

THE  
NATIONAL  
GALLERY


POLICIES &  
PROCEDURES



# DISPLAY POLICY

July 2024

## Display Policy

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## Overview

This policy covers the on-site display of the Gallery's collection, and of borrowed objects in our care.

The main audiences for the policy are the Gallery's employees, Executive Committee and Trustees; and the Gallery's audiences.

The Gallery aims to be open and transparent in how it manages its collection and intends to make this policy available to the public and other institutions on our website. This approach is in line with other collecting institutions in the UK.

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## 1 Introduction

- 1.1 This policy covers the on-site display of the Gallery's collection, and of borrowed objects in our care.
- 1.2 This policy should be read in conjunction with the Collection Management Framework and Collections Access Policy as well as the following:
- Audience Strategy, 2024
  - Access policy, 2024
  - Collections access plan, 2024
  - Exhibitions policy, 2024
  - Loans in policy (borrowing), 2024
  - Loans out policy (lending), 2024
  - Due diligence policy, 2024 (being updated)
  - Exhibition policy, 2024
  - Glazing policy, 2022
  - Frame policy, 2024 (being written)
  - Collections care and conservation policy, 2024
  - Condition checking policy, 2024 (being written)
  - Audit policy, 2024 (being written)
  - Visitor admissions policy

## 2 Principles

- 2.1 The National Gallery has core objectives laid out under our constitution to care for the collection, to enhance it for future generations, and to study it and to share our expanded knowledge about our collection as widely as possible in a variety of appropriate ways.
- 2.2 Collection displays are one of the Gallery's core functions. The Gallery's vision is to bring people and paintings together, making the nation's collection accessible for everyone everywhere.
- 2.3 Through its collection displays the Gallery aims to:
- be a space for everyone, everywhere
  - encourage visitors to place the appreciation and enjoyment of paintings in the Western European tradition at the centre of their cultural lives
  - make its collection available for the education and enjoyment of the widest possible public by
    - maintaining free admission to the public
    - opening during the most convenient possible hours



- encourage access by the widest possible public, both in the Gallery and beyond, to understand and enjoy the paintings, taking advantage of digital opportunities.

2.4 The Gallery's collection displays will therefore:

- present as much of the collection as possible
- deliver a carefully presented display of the main Collection
- display and interpret the pictures as well as possible in well maintained galleries
- ensure both that the pictures are both well-lit and well hung, so that they can be inspected to full advantage
- help the Gallery fulfil its ambition to be a national and international leader in all its activities

## 3 Responsibilities and decision making

3.1 The Head of the Curatorial department, along with the Director and Director of Collections and Research, has overall responsibility for the Gallery's displays. Collection Curators are responsible for rehangs in their galleries.

3.2 The Display Steering Group oversees changes and impacts to the main floor display, collection and collection galleries. The group has control over displays, ensuring that the display programme is coordinated with the ongoing refurbishment of galleries, deliberately minimising disruption and cost.

3.3 The Director of Collections and Research has overall responsibility for the refurbishment of collection galleries in consultation with the Head of Curatorial, Head of Building and Facilities and the Head of Creative.

3.4 The Displays Operations Group proactively and operationally steers the successful delivery of collection display-related projects. This includes oversight of the planning and delivery of current and planned collection display projects.

3.5 The Gallery and Displays Forum communicates changes to and impacts on the displays with a wider group of Gallery colleagues.

## 4 Audiences and collections access

4.1 A strategic framework is used to grow, diversify and nurture our relationship with audiences.

- 4.2 Access to the Collection for the education and enjoyment of the widest possible public always was, and remains, a most fundamental principle of the National Gallery.
- 4.3 By international standards, the Gallery's Collection is not large (approximately 2400 paintings), its breadth and quality make it a collection of world-wide importance and reputation.
- 4.4 The Gallery aims to display approximately up to 50-60% of the Collection subject to constraints by Gallery programming and capital projects and other events.
- 4.5 Works are sometimes removed from display for reasons such as reframing, photography, examination, conservation, loan and exhibition.
- 4.6 Information on pictures 'not on display' is available on the Gallery's website. Visitors are encouraged to use these information sources to further their enquiries.
- 4.7 The Gallery facilitates access to collections in store. Requests can be made by the public to view a painting in storage.
- 4.8 Curators work on a regular basis to improve the display for the benefit of the public by rehangng individual works, groups of paintings and interlinked areas of the Gallery's display. These are planned both for aesthetic reasons and to improve understanding of the hang in terms of the history of art.
- 4.9 The Gallery continues to improve its display by acquiring and restoring paintings in line with the Collection Development Policy and Collection Care and Conservation Policy.
- 4.10 The Gallery continues to improve its display by renewing, repairing, replacing and conserving picture frames, and by acquiring genuine period frames as resources and opportunities allow, in line with the Frame Policy.
- 4.11 The collection displays are free for everyone to access, onsite and online. The Gallery is open 361 days of the year.
- 4.12 The Gallery seeks to avoid room closures during public hours whenever possible.

## 5 Display scope and subject matter

- 5.1 The National Gallery's main display is provided by the sweep of over 60 main floor picture galleries in the main (Wilkins) Building and the Sainsbury Wing.
- 5.2 The main floor displays in the permanent galleries are presented within a broadly chronological framework, while allowing for comparisons to be made, for

example, across national boundaries; between artists inspired by other artists; within themed displays.

- 5.3 The displays are structured in four clearly indicated chronological sections to create a strong framework by which visitors can navigate and understand the collection.
- Medieval and Early Renaissance (1260–1550)
  - Renaissance (1500–1600)
  - Baroque (1600–1700)
  - Rococo to Romanticism (1700–1800) and Towards Modernism (after 1800)
- 5.4 We aim to create a varied experience as visitors journey between the grand and spectacular spaces to the more intimate encounters in smaller galleries and cabinet rooms.
- 5.5 Due to the nature of ongoing capital project works to improve our visitor offer, the future use of the Ground Floor Galleries (usually used to improve or supplement the collection displays with carefully selected hangs) is under review.

## 6 Loans In

- 6.1 The collection is supplemented by long-term loans of pictures of importance and quality where these enhance the collection, usually by providing comparisons and juxtapositions that increase public understanding and enjoyment of the nation's paintings.

## 7 Interpretation

### 7.1 General

- 7.1.1 Our collection displays aim to connect visitors with great paintings, and to display and interpret them to the highest possible standards in a balanced and stimulating programme, in order to increase understanding of, and engagement with, the collection.
- 7.1.2 Interpretation in the collection galleries aims to draw on universal human experiences, encourage close looking and visual literacy and set the works in the context of their times to make our historical collection accessible, relevant and inspiring to contemporary audiences. It creates connections between artworks and artists across the whole collection and explores how artists over time and

place responded to and reinvented traditions and conventions (including context, function and materiality). It also celebrates the history of how the National Gallery and its collection were formed and developed.

- 7.1.3 Encompassing print, digital and in-person engagement, the multi-layered interpretation offer is audience-focused and designed to reflect the diversity of visitors – from those looking at paintings for the first time, to repeat visitors seeking deeper insight. It aims to foster inclusion, agency, ownership and creativity and to be continually enriched so that visitors always discover something new.

## 7.2 Gallery-based interpretation

- 7.2.1 Print interpretation in the galleries provides the introductory level of information about the collection, as well as interpretation written specifically for children.
- 7.2.2 Room panels in each gallery explain the theme of the display, the historical context and introduce key artists.
- 7.2.3 Artist labels identify important innovators and highlight the strengths of our collection, grouping paintings together, creating connections between artists and providing an accessible narrative route through the galleries.
- 7.2.4 Focus painting labels highlight our most significant works, providing focal points in each gallery and a pathway of masterpieces for first-time visitors who might otherwise be unsure where to begin. Labels for each painting explain unfamiliar subjects and encourage close looking.
- 7.2.5 Insight panels and labels provide context, explaining historical events, creating connections between paintings, revealing ‘behind the scenes’ material such as conservation stories, and showing reconstructions of altarpieces or other works from series.
- 7.2.6 History labels provide information about the Gallery’s architecture and past.
- 7.2.7 The National Gallery Multimedia Guide powered by Smartify offers the next level of more detailed content for every painting on display, as well as a selection of thematic and ‘Highlights’ tours featuring diverse specialist voices from both inside and beyond the Gallery.
- 7.2.8 The Keeper of Paintings app offers an immersive experience for children aged 7 to 11.

## 7.3 Language

- 7.3.1 Interpretation is written for a reading age of 11+ to 16+ to reflect universal secondary education. Language suitable for this reading age is pitched correctly for an adult without prior knowledge of a subject. The Gallery’s tone of voice is



warm, distinct, personal and sometimes surprising, conveying our rich, deep knowledge of the collection in clear, simple language.

- 7.3.2 Interpretation for key paintings is provided in multiple languages, including British Sign Language, visual descriptions and large print labels for blind and partially sighted visitors, as well as interpretation tailored for our neurodiverse visitors.
- 7.3.3 The Gallery offers talks delivered in British Sign Language (BSL) by Deaf lecturers as well as sessions delivered with BSL Interpretation for visitors who are D/deaf and hard of hearing. Audio-described (AD) sessions are offered for visitors who are blind and partially sighted.
- 7.3.4 Our Access Policy and website outline our accessible offer and facilities.

## 8 Programming and activities

- 8.1 We offer a comprehensive programme of activities for all which include:
- free in-gallery talks, tours, creative workshops and performances centred around the collection
  - Friday Lates series which enables visitors to enjoy the collection and exhibitions after hours, offer special events including talks, performances, music and creative activities
  - courses, study days and conferences
  - activities for children and young people of all ages to do, watch, make and learn including creative sessions during the school holidays
  - sketching and drawing in the Gallery to take inspiration from the Collection
  - a Copyist Scheme
  - photography and filming for personal and non-commercial purposes
- 8.2 Our Collections access policy and website outline our full offer.

## 9 The collection galleries

- 9.1 The National Gallery recognises that it is not only the pictures on show that determine the quality of the overall display, but also the state (and aesthetics) of decoration and repair of the rooms, and the standards of lighting and lighting maintenance.
- 9.2 The Gallery makes plans for major refurbishment and improvement of its rooms on a regular basis, with the curators as principal clients, according to available

resources. Core building maintenance takes precedence over schemes for improved decoration

- 9.3 Where technically feasible and affordable, all principal floor galleries have controlled, UV-filtered, daylight, supplemented by dimmable LED lighting fixtures. The principles for lighting of the display rely on the conservation requirements of pictures, aesthetic quality and low-energy consumption of lighting units.
- 9.4 The installation of LED lighting forms part of the Gallery's carbon management plan. Improvements to lighting and environmental management are made as resources become available.
- 9.5 The Gallery is committed to updating the lighting to improve picture lighting and accessibility.
- 9.6 Sustainability is a key consideration when making changes to display lighting, environmental conditions or display solutions.

## 10 Risk Management

- 10.1 The following risks are associated with collection displays:
- Loss or damage to the collection or loans through physical deterioration or security factors
  - Reduced access to collections due to building, capital or exhibition projects
  - Events and programmed activities
- 10.2 Risk mitigations are put in place with a view to minimising these risks. The following mitigations should be read in conjunction with the Gallery's Collections Care and Conservation Policy which further details preventive conservation mitigations and how the Gallery monitors risks to objects through use of its collection.

## 11 Collection care

- 11.1 Displays are planned within the following constraints:
- appropriate environmental conditions for the preservation of the collection
  - availability of continuous security measures to prevent damage by visitors whether by accident or by deliberate acts

- conservation factors: works on display must have sufficient robustness for long-term display

- 11.2 All collection spaces in the Gallery (display areas and stores) are air-conditioned with the exception of two of the main floor display rooms which have dehumidification and heating. These systems provide air to the spaces at a controlled temperature and relative humidity.
- 11.3 The lack of full environmental control in parts of the National Gallery, that fall outside the parameters specified as 'best practice' for the protection of paintings on panel and on canvas, limit the flexibility of curators in determining the hang. The Gallery is committed to upgrading the environmental control in these galleries to the HVAC system.
- 11.4 In cases of doubt, protection from damage to paintings is the primary consideration as determined by the Conservation and Scientific Departments.
- 11.5 To help us protect the collection, visitors are asked to follow the admissions policy and the instructions of our staff.
- 11.6 The majority of the displays are behind barriers.
- 11.7 For reasons of security or conservation, certain paintings on public display are glazed for their protection. The decision to glaze is guided by the Gallery's Glazing Policy. Display cases are also used where appropriate.
- 11.8 The Gallery's Collection Care and Conservation Policy and Security policies set out the Gallery's full policy and risk mitigations in particular about how the Gallery monitors risks to objects through use of its collection.

## 12 Room closures

- 12.1 Where pictures are removed from display for building or maintenance works to rooms, alternative public display is often found, although certain pictures may require temporary storage for lack of alternative hanging space. These plans are determined by curators in conjunction with the Building Department, Art Handling, Conservation and Collection Registrars.
- 12.2 If temporary room closures are necessary, due to shortages of staff, closures are planned to inconvenience visitors to the least extent.
- 12.3 For emergency closures, for example where urgent maintenance work or safety or security measures are involved, the affected rooms will be closed irrespective of the pre-planned sequence.
- 12.4 We do not close galleries, during normal viewing hours, for events. Such events require exceptional approval from the Director.

## 13 Loans out and exhibitions

- 13.1 Visitors expect to see our most popular masterpieces on display at the Gallery. Decisions for loans and exhibitions are balanced taking account of the effects on the display of paintings temporarily unavailable to visitors to Trafalgar Square.

## 14 Storage

- 14.1 The Gallery maintains several environmentally controlled storage facilities on-site. The collections are not stored off-site.
- 14.2 The Gallery maintains several environmentally-controlled storage facilities on-site. No paintings from the collection are stored off-site.
- 14.3 The main storage area has a rolling-racking arrangement to allow access for viewing, research, condition checks, and so on. Stored paintings are available for public inspection by advance appointment, via direct application to the Information or Curatorial Departments.
- 14.4 Paintings in storage are relatively accessible for re-installation in public spaces as hangs change, for example to provide pictures for public display when other paintings are unavailable as a result of conservation work, or of temporary loan.

## 15 Access to works in store

- 15.1 Access to the Collections in storage must be balanced against the need for conservation care, security of objects and availability of resources, to ensure their long-term preservation.
- 15.2 Information on pictures 'not on display' is available on the Gallery's website, which also provides a contact number and email address for information. Gallery visitors are encouraged to use these information sources to further their enquiries in the first instance.
- 15.3 The Gallery will facilitate a request to view a painting in storage, although specialist staff, for example art-handlers, are not always available at short notice. Requests to see paintings by specialists and researchers would normally be given priority over casual enquiries, but the latter are also considered a service to the public.
- 15.4 Due to security issues, general public access to the picture stores is not permitted; a viewing area will be used instead. All visitor special access requests

require a pre-arranged appointment and will be fully supervised. A record is kept of all special access visits. Photo ID and proof of address must be checked.

15.5 The Gallery will offer full reasons for a refusal where that decision is made.