‘MR AND MRS ANDREWS’, *c*.1750

OIL ON CANVAS 69.8 x 119.4 CM

THOMAS GAINSBOROUGH

ABOUT THE PAINTING

**The Sitters**

The couple are Robert Andrews and his wife Frances, who had married in 1748. Robert Andrews, who was two years older than Gainsborough, was in his mid-twenties at the time of the painting. Artist and sitter must have been aware of each other as children, both attending Sudbury Grammar School before Gainsborough left for London. Andrews remained at school and went up to Oxford, although he seems not to have taken a degree. His father, also Robert Andrews, was a local landowner and his son seems to have devoted his energies to farming and improving the land he inherited.

His wife, also from a local landowning family, was born Frances Carter in around 1732. She was only around 18 at the time of the painting. The match was probably engineered by the two fathers in order to consolidate and secure their lands.

**The Setting**

Soon after his marriage Robert Andrews inherited the house and estate of Auberies, the setting for the painting. It has been suggested that this is not just a double portrait but a triple portrait of Andrews, his wife and his estate. The painting looks out across the landscape, south over the valley of the River Stour, the county boundary with Essex. The Andrews are looking towards the location of their substantial brick-built house, which cannot be seen. As he owned 3,000 acres, much of the landscape behind them belonged to Robert Andrews.

The scene, well known to both artist and patron, is depicted more accurately than in any other Gainsborough painting. At the far left is a view of the square tower of Holy Trinity Church, Long Melford, three miles away, while in the centre distance there is a glimpse through the trees of the parish church of All Saints, Sudbury, where the Andrews had been married. The oak tree under which they pose still stands, though it is no longer living. The artist has allowed himself some licence by showing a newly harvested corn eld, which stands far too close to the house to be likely.

**What became of Mr and Mrs Andrews?**

The Andrews were to have nine children between 1751 and 1769. Frances died in 1780 aged 48. Robert remarried and lived to the age of 80 dying in 1806. They are buried together in the nearby church of St Andrews, Bulmer. With such a large number of children to provide for, Robert Andrews directed that Auberies and his estate be sold and so it passed in to other hands. The house still exists today as a private home. The painting remained in the family for over two hundred years. It was sold to the National Gallery in 1960 by the sitters’ great, great, great grandson.

**Before looking at the painting**

* With the pupils’ eyes closed, introduce some key vocabulary from the painting and use ‘shared imagining’ to build the scene in the children’s imagination. ‘There is a man with his dog and a woman seated on a bench in the countryside ...’
* Pass around objects from the painting in a canvas bag so that children can feel and describe them, such as silky material, straw hat, dried ears of corn.
* Set the scene: if possible go for a walk in the countryside or local park and note the season, the colours, the smells, the trees. Where can you sit? What would you paint?

**Strategies to Support Looking**

* Describe the painting to someone who cannot see it.
* Starting with the back and arm of the bench, trace all the curly lines you can find in the picture.

**Open questions to initiate dialogue**

* Would you like to meet this couple? What would you ask them?
* Imagine what they said to each other while they waited for the artist to paint them.
* Why do you think the artist left part of Mrs Andrews’s dress unpainted? Imagine what could be there.
* Imagine going for a walk inside the painting. What might you see, hear and feel?

**Thinking more … on the painting**

**Landowning**

Explore the history of the site in this painting, or see if you can nd out about any large estates or farms in your area. Some might still exist, some might not as towns and cities have expanded, but there may be some clues left.

**Farming**

Mr Andrews cared about how his estate was farmed. Find out about how farming has changed since the 18th century, for example the rearing of sheep and the growing of wheat as we see in the picture.

**The Landscape**

Mr and Mrs Andrews were painted on their estate because it was important to them. Could you nd or imagine an area of landscape or even townscape or cityscape, that is important to you and respond to it. This could be through painting, photography, dance, art, music or ICT.

**Inheritance**

The painting was passed down in the family through generations. Is there anything in your family that has been treasured and passed down? What would you keep and pass on?

**Costume**

Gainsborough’s portraits often show his sitters, particularly women, in beautiful and fashionable clothes. Explore the costume of the sitters here – what would it have been like to wear and what did it say about them. Think about how different clothing in Britain is today.

**The Seasons**

The painting gives us clues that this is high summer. Compare and contrast this with other paintings of the same or different seasons. Make your own version of this painting set in a different season – the trees, colours, clothing would all be different.