Cecil Beaton's Bright Young Things

Photography Competition
(Schools Category)
20 January – 18 May 2020

Cecil Beaton
Paul Tanqueray, 1937
National Portrait Gallery, London
© Estate of Paul Tanqueray
Take inspiration from Cecil Beaton’s photography and create your own portraits inspired by the themes of our exhibition Cecil Beaton's Bright Young Things

Who are the ‘Bright Young Things’ of 2020?

This slide show includes images by Cecil Beaton for each of the competition’s five themes: Costume and Masquerade, Fashion and Style, Props, Performance and Self-Portraits.

Some of the images included are student submissions. We hope you get some inspiration from both Cecil Beaton and fellow young photographers to create your own portraits at home.
Costume and Masquerade

Beaton often attended extravagant costume parties with his friends and acquaintances.

Have fun dressing up! Capture yourself or your family in creative costumes made from everyday items.
Make a paper crown for your sitter...

Paula Gellibrand, Marquesa de Casa Maury as Eleanor of Aquitaine for the Pageant of Heroines
Cecil Beaton, 1929
The Cecil Beaton Studio Archive
© The Cecil Beaton Studio Archive
Or fashion an entire futuristic costume out of cardboard against a foil background.
A Step Back in Time #2
Sophie, Cranleigh School
Student submission
Fashion and Style

Beaton photographed for some of the world’s leading fashion magazines, including Vogue. Create images to evoke current trends and/or your own personal style.
Express your personal style, an alter ego or any part of your identity against a backdrop of your choice.

Princess Emeline de Broglie à la garçonne
Cecil Beaton, c. 1927
The Cecil Beaton Studio Archive
© The Cecil Beaton Studio Archive
Cecil Beaton used flowers and cellophane to make the backdrop for his photograph of Anna May Wong. What day-to-day items can you get creative with for a backdrop?
morale
Alex, Long Road Sixth Form College
Student submission
Think Pink
Lucy, Long Road Sixth Form College
Student submission
As a teenager, when taking photographs of his younger sisters Nancy and Baba, Beaton would use everyday items as props and create glorious backdrops for his portrait photographs.

Transform everyday materials into glamorous accessories. Be inventive with props and backdrops available in your home to tell a story in your photograph.
Play with light streaming through a window and shadows and simple props.

What props can you find at home to tell a story about your sitter or a made-up character?
Use items such as balloons or decorations to create a theatrical setting for your portrait.

Plan your composition and lighting to create a mood or atmosphere.
Consider how effective this patterned carpet is.

What other patterned textiles could you use or combine in a set up?

Style an outfit which fits the mood of the backdrop and accessories.

Lady Edwina Mountbatten against carpet backdrop
Cecil Beaton, 1931
The Cecil Beaton Studio Archive
© The Cecil Beaton Studio Archive
Aurora
Zoe, Long Road Sixth Form College
Student submission
A Step Back in Time #3
Sophie, Cranleigh School
Student submission
Performance

Whether capturing well-known performers, or finding artistic inspiration in the performances taking place around him, the idea of performance was central to Beaton’s portraiture.

Perform for the camera – create a character and record this performance with photography.
Pose as one of your favourite artists from a different era, or think about how you can bring them into our times?

Self Portrait as Thomas Gainsborough for the Pageant of Hyde Park
Cecil Beaton, 1928
The Cecil Beaton Studio Archive
© The Cecil Beaton Studio Archive
Think about reflective surfaces in your home to stage a dramatic scene.

Here Cecil Beaton photographed his two sisters for this dramatic double-portrait.

Think about who you could photograph in your household if you are physically distancing together as a family.

Could you include your siblings ...

Nancy and Baba Beaton reflected in piano lid
Cecil Beaton, 1926
The Cecil Beaton Studio Archive
© The Cecil Beaton Studio Archive
... or your family pet as a sitter in your photograph?

And if you don’t have a pet, what other fantastical creatures can you imagine, or create in your home?

The Maharani of Cooch Behar against netting and butterflies
Cecil Beaton, 1930s
The Cecil Beaton Studio Archive
© The Cecil Beaton Studio Archive
Trapped
Daisy, Cranleigh School
Student submission
Self-Portraits

Alongside portraits of his family, friends and celebrities Beaton also made many self-portraits. From a young age, he used mirrors and props to present himself as an artist at work in his studio, and transformed his appearance using costumes, wigs and makeup into fabulous theatrical alter-egos.

Consider how to create and present a self-portrait photograph. What aspects of yourself would this image explore? Show yourself as an artist at work with your camera, or play with the idea of identity and dressing up.
Capture yourself while doing one of your favourite pastimes or hobbies.
Or perhaps consider a self-portrait posing in character as someone else.
Paint a picture to use as a backdrop and a few branches from your garden or your daily walk.