

The National Gallery: Old Masters in London [B2]

La magnifica galleria d'arte di Londra celebra il suo bicentenario. È un'occasione unica per ripercorrere la sua storia e contemplare le grandi opere dell'arte europea che si trovano esposte nelle sue sale.

On 10 May 2024 celebrations begin for the bicentenary of the National Gallery in London. The anniversary, [dubbed](#) NG200, will be marked by an exciting year-long festival of art, creativity and imagination. The [aim](#) is to celebrate the past, but also set the tone for the gallery's future. This includes reiterating one of the gallery's original intentions, to bring great art into closer contact with people [from all walks of life](#).

HISTORY OF THE GALLERY

The National Gallery dominates Trafalgar Square in the City of Westminster, Central London. The Neo-Renaissance building was designed by architect William Wilkins and opened in 1838. However, the collection was originally housed in more modest [premises](#) down the street at 100 Pall Mall. This was the former London townhouse of John Julius Angerstein, a wealthy marine [insurance broker](#) and [underwriter](#). Angerstein had [assembled](#) a collection of thirty-eight paintings, including famous works by Titian, Rembrandt, Rubens, Van Dyck, Claude and Hogarth. It was possible to view the paintings [by appointment](#) and the collection had already gained some renown by the time Angerstein died in 1823. Anxious [to secure](#) this [asset](#) for the nation, Parliament voted to buy it for £57,000 (well over £3 million in today's money.)

OLD MASTERS

Earlier, in 1823, another collector and amateur painter, Sir George Beaumont, had also donated his collection to the nation, so it was decided to display the two collections together in the Pall Mall house. The doors opened to the

public on 10 May 1824 with a very limited staff: William Seager, who was the keeper, picture cleaner and restorer, a doorman, two porters and a [housemaid](#). The gallery opened five days a week and only to a maximum number of two hundred visitors at any one time. However, a more suitable space soon had to be found for what was a magnificent collection of old masters. In 1831 Parliament agreed to construct a building for the National Gallery at Trafalgar Square. This site in the very heart of the city could be easily reached both by the rich coming from the west of London in their carriages, and by the poor arriving on foot from the East End. In this way the paintings could be enjoyed by all classes in society.

THE COLLECTION

In the beginning, new paintings were acquired very much according to the personal tastes of the [trustees](#). In 1855, collection policy was reformed and the new director, Sir Charles Eastlake, spent ten years travelling throughout Europe to purchase works for the gallery. Under his guidance, the collection of Italian masters was expanded to become one of the best in the world. Over the years, [Dutch and Flemish](#) works were added, along with the works of British artists, and the gallery had to be expanded more than once. Today the National Gallery has over 2,300 works, it employs around 245 staff and welcomes millions of visitors through its doors every year.

NATIONAL TREASURES

As part of the NG200 programme of events, twelve of the nation's most iconic and well-loved paintings from the collection, including Constable's [The Hay Wain](#) and Turner's *The Fighting Temeraire*, will travel to twelve different [venues](#) in cities located across the UK. For some of these old masters, such as *The Wilton Diptych* and Botticelli's *Venus and Mars*, it will be their first trip out of the gallery since they were acquired. Each of the partner [venues](#) will hold simultaneous events, exhibitions and digital interventions to [showcase](#) these treasures, enabling people from all over the country to get close to some of the greatest works in the history of Western art.

www.nationalgallery.org.uk

Glossary

- **Hay Wain** = carro da fieno
- **dubbed** = denominare
- **aim** = obiettivo
- **from all walks of life** = di tutti i ceti sociali
- **premises** = sedi
- **housemaid** = donna delle pulizie
- **insurance broker** = broker assicurativo
- **asset** = bene
- **trustees** = membri del consiglio di amministrazione
- **Dutch and Flemish** = olandesi e fiamminghe
- **venues** = strutture, sedi
- **underwriter** = agente assicuratore
- **assembled** = mettere insieme
- **by appointment** = su appuntamento
- **to secure** = assicurarsi, salvaguardare
- **showcase** = mostrare