



THE QUEEN'S GALLERY
PALACE OF HOLYROODHOUSE

Masterpieces from Buckingham Palace

Large Text Labels



Please do not remove from the gallery

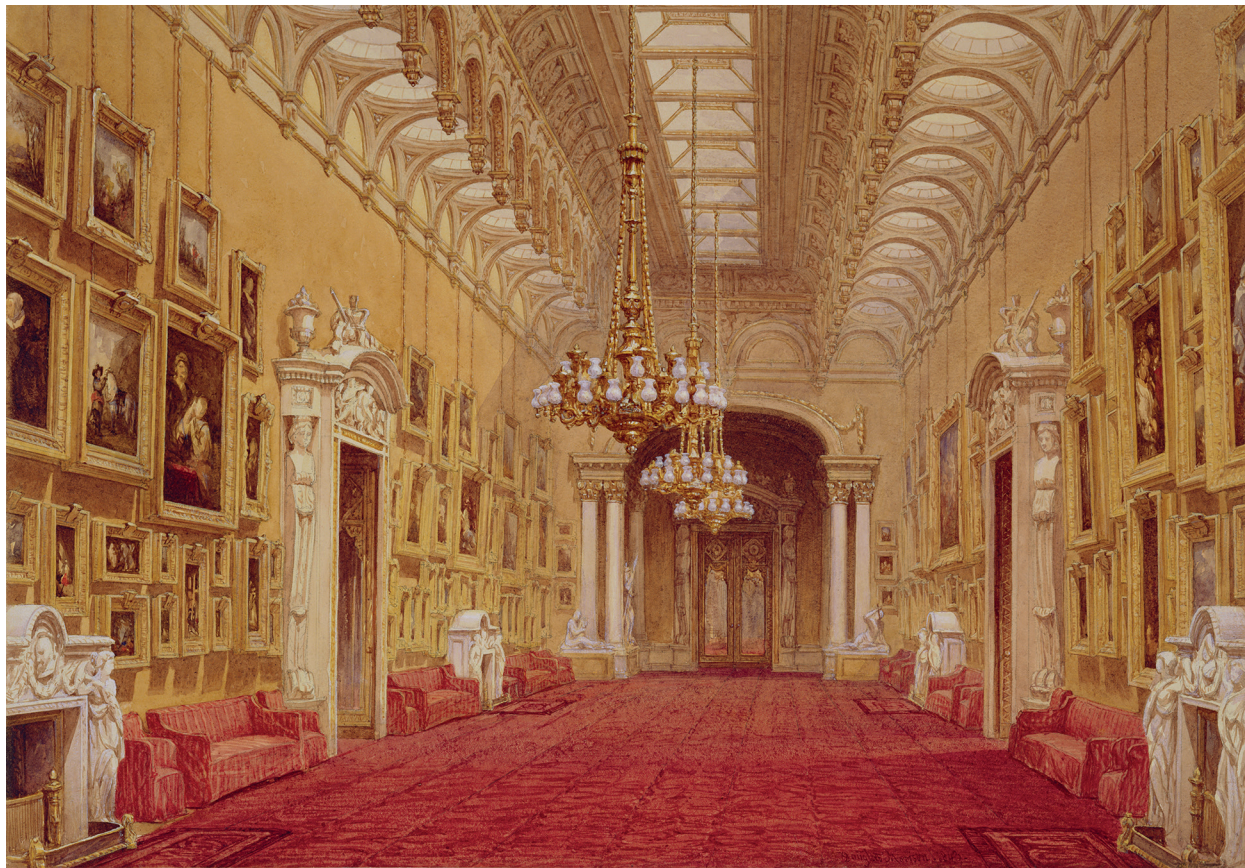
Masterpieces from Buckingham Palace

Masterpieces from the Royal Collection have been displayed in Buckingham Palace since the residence was acquired by George III and Queen Charlotte in 1762. The painting displays were reinvented during the reign of their son, George IV, who commissioned the architect John Nash to renovate the palace in the 1820s. A Picture Gallery was included to display the monarch's exceptional collection of paintings. Since then, the Picture Gallery has remained the focus for some of the most treasured Italian, Dutch and Flemish paintings from the Royal Collection.

Palace displays are often imbued with dynastic meaning; the Picture Gallery was one of the few spaces intended for the enjoyment of art, pure and simple. It is in this same spirit that we have mounted this exhibition: for the first time the paintings are displayed together in modern gallery conditions, allowing us to look at them afresh.

In general these paintings are securely dated and attributed; mostly we know which monarch bought them. We are providing this information here, but we are also asking a different, more subjective question – what makes them important? What do they have to offer? In the exhibition catalogue we have suggested qualities that were valued by the makers of these works and can still be appreciated today: the imitation of nature; the sensuous use of materials; the creation of beautiful design; and the ability to express human emotion. But are we missing something? We hope that visitors will make up their own minds about what there is to enjoy in these paintings and find reasons to believe that they are still worth exploring.





Douglas Morison, The Picture Gallery, Buckingham Palace, 1843, Pencil, watercolour and bodycolour



The Picture Gallery, Buckingham Palace, 2019

Italian Paintings 1520–1640

These Italian paintings were created in various artistic centres over a period of more than a hundred years. The works all centre on female figures, from women of myth and history to an artist herself.

We find idealised female figures, informed by a study of antique sculpture and a classical conception of beauty. Elsewhere the image of the female figure is redefined, incorporating elements of autobiography and allegory, epitomised by Artemisia's self-portrait as she raises a paintbrush ready to apply the first strokes to a canvas. Each woman possesses a certain monumentality, whether at a moment of high drama or inscrutable reflection.

These paintings represent the tastes of earlier collectors, including Charles I, and reflect the types of idealised, Italian paintings on display in Buckingham House during the late eighteenth century. They were hung in carefully ordered arrangements by George III and Queen Charlotte.

Andrea del Sarto, 1486–1530

Portrait of a Woman in Yellow

Oil on panel, 1529–30

This painting, left incomplete in del Sarto's studio after his death, reveals the way in which artists brought their subjects to life by blurring the transition between light and shadow. Developed by Leonardo da Vinci, this technique, called sfumato, creates the impression of a three-dimensional woman moving into the light towards us.

First recorded at Windsor Castle
during the nineteenth century

RCIN 404427



Guido Reni, 1575–1642

Cleopatra with the Asp

Oil on canvas, c.1628

Here we see the Egyptian Queen Cleopatra moments before the end of her life, as the asp rears its head ready to deliver its venomous bite. Reni dramatically conveys the foreboding of her passage from life to death. The transition is particularly noticeable in the colour that drains from her extremities, indicating a shift from warm flesh and blood to cold marble.

Acquired by Frederick, Prince of Wales, by 1749

RCIN 405338

Parmigianino, 1503–1540

Pallas Athene

Oil on canvas, c.1535

An inscription on the brooch identifies this figure as Athena, the goddess of warfare and wisdom and the patron of Athens. Her elongated and idealised features are thrown into bright light, catching the shimmer of her golden locks and the gems on her breastplate and culminating in a breathtaking harmony of elegance and radiance.

Presented to Charles II in 1660 by the

States of Holland and West Friesland

upon his restoration to the throne

RCIN 405765



Cristofano Allori, 1577–1621

Acquired by Charles I, probably from the Gonzaga collection, Mantua

Judith with the Head of Holofernes

RCIN 404989

Oil on canvas, signed and dated 1613

The dramatic impact of this painting derives from exaggerated contrast, rather than explicit bloodshed. Judith's regular features and smooth complexion magnify the despair in Holofernes' twisted expression, whilst the shaggy tufts of his mane underline the richness of Judith's golden dress.

Judith of Bethulia's hometown was invaded by Assyrian forces, led by Holofernes, whom she beheaded to save her city. The figures in this painting are said to be autobiographical, based on an unhappy affair between the artist, presented here as Holofernes, and Maria de Giovanna Mazzafirri, in the guise of Judith.

Artemisia Gentileschi, 1593–1654 or later

Self-Portrait as the Allegory of Painting ('La Pittura')

Oil on canvas, c.1638–9

Artemisia was the most successful female artist of her day. In this confident, energetic painting she presents herself boldly as the allegory of Painting. Her loose hair indicates her creative fervour, the mask on a gold chain signifies imitation, and her iridescent dress demonstrates mastery of colour. But Artemisia does something none of her male contemporaries could: she gives the allegory of Painting her own features, creating a uniquely self-referential image.

Acquired by Charles I
RCIN 405551



Van Dyck and Rembrandt

Anthony van Dyck and Rembrandt van Rijn both hailed from the Low Countries and worked at a similar time, but they were different characters: van Dyck a courtier, and Rembrandt a professional serving the merchants of Amsterdam.

In some ways the effects of their paintings are similar. The immediacy of van Dyck's and Rembrandt's compositions is clear: life-size figures appear to enter our space, bridging the painted and the real world. Where they differ dramatically is the way in which they bring their figures to life; whereas Rembrandt overloads us with sculptural information, van Dyck leaves us to fill in the gaps.

Sir Anthony van Dyck, 1599–1641

Christ Healing the Paralysed Man

Oil on canvas, 1618–19

Van Dyck completed this work aged 20, when he was working in Rubens' studio. The young artist encourages the viewer to participate in the drama, as if we are next in line, waiting to be healed. The bedding of the paralysed man is within our reach, and Christ's blessing hand seems to project out of the front of the picture plane.

Acquired by George IV in 1811,

when Prince Regent

RCIN 405325



Rembrandt van Rijn, 1606–1669

Portrait of Agatha Bas (1611–1658)

Oil on canvas, signed and dated 1641

In art of this date a woman's charm is usually shown through hesitancy – making eye-contact, but only with shrinking bashfulness. There is no precedent for Agatha Bas's direct, steady and confident gaze. She is even painted in an uncompromising way: in the illusion of her thumb and fan, which seem to project beyond the ebony frame; and in the encrusted paint, sculpted into her lace and jewellery.

Acquired by George IV in 1819,

when Prince Regent

RCIN 405352



Sir Anthony van Dyck, 1599–1641

Thomas Killigrew and (?) William, Lord Crofts

Oil on canvas, 1638

Thomas Killigrew, a poet at the court of Charles I, had recently lost his wife, Cecilia Crofts. Here he holds a design for her tomb and sits in a slouch of weary melancholy. His companion (usually identified as Cecilia's nephew, William Crofts) urges him to write something on the paper he holds – perhaps an epitaph.

Acquired by Frederick, Prince of Wales, in 1747

RCIN 407426

The Low Countries 1630–1680

The paintings in this space were all created in the Low Countries between 1630 and 1680, the heyday of the so-called Dutch Golden Age. They are modest in scale, the majority scenes of everyday life, with figures in landscapes or in homes, taverns and shops. These artists did not set up their easels in the market place; they worked from drawings, memory and imagination, but they depicted the familiar everyday world around them.

The people they painted were of the same kind that bought their paintings: we can see an example in a simple ebony frame on the wall in Pieter de Hooch's interior.

All but one of these paintings were acquired by George IV. Like their original purchasers, he admired them for their comedy, their brilliant technique and their truth to life. They continue to fascinate through their minute detail, tactile surfaces and ability to suggest spaces filled with light and air.

Rembrandt van Rijn, 1606–1669

Self-Portrait in a Flat Cap

Oil on panel, signed and dated 1642

This self-portrait dates from the period of the artist's greatest success, and he presents himself as confident, prosperous and faintly theatrical. He provides more information than necessary about the broadening nose, sagging flesh, tired eyes and resigned expression.

Rembrandt's work has helped us to recognise truth as the highest goal of portraiture; his contemporaries wanted something more flattering.

Acquired by George IV in 1814, when Prince Regent, from the Baring Collection

RCIN 404120

Rembrandt van Rijn, 1606–1669

Christ and St Mary Magdalen at the Tomb

Oil on panel, signed and dated 1638

Mary Magdalen has set out before dawn to anoint Christ's body; she finds the tomb empty, with angels guarding it. She turns to another figure nearby whom she takes to be a gardener, asking him where he has taken the body. He says her name and she recognises her risen Lord. No artist has ever conveyed so powerfully the bewilderment and pain of this famous episode. All artists use the light of the rising sun as a metaphor for Christ's resurrection – none as effectively as Rembrandt.

Acquired by George IV in 1819,
when Prince Regent

RCIN 404816



Rembrandt van Rijn, 1606–1669

A Rabbi with a Cap

Oil on panel, signed and dated 1635

This type of character head was common in Dutch art – they called it a tronie, meaning something like ‘mug-shot’. In this case Rembrandt’s model is from Amsterdam’s Jewish community. He uses the format to explore costumes and expressions for his Old Testament subjects. He employs a looser style of painting than would have been appropriate for his commissioned portraits at this time.

Acquired by George III in 1762 as part of the collection of Joseph Smith, British Consul in Venice

RCIN 405519

Godfried Schalcken, 1643–1706

The Game of ‘Lady Come into the Garden’

Oil on panel, c.1668

We don’t know the rules of this game, apparently played by the fashionable youth of seventeenth-century Dordrecht. Presumably the players shed a garment every time they fail in some humorous task. The defrocked victim is a self-portrait; the figure behind him is a portrait of his sister, summoning her next target. Parlour games in art are usually metaphors for love – in this case conveying the idea that, in love, men should learn to lose gracefully.

Acquired by George IV in 1803, when Prince of Wales

RCIN 405343

Jan Steen, 1626–1679

Interior of a Tavern, with Cardplayers and a Violin Player

Oil on canvas, c.1665

Jan Steen excels in animation and expression – the riotous drinker (a self-portrait), the sentimental fiddler, the drunken dancer, the befuddled cardplayer and the smug matron. He also excels in the tactile realism with which he depicts the props in this low-life comedy – the tables, cloths, pewter jug and foot warmer.

Acquired by George IV in 1818, when Prince Regent
RCIN 405825

Nicolaes Maes, 1634–1693

The Listening Housewife

Oil on panel, signed and dated 1655

The mistress of the house descends the steep wooden stairs in order to surprise her servants, who are misbehaving in the basement. She bids the viewer, with finger to lips, not to give her away. Maes trained with Rembrandt, where he learned to make everything tactile as well as visible – evident here in the soft light and thick shadows as well as the wood, fur and linen.

Acquired by George IV in 1811, when Prince of Wales
RCIN 405535

Pieter de Hooch, 1629–1684

A Courtyard in Delft at Evening: A Woman Spinning

Oil on canvas, 1657

The setting for this utterly convincing courtyard is provided by two Delft landmarks visible in the background – the tower of the Town Hall and the spire of the New Church. It is easy to see how de Hooch's paintings appealed to the Impressionists: an inconsequential scene of daily life with an effect of direct sunshine, conveyed through intense primary colours.

Acquired by George IV in 1829

RCIN 405331

Jan Steen, 1626–1679

A Woman at her Toilet

Oil on panel, signed and dated 1663

The arch looks like an altar surround, the room seen through it like a chamber of sinful pleasure. On the altar ledge is a lute with music – the attributes of a serenading lover – resting upon a skull entwined with ivy, a reminder of the transience of earthly things.

Acquired by George IV in 1821

RCIN 404804



Pieter de Hooch, 1629–1684

Cardplayers in a Sunlit Room

Oil on canvas, signed and dated 1658

The viewer in art is usually treated like the audience in a theatre – but not here. We seem to have wandered into the scene without its characters being aware of our existence, two with their back to us, all absorbed in their game. Instead of being dark and closed like a stage, the background becomes ever lighter and more spacious, as if the painting is a tantalising prologue to something more interesting beyond.

Acquired by George IV in 1825

RCIN 405951

David Teniers the Younger, 1610–1690

The Drummer

Oil on copper, signed and dated 1647

The copper support allows Teniers to paint with special precision and produce a shiny, reflective finish. This is partly a composition reflecting the life of the camp, and partly a catalogue of military hardware and software – banners, capes and tents; armour and weaponry.

Acquired by George IV in 1803, when Prince of Wales

RCIN 406577

David Teniers the Younger, 1610–1690

A Kermis on St George's Day

Oil on canvas, signed and dated 1649

Kermis, literally 'church-mass', is a religious service followed by the festivities on display here. Though a comedy, with as many varieties of folly as Teniers can invent, this scene would still have seemed an appropriate way to honour a saint.

Acquired by George IV in 1821

RCIN 405952

Gonzales Coques, 1614–1684

The Family of Jan-Baptista Anthoine

Oil on copper, signed and dated 1664

This is a family portrait which grants precedence to the wife, who sits enthroned on her husband's right hand, surrounded by her children. Coques learned something crucial from Rubens and van Dyck – how to paint the glow of health. The children here have an engaging, spirited and graceful energy, which provides an animated counterpart to the fine things – the silk, the lace and the marble.

Acquired by George IV in 1826

RCIN 405339



Willem van de Velde the Younger, 1633–1707

A Calm: A States Yacht, a Barge and many other Vessels under Sail

Oil on canvas, signed and dated 1659

This seascape and *A Calm*, hanging nearby, were not created as a pair, but had become one before they were acquired by George IV. Both depict a profusion of shipping, of all types and sizes, at anchor in the inland sea, conveying the scale of the Dutch maritime enterprise. Both describe a multiplicity of men and technology within a unity of light and atmosphere, of sky reflected in the mirror of the sea.

Acquired by George IV in 1814, when Prince Regent,
from the Baring Collection

RCIN 407275



Jacob van Ruisdael, c.1628–1682

Evening Landscape: A Windmill by a Stream

Oil on canvas, c.1650

This is domestic terrain, with a windmill, farmstead, distant village and bleaching fields, and yet Ruisdael's depiction is grave and stern, rather than pretty.

The day is blustery and the clouds substantial, creating a dark foreground and flashes of light in the middle distance. The forms, especially in the foreground, have a rough texture and jagged outline. A single figure, swathed in black, walks away from us.

Acquired by George IV in 1810, when Prince of Wales
RCIN 405538

Willem van de Velde the Younger, 1633–1707

A Calm: A States Yacht under Sail close to the Shore, with many other Vessels

Oil on panel, c.1655

Acquired by George IV in 1814, when Prince Regent,
from the Baring Collection

RCIN 405328

Paulus Potter, 1625–1654

A Young Bull and Two Cows in a Meadow

Oil on panel, signed and dated 1649

Potter painted this scene just after the conclusion of the Eighty Years' War against the Spanish in 1648.

The Dutch Republic is symbolised by the cow and the meadow, in which it is now permitted to graze undisturbed. A modern equivalent is to imagine it painted in 1946, depicting a bulldog on the White Cliffs of Dover.

Acquired by George IV in 1814, when Prince Regent,
from the Baring Collection
RCIN 404585

Gerrit Dou, 1613–1675

The Grocer's Shop

Oil on panel, signed and dated 1672

In this densely packed late work, Dou fuses realism and artifice. A naturalistic, light-filled Dutch grocer's shop is seen through a beautifully contrived stone frame, with fictive relief in the style of seventeenth-century sculptor François Duquesnoy, known for his portrayals of putti. Objects are conveniently arranged along the stone ledge in the foreground, seeming to lean out of the painting and into the real world.

It is as if the painting is itself a shop window.

Acquired by George IV in 1817,
when Prince Regent
RCIN 405542



Gerrit Dou, 1613–1675

A Girl Chopping Onions

Oil on panel, signed and dated 1646

Dou's 'fine painting' influenced generations of Dutch masters. He creates meticulous detail and flaunts his skill through many different materials, surfaces and intricate shapes. He explores the play of natural daylight and makes objects appear to 'breathe' in space. He demands the viewer's attention, even on this tiny scale, through the serving girl's guarded stare and the objects spilling out of the front of the picture.

Acquired by George IV in 1814, when Prince Regent,
from the Baring Collection
RCIN 406358

Adriaen van Ostade, 1610–1685

The Interior of a Peasant's Cottage

Oil on panel, signed and dated 1668

This is a depiction of a happy humble home (or possibly tavern), graced with modest plenty and model parenting. The figures have the slightly cartoonish character of a seventeenth-century Dutch Simpsons family. Ostade likes clutter – in the number of objects he can include and the number of variations he can introduce into the simplest surface.

Acquired by George IV in 1811, when Prince Regent
RCIN 404814

Landscape Paintings

The final paintings in this exhibition were made between 1610 and 1680, at a time when some artists were exploring the depiction of landscape as a subject in its own right, rather than always as a setting for a historical, mythological or biblical narrative.

The landscapes capture the beauty and drama of nature, placing us directly within a scene.

We experience contrasting atmospheres from an idyllic pastoral view, to a calm harbour, to a dramatic storm. Above all the quality that draws us into these paintings is the fleeting, powerful light, whether symbolic or pure expression. This luminosity was particularly cultivated by Claude Lorraine and adopted to great effect by Dutch Italianate painters Jan Both and Nicolaes Berchem.

Frederick, Prince of Wales, collected the atmospheric landscapes by Claude and Gaspard Dughet and commissioned the elaborate French frames they are still displayed in today. They were hung in Buckingham House by his son, George III.

Sir Peter Paul Rubens, 1577–1640

Milkmaids with Cattle in a Landscape (‘The Farm at Laken’)

Oil on panel, c.1617–18

This beautiful landscape acquired its title because the church in the background resembles one formerly at Laken near Brussels. It is more of an ideal composed group than a working farm, conveying the bounty and harmony of Nature: vegetables and fruit flow freely, the cows appear well fed, and all co-exist together happily under the watchful eye of the doves, symbols of Peace.

Acquired by George IV in 1821

RCIN 405333



Jan Both, c.1618–1652

Landscape with St Philip Baptising the Eunuch

Oil on canvas, 1640s

St Philip shares a ride with an Ethiopian eunuch from the court of Queen Candace; he converts him to Christianity and baptises him by the roadside. The epic landscape supports the narrative – the all-pervading light provides a metaphor for religious faith.

Acquired by George IV in 1811, when Prince Regent
RCIN 405544

Claude Lorrain, 1604/5–1682

A View of the Campagna from Tivoli

Oil on canvas, 1645

These two shepherds conversing represent Claude's minimum quota of figures. Instead the subject here is the countryside around Rome, where a visitor today could still appreciate a similar view. The artist captures the light just before the sun disappears. The rocky landscape and cascades emerge from behind a grey haze, which turns blue where the land plateaus.

The small bump on the horizon is the dome of St Peter's Basilica in Rome.

Acquired by Frederick, Prince of Wales, in 1742
RCIN 404688

Claude Lorrain, 1604/5–1682

Harbour Scene at Sunset

Oil on canvas, dated 1643

Claude was captivated by the effect of light in landscape and spent his career recording its peculiarities. The specific glint of the sun on the inky-blue sea and the sharpness of the foreground architecture reminds us exactly of an effect we have seen in nature. We are transported directly into the scene.

Probably acquired by Frederick, Prince of Wales.

First recorded at Buckingham House c.1790

RCIN 401382



Gaspard Dughet, 1615–1675

Seascape with Jonah and the Whale

Oil on canvas, c.1654

A huge storm prevented Jonah's escape from God's commands. It could only be calmed by throwing the prophet overboard, where he was swallowed by a giant fish. Dughet revels in the spectacle of the storm, matching the marvel of the weather conditions with the dramatic narrative. We are left reeling like the figures in the foreground, aghast at the overwhelming force of nature.

Acquired by Frederick, Prince of Wales, in 1748

RCIN 405355

Nicolaes Berchem, 1620–1683

A Mountainous Landscape with Herdsmen Driving Cattle down a Road

Oil on canvas, signed and dated 1673

Berchem creates a sweeping, if conventional, perspective of repeating hillocks and winding paths, the colour shifting from brown in the foreground through green to blue in the distance. Picturesque groups of cattle, sheep, dogs and herdsmen are conjured up with a brilliant flicker of the brush.

Acquired by George IV in 1814, when Prince Regent,
from the Baring Collection

RCIN 405345

