



HOGARTH: LORNA MAY WADSWORTH

Portrait of a Lady

Artist Lorna May Wadsworth recalls the almost familial relationship that developed during her sittings with Lady Thatcher

She was already in the room when I arrived, and I was ushered in. She had such gravitas and presence it was all I could do not to curtsy. She was very approachable with a benevolent ruler vibe and immediately went out of her way to put me at ease.

In the first sitting I was trying to work out where she should sit for me to get the right light and composition. She began picking up furniture before I could stop her, just to be

amenable. She was a phenomenal sitter, in terms of fortitude. It was very late in her life when she sat for me, aged 82 – long after the Downing Street years. It was a year before it became public knowledge that she was no longer everything that she had been.

When I discovered that for myself, it made me very protective of her. We had a very sweet relationship because I was very young, only 26. I would bound in, full of the joys of spring, showing her my new handbag, or my new boyfriend on my digital camera, and she would respond to my dynamic. My maternal grandmother looked a lot like her; she was also a ferocious matriarch, so the dynamic we formed was quite similar to the one I had with my granny Margie.

Her ladies-in-waiting, as I used to call them, used to leave me alone with her

because we got along quite happily. Once we got into trouble because Lady T and I had gone to the kitchen, and she'd disappeared into a cupboard to find a teapot. One of her ladies came in and said "What are you doing? Let me do that!" We were like two children in trouble. She was always very independent; she wanted to do things for herself.

I was born the year she came to power, in 1979, so I grew up with her as this huge figure – with the poll-tax riots and her image being on the little television in the corner. Whatever people may think about Thatcher politically, when you are spending time with a human you realise that nobody gets out of this alive. The process of life is incredibly cruel; she was a lady that was diminished. For her to trust her public image with me was incredibly generous. It allowed me to love her. ❀