What can you see when the National Portrait Gallery



A conservator works on a painting ready for the reopening of the National Portrait Gallery. Credit: David Parry

Following a transformational project, supported by a £9.4million National Lottery grant, the National Portrait Gallery in London has reopened its doors.

After being closed since spring 2020, the new National Portrait Gallery opened to the public on 22 June 2023.

The Inspiring People project has reimagined the building and is the largest redevelopment in its history. The three-year programme has redisplayed the entire collection, formed a new welcoming and accessible visitor entrance and set up a learning centre to inspire the next generation.

The History Makers gallery has been renamed to The National Lottery Heritage Fund Gallery, recognising the invaluable support of National Lottery players. This flexible space on the ground floor will show some of the gallery's most recent acquisitions and commissions, and is dedicated to the country's important 'history makers'.

To celebrate the reopening, we have picked out some of our top things to see in the new space.

Our highlights

Portrait of Mai (Omai) by Sir Joshua Reynolds (circa 1776)

An oil painting on canvas of Mai by Sir Joshua Reynolds

Close up of Portrait of Mai (Omai) by Sir Joshua Reynolds, circa 1776. Image courtesy of National Portrait Gallery, London and Getty.

Widely regarded as the finest portrait by one of Britain's greatest artists, it depicts the first Polynesian to visit Britain. The painting was saved for the UK following a historic fundraising campaign, including an exceptional £10m grant from the National Heritage Memorial Fund.

John Barry, O Kelly, Sonny and Richard Moore by Michael Armitage (2022)

A tapestry showing key workers to recognise their efforts in the community

John Barry, O Kelly, Sonny and Richard Moore by Michael Armitage, 2022. Gifted by the artist and White Cube.

On display for the first time, this tapestry recognises the efforts of key workers in the community which largely go unseen. With the help of weavers, Armitage transformed his painting created during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic into a tapestry.

Work in Progress by Jann Haworth and Liberty Blake (2021–22)

A close up of the centre panels of the mural by Jann Haworth and Liberty Blake, showing images of inspirational w

Detail of Work in Progress by Jann Haworth and Liberty Blake, 2021–2022. Commissioned with kind support from the CHANEL Culture Fund for 'Reframing Narratives: Women in Portraiture', 2023.

This impressive 8-metre-long mural shows 130 inspirational women from centuries of history, from Anne Boleyn to Amy Winehouse to Amika George – a period poverty activist and the youngest featured, born in 1999.

Sir Anthony van Dyck by Sir Anthony van Dyck (circa 1640)

A self portrait painted by Sir Anthony van Dyck

Sir Anthony van Dyck by Sir Anthony van Dyck, circa 1640 © National Portrait Gallery, London.

As one of the most acclaimed royal portraitists of all time, van Dyck was usually found on the other side of the canvas. This self-portrait is said to be one of the finest ever created. It was saved for the nation in 2014 thanks to multiple supporters including a £6.3m grant from the Heritage Fund.

Doreen Lawrence, Baroness Lawrence of Clarendon by Thomas Ganter (2020)

Baroness Doreen Lawrence sitting with the portrait

Doreen Lawrence, Baroness Lawrence of Clarendon by Thomas Ganter, 2020 © National Portrait Gallery, London.

This new portrait was commissioned by the National Portrait Gallery for the reopening. It was announced on the 30th anniversary of Stephen Lawrence's death. Baroness Lawrence has become a key figurehead in campaigning for equality and inclusivity.

Mary Seacole by Albert Charles Challen (1869)

A painting of Mary Seacole by Albert Charles Challen

Mary Seacole by Albert Charles Challen, 1869 © National Portrait Gallery, London.

Born in 1805, Mary Seacole was a nurse, entrepreneur, adventurer and writer. She set up her own ‘British Hotel’ behind the lines of the Crimean War to treat soldiers. In 1991, she was posthumously awarded the Jamaican Order of Merit and in 2004, she was voted the greatest black Briton.

Photographs 1963–64: Eyes of the Storm by Paul McCartney

Created for the reopening, this exhibition shares, for the first time, an extraordinary archive of rediscovered and never-before-seen photographs taken by Sir Paul McCartney. These show the start of ‘Beatlemania’ between December 1963 and February 1964 through his eyes. It runs until 1 October 2023.

Discover more this summer

Find out which other heritage places are reopening in summer 2023 that you can visit.

If you're a heritage organisation open to visitors this summer, why not take part in our #HeritageIsOpen campaign?





r major redevelopment

Frieze, 1923



lding celebrated in new exhibition

Royal Observatory Greenwich at sunrise. Credit: Chris Gorman / The Big Ladder Photographer™

London and South