NEW HAVEN, CT (February 13, 2018)—When the Yale Center for British Art reopened to the public on May 11, 2016, after completing the third phase of an important multiyear building conservation project, visitors were able to experience not only a renewed masterpiece of modern architecture by Louis I. Kahn but also a freshly reimagined installation of the Center’s collections. Nearly four hundred works from the Center’s holdings, largely the gift of the institution’s founder, Paul Mellon (Yale College, Class of 1929), and augmented by other gifts and purchases, are displayed in the restored and reconfigured galleries on the fourth and second floors.

“The reinstallation puts British art in a global context, tracing the relationship between art and Britain’s imperial ambitions from the sixteenth century to the present day,” said Matthew Hargraves, Chief Curator of Art Collections. “Far from being insular, the hang shows the range and depth of British art, how much it was shaped by artists from across the globe, and how it was constantly being reinvented in response to Britain’s changing fortunes. Above all, it seeks to show how British art defined a nation that shaped the modern world.”

Developed by a team of curators led by Scott Wilcox, the Center’s Deputy Director for Collections, and Hargraves, the most recent iteration of this installation presents the complex story of the development of British art from the time of the Protestant Reformation to the present.

“Ours is one of the most outstanding institutions devoted to the art and culture of a single nation,” said Director Amy Meyers. “The challenge that we embrace enthusiastically is to understand, celebrate, interrogate, and critique that culture in a global context.”

Tracing the growth of a native British school of artists, Britain in the World reveals how frequently the story of art in Britain focuses on a narrative of international exchange. The installation addresses the impact of immigration and travel on British art and culture across the centuries, and the role that the arts have played in the history of
Britain’s imperial vision, exploring the ways in which the perception of the British Empire influenced how Britons saw themselves and others. Featured in the display are the Netherlandish artists who provided the foundations of British art in the Tudor period (1485–1603), as well as the seventeenth-century Flemish artists Peter Paul Rubens and Anthony van Dyck, the eighteenth-century Italian artist Canaletto, the German artist Johan Zoffany, and American artists John Singleton Copley and Benjamin West.

“Our intention is to show the masterpieces of the collections to their best advantage, but within richer, denser hangs that will allow for more of the collection to be on view, and in an arrangement that will give variety and drama to the gallery spaces,” said Wilcox.

Many of the Center’s well-known treasures from the Paul Mellon Collection are on view in exciting juxtapositions, such as the works of George Stubbs, including his painting *Pumpkin with a Stable-lad* (1774); Joseph Wright of Derby’s *The Blacksmith’s Shop* (1771); J. M. W. Turner’s *Dort or Dordrecht: The Dort packet-boat from Rotterdam becalmed* (1818) and *Staffia, Fingal’s Cave* (1831–1832); and John Constable’s cloud studies (ca. 1821–1825) and *Hadleigh Castle, The Mouth of the Thames—Morning after a Stormy Night* (1828–1829). The display also comprises exceptional loans, including a portrait of Henrietta Maria (1636) by Van Dyck, and coins and medals from the collection of Stephen Scher.

The installation is organized chronologically, focused around a number of themes. On the fourth floor, these include Becoming Great Britain (1550–1688); A Commercial Society (1688–1750); Rule Britannia? (1750–1775); Art and the Market (1775–1800); Revolution and Reaction (1800–1830); and A New Age (1830–1860).

The timeline continues on the second floor with Art for Art’s Sake (1860–1900); Going Modern, Being British (1900–1945); The End of Empire (1945–1979); and Postmodern Britain (1979–present). Masterworks from the collection, such as Frederic Leighton’s *Mrs. James Guthrie* (1865) and James McNeill Whistler’s *Nocturne in Blue and Silver* (1872–1878), are paired with major loans, including paintings by Francis Bacon (1909–1992) and Lucian Freud (1922–2011). The second floor also contains works by Gwen John (1876–1939), Vanessa Bell (1879–1961), Ben Nicholson (1894–1982), Henry Moore (1898–1986), Maggi Hambling (b. 1945), and Yinka Shonibare MBE (RA) (b. 1962), among many others.

The reinstallation of the collection in 2016 also included a complete reconfiguration of the Long Gallery on the fourth floor, restoring the original conception of the space as a study gallery, as formulated by the Center’s founding director, Jules Prown, and as designed by Kahn.
The Long Gallery comprises an elegant sweep of seven bays in which more than two hundred works represent ensembles of subjects including abstraction, beaches and coastlines, the British Empire, the British theater, castles, gardens, “the horse and sporting art,” interiors, marine painting, portraits of artists, war and the military, and “women of distinction.” The addition of a much-needed Collections Seminar Room at the end of the Long Gallery allows faculty and students to request an up-close examination of paintings, sculptures, prints, and drawings that are not currently on display.

ABOUT THE YALE CENTER FOR BRITISH ART
The Yale Center for British Art is a public art museum and research institute that houses the largest collection of British art outside the United Kingdom. Presented to the university by Paul Mellon (Yale College, Class of 1929), the collection reflects the development of British art and culture from the Elizabethan period onward. The Center’s collections include more than 2,000 paintings, 250 sculptures, 20,000 drawings and watercolors, 6,000 photographs, 40,000 prints, and 35,000 rare books and manuscripts. More than 40,000 volumes supporting research in British art and related fields are available in the Center’s Reference Library. In May 2016, the Center reopened to the public following the completion of a multiyear project to conserve its iconic Louis I. Kahn building.

Visit the Center online at britishart.yale.edu, and connect on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, and Snapchat @yalebritishart. #YCBA

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Image credits: George Stubbs, *Pumpkin with a Stable-lad*, 1774, oil on panel, Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection; Sir Peter Paul Rubens, *Peace Embracing Plenty*, between 1633 and 1634, oil on panel, Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection; Canaletto, *Warwick Castle* (detail), 1748–1749, oil on canvas, Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection; J. M. W. Turner, *Dort or Dordrecht: The Dort packet-boat from Rotterdam becalmed* (detail), 1818, oil on canvas, Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection; Frederic Leighton, *Mrs. James Guthrie*, 1865, oil on canvas, Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection; James McNeill Whistler, *Nocturne in Blue and Silver*, 1872 to 1878, butterfly added ca. 1885, oil on canvas, Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Fund; Gwen John, *Still Life with a Prayer Book, Shawl, Vase of Flowers and Inkwell*, late 1920s, oil on canvas, Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection; John Frederick Lewis, *On the Banks of the Nile, Upper Egypt*, 1876, oil on panel, Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection; Yale Center for British Art, exterior view, photograph by Richard Caspole