

Britain in the World: A Display of the Collections at the Yale Center for British Art

NEW HAVEN, CT (January 31, 2017) – 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. More than five hundred works from the Center’s holdings, largely the gift of the institution’s founder, Paul Mellon (Yale College, Class of 1929), are displayed in the newly renovated and reconfigured galleries on the third and fourth floors.



“The reinstatement 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 and Head of Collections Information and Access. “Far from being insular, the new 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, this new 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, the installation reveals how frequently the story of art in Britain focuses on a narrative of international exchange. The new arrangement 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



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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 a richer, denser hang that will allow for more of the collection to be on view, and in an arrangement that will give a new variety and drama to the gallery spaces,” said Wilcox.

Many of the Center’s well-known treasures from the Paul Mellon Collection return to view in new and 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 *Staffa, 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 includes important loans, from a portrait of the young Elizabeth I to paintings by Allan Ramsay (1713–1784) and John Linnell (1792–1882), as well as 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* (1800–1820); and *The Age of Unease* (1820–1850). The timeline continues on the third floor with *A New Age* (1850–1900); *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 Sir John Everett Millais (1829–1896), Francis Bacon (1909–1992), Lucian Freud (1922–2011), and Lynette Yiadom-Boakye (b. 1977), and a sculpture by Sir Antony Gormley (b. 1950). The third floor also contains works by Ben Nicholson (1894–1982), Henry Moore (1898–1986), and Maggi Hambling (b. 1945), among many others.

The reinstallation of the collection 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.



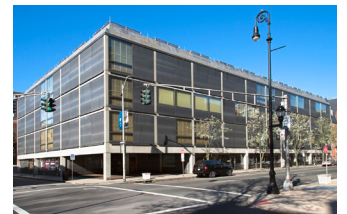
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The Long Gallery comprises an elegant sweep of seven bays in which more than two hundred works represent ensembles of subjects including beaches and coastlines, the British empire, the British theater, “chaos and conviviality,” families, gardens, “the horse and sporting art,” “into the woods,” marine painting, portraits of artists, species and specimen, 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 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, 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.



Visit the Center online at britishart.yale.edu.

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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; Joseph Wright of Derby, *The Blacksmith’s Shop*, 1771, 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; Studio of Francis Harwood, *Bust of a Man*, ca. 1758, black limestone on a yellow marble socle, 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; Tilly Kettle, *Shuja-ud-Daula, Nawab of Oudh*, 1772, 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