

Yale Center for British Art Reopened May 11, 2016, Following Historic Conservation of Iconic Louis I. Kahn Building and Reinstallation of World-Renowned Collection

+1 203 432 2800
f 203 432 9628

ycba.info@yale.edu
britishart.yale.edu

NEW HAVEN (September 13, 2016) – The Yale Center for British Art, home to the largest collection of British art outside the United Kingdom, reopened its doors on Wednesday, May 11, 2016, following an important, multiyear conservation project addressing its renowned building, designed by internationally acclaimed American architect Louis I. Kahn. More than a decade of research on the history of the design, construction, and renovation of Kahn’s final building (completed 1977) guided the completion of this three-phase, \$33 million project, led by architect George Knight, Principal of Knight Architecture LLC (New Haven), in concert with Constance Clement, the Center’s Deputy Director; Yale Office of Facilities; Turner Construction Company; and under the advisal of Peter Inskip and Stephen Gee of Peter Inskip + Peter Jenkins Architects Limited. The third phase renewed the Center’s public galleries, bringing its Lecture Hall, internal systems, spaces, and amenities up to state-of-the-art standards, while also providing an opportunity for the Center to reimagine and reconfigure the presentation of more than five hundred works from its collection, which spans five centuries of British art.

“I hope that the Center’s conservation project can serve as an inspiration for other institutions charged with the responsibility to protect and preserve modern buildings for future generations. As a public museum and research institution, we are honored to work towards the conservation of an architectural masterpiece,” said Amy Meyers, the Center’s director.

The subtle refurbishment of the Center reveals itself slowly to visitors, beginning with the beautifully refinished white oak panels in the Entrance Court and Library Court. Also to be admired is the return of the Long Gallery to the original plan, and the refreshed materials and architectural finishes throughout the building. On the second, third, and fourth floors, the public galleries have been renewed and reconfigured to exemplify Kahn’s original vision for intimate aesthetic spaces using “pogo” walls that were redesigned according to the architect’s drawing from 1974. Transformations include the addition of a Collections Seminar Room, improved patron amenities in the Lecture Hall, the introduction of white oak lockers and gender-neutral bathrooms on the lower level, and systems upgrades.

“The organization of the building is enormously powerful, in part, because it possesses an incontestable clarity,” said George Knight. “Nowhere is the Center’s logic more evident than in the Entrance Court – the expansive, light-filled space one reaches upon passing through the shadowed portico on the corner of Chapel and High streets. The regular pattern of columns and beams is disrupted to form an unexpected atrium and offer a glimpse of the building’s iconic cylindrical stair tower. With a ground floor wrapped in the same metal

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panels used on the building's exterior, one is implicitly urged to ascend to upper level spaces, clad in white oak and punctured with alluring views to the collections beyond."

"We would like to thank many people at Yale University, without whose steadfast support this conservation project would not have been possible," said Meyers. "We wish to express our deep appreciation to former Yale President Richard Levin and current President Peter Salovey, who, with foresight and wisdom, recognized the necessity to move forward in our conservation efforts."

BUILDING CONSERVATION

In 2011, the Center published a groundbreaking conservation plan, *Louis I. Kahn and the Yale Center for British Art: A Conservation Plan*, by Inskip and Gee, in association with Clement. The plan – the first of its kind to be produced in the United States – chronicles the Center's design and construction history, as well as several conservation projects, and proposes a series of policies for the building's care and maintenance in the years ahead. In doing so, it addresses the evolution and appropriate upkeep of a modern building by identifying the key features characterizing its cultural significance, and determining those which should be protected and others which can be allowed to change.

"The Yale Center for British Art adds a striking diversity to the architecture of the Yale campus and the City of New Haven," said Robert A. M. Stern, Dean of Yale School of Architecture and Principal of Robert A. M. Stern Architects, LLP. "The conservation of Louis Kahn's building is a landmark project that sets a new standard for the stewardship of modern architecture. It is an invaluable teaching resource, frequently studied and used in many classes at the School of Architecture. Much more than a treasure house, the Center is an integral part of the cityscape – a triumph of architecture and urbanism."

The first phase of work, from 2008 to 2013, included the rehabilitation of the Center's exterior Lower Court and repairs to the adjacent Lecture Hall lobby. This was followed by two additional phases addressing the building's interior spaces. The second phase, in 2013, focused on refurbishment of the Departments of Prints & Drawings and Rare Books & Manuscripts. Along with increasing vitally needed storage capacity for works on paper, behind-the-scenes renovations included the replacement of synthetic carpeting for wool, as well as the replacement of worn Belgian linen wall coverings; the renewal of the finish on white oak storage cabinets; and the reconfiguration of offices to accommodate the needs of staff more effectively. The third phase, begun in 2015, and during which the Center was closed to the public, concentrated primarily on enhancing the Center's public spaces, namely the galleries and Lecture Hall, while also addressing improvements related to safety and accessibility, and extensive building-wide mechanical and electrical upgrades. The Lecture Hall, which was the only remaining space that had never been refurbished, now boasts state-of-the-art audiovisual, video conferencing, and lighting capabilities, as well as reconfigured seating with spaces for guests in wheelchairs and their attendants. The seating is flanked by new steps and railings along each side wall, allowing easier access for all.

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REINSTALLED GALLERIES

The reinstallation, entitled *Britain in the World*, features more than five hundred works from the Center's holdings, which are largely the gift of the institution's founder Paul Mellon (Yale College, Class of 1929). The works are displayed throughout two full floors of the building, tracing the development and evolution of British art from the Protestant Reformation to the present, seen within a wider global context. Exploring the impact of international influences on British art and culture through the centuries, the installation examines the role the arts have played in shaping British history and identity. Highlights include many of the Center's renowned treasures by artists such as George Stubbs, Joseph Wright of Derby, J. M. W. Turner, and John Constable, as well as masterpieces by Sir Peter Paul Rubens, Sir Anthony van Dyck, Canaletto, Sir Joshua Reynolds, Thomas Gainsborough, Johann Zoffany, John Singleton Copley, and Benjamin West. These have been augmented by gifts and acquisitions of works by artists such as Dame Barbara Hepworth and Rachel Whiteread, as well as select loans including works by Francis Bacon, Lucian Freud, Damien Hirst, David Hockney, Sir Howard Hodgkin, Christopher Le Brun, John Linnell, Sir John Everett Millais, John Singer Sargent, and Lynette Yiadom-Boakye. *Britain in the World* has been organized by a team of curators led by Scott Wilcox, Deputy Director for Collections, and Matthew Hargraves, Chief Curator of Art Collections and Head of Collections Information and Access.

One of the notable changes to the Center's fourth-floor is the return of the Long Gallery to the original conception of the space as a teaching and study gallery, as formulated by the Center's founding director, Jules Prown, and as designed by Kahn. Here, more than two hundred works of paintings and sculpture are presented in a rich floor-to-ceiling installation across seven bays. The reinstallation arranges the works thematically and features subjects including beaches and coastlines, the British empire, the British theatre, "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." Adjacent to this gallery, in a space that formerly served as an office, is a new Collections Seminar Room for faculty, students, and visiting scholars to engage in the close study of objects from the collection.

DOCUMENTARY FILM

Conserving the Yale Center for British Art recounts the Center's building conservation project, with original music composed by Martin Bresnick, Professor of Composition, Yale School of Music (2016; not rated; 12 minutes).

The documentary provides insight into the architecture of the Center's iconic building, designed by Louis I. Kahn, the recently completed building conservation project, and relationship of the building to the collections.

ABOUT THE CENTER

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 and 250 sculptures, 20,000 drawings and watercolors, 40,000 prints and 35,000 rare books

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and manuscripts. More than 40,000 volumes supporting research in British art and related fields are available in the Center's library.

Widely recognized as a masterpiece of modern American architecture, the Yale Center for British Art was designed by Louis I. Kahn (1901–1974), and first opened to the public in 1977 in downtown New Haven, Connecticut, directly across the street from Kahn's first major commission, the Yale University Art Gallery (completed 1953). In addition to exhibition space, the Center's building houses a rare book collection; research library; photograph archive; auditorium; classrooms; workshops and offices; conservation facilities; and storage areas for paintings, sculpture, drawings, and prints. It was the first museum in the United States to incorporate retail shops in its design.

The Center's exterior of matte steel and reflective glass confers a monumental presence in downtown New Haven. The building's highly geometric five-floor interior, based on a repetitive 20-square-foot grid system, is designed as a series of room-like spaces around two inner courtyards. It is comprised of a restrained palette of natural materials including travertine, white oak, and Belgian linen, set against a structural frame of exposed concrete. Kahn expressly designed the Center's intimate galleries to enable visitors to view objects in diffused natural light, creating a ceiling of coffered bays that maximize daylight and use artificial illumination only on dark days or in the evening. The building's design, materials, and sky-lit rooms provide an environment for works of art that is simple, dignified, and humanly scaled. In 2005, the Center received the prestigious Twenty-five Year Award of the American Institute of Architects, which each year honors a single architectural landmark that was completed within the previous twenty-five to thirty-five years and has withstood the test of time.

PUBLIC INFORMATION

The Yale Center for British Art is a public art museum and research institute for the study of British art and culture. The Center is located at 1080 Chapel Street, New Haven, Connecticut, 06520 at the corner of High Street. Admission is always free. The Center is open to the public Tuesday through Saturday, 10:00 am to 5:00 pm, and Sunday, noon to 5:00 pm. The Center is closed on Mondays.

Visit the institution online at britishart.yale.edu or call +1 877 BRIT ART / +1 203 432 2800.

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PRESS CONTACTS:

YALE CENTER FOR BRITISH ART

Betsy Kim: +1 203 432 2853 | betsy.kim@yale.edu

Ronnie Rysz: +1 203 436 3429 | ronnie.rysz@yale.edu