp?id=1984&cat=New+Dawn+Range>
9. The total cost of *New Dawn* was £124,000. The cost of *New Dawn* was met from the existing Works of Art Committee budget, as well as donations from the House of Lords Works of Art

Committee's existing budget and the [Speaker's Art Fund](#), a charitable trust. The cost includes all equipment and materials used in *New Dawn*, as well the artist's commission fee. The artist worked with a team of craftspeople to develop the work – including Adam Aaronson (glass), Musson Engineering (metal work), Applelec (LED lighting), and WLX Productions (electrical programming). To reduce costs to the public, the installation of *New Dawn* was combined with pre-planned cleaning and repair works to the stonework in St Stephen's Porch.

10. History of Women's Suffrage Movement in Parliament – Women and men lobbied Parliament for votes for women from the 19th century. As the campaign developed some individuals and groups, frustrated by the lack of progress, began to use more militant and sometimes violent forms of protest inside and outside Parliament. Examples include:

The first petition to Parliament asking for votes for women was presented to the House of Commons by Henry Hunt MP on behalf of a Mary Smith, on 3 August 1832. The same year, the Great Reform Act expanded the electorate, but to 'male persons' only. In 1866 the Women's Suffrage Committee collected 1500 signatures on a petition for women's suffrage which was presented to the House of Commons by John Stuart Mill, the philosopher, political economist and Member of Parliament.

October 1908: Three women unfurled a banner from the Ladies' Gallery in the House of Commons. Two of them also chained themselves to the grille covering the Ladies' Gallery window. The grille had to be removed with the women still attached, and the locks were filed off in a committee room. It was one of three simultaneous demonstrations in Parliament that day, including one by women in St. Stephen's Hall and one by two men in the Members' Gallery.

April 1911: Emily Wilding Davison was a regular protester to Parliament but most notably, hid in St Mary Undercroft on Census night, April 1911, so as to record her census address as the 'House of Commons'.

For further information on the suffragette movement and the role of women in Parliament, see Parliamentary web pages here: <http://www.parliament.uk/about/living-heritage/transformingsociety/electionsvoting/womenvote/> and here: <http://www.parliament.uk/women>. The House of Commons Library has published a [list of all the women who have ever been elected to the House](#), as well as information on [the history of the suffrage movement](#) and [the current levels of women's representation in the Commons](#).

11. The Speaker's Advisory Committee on Works of Art approved the appointment of an Artist-in-Residence for women's suffrage on 21 January 2014: <http://www.parliament.uk/documents/commons-committees/works-of-art/PI07-21-January-2014.pdf/>. Mary Branson's appointment to the post was announced on 9 April 2014, following an open call for applications. Upon completion of the residency, Mary Branson proposed *New Dawn* to the Works of Art Committee, and the formal commission was announced on 5 March 2015, as part of an International Women's Day event: <https://www.parliament.uk/about/art-in-parliament/news/2015/march/artwork-to-commemorate-womens-suffrage-commissioned-/>.
12. The Speaker's Advisory Committee on Works of Art was established in 1956 to advise the Speaker on matters relating to works of art in the House of Commons Collection. The Committee is a cross-party group of MPs appointed by the Speaker to preserve the history of Parliament through art and advises on the management of the art collection in the House of Commons. The Collection, which is of national and international significance, is cared for, developed and interpreted by the Committee and the staff in the Curator's Office to ensure it remains relevant to the changing face of Parliament. Care is also taken to illustrate the people

and events which have made a difference to the political life of the UK and ensure a variety of styles and approaches from UK-based artists are represented. For further information about the Committee visit: <http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/other-committees/works-of-art/>