

'Masterpieces from Buckingham Palace' opens at Queen's Gallery

From tomorrow (Friday, 25 March), a selection of the finest paintings in the Royal Collection will go on display at The Queen's Gallery, Palace of Holyroodhouse. 'Masterpieces from Buckingham Palace' brings together over 30 spectacular works by artists including Sir Peter Paul Rubens, Claude Lorrain, Artemisia Gentileschi and Sir Anthony van Dyck. A particular highlight will be four paintings by Rembrandt Van Rijn, the largest group of works by the Dutch artist currently on public display in Scotland.

In Her Majesty The Queen's Platinum Jubilee year, this exhibition provides an opportunity to view these world-renowned paintings in a modern gallery setting, away from the historic interior of the Picture Gallery at Buckingham Palace, where they can usually be seen as part of the annual Summer Opening of the State Rooms. The more intimate display at The Queen's Gallery gives audiences the

chance to encounter each painting close up and at eye level. Visitors are invited to consider what makes a 'masterpiece', from the artists' use of materials and composition to their evocation of the real world and the expressive quality of their works.





The paintings are arranged by school, beginning with a group of pictures created in Italy between 1530 and 1660, including both figurative subjects and landscapes. Several Italian works feature idealised female figures derived from the study of antique sculpture. These include Guido Reni's Cleopatra with the Asp, 1628, whose once-rosy skin seems to turn to cold marble before our eyes, and Parmigianino's Pallas Athene, 1535, whose finely spun hair is as bright as the gold of her breastplate. In Judith with the Head of Holofernes by Cristofano Allori, 1613, Judith's faultless complexion contrasts with the grotesquery of her victim's severed head.

Two Italian paintings reveal aspects of the artistic process. Andrea del Sarto's unfinished work Portrait of a Woman in Yellow, 1529–30, with its visible underdrawing and exposed underlayers, offers a portal into the Renaissance studio, as though we are watching over del Sarto's shoulder as he paints. In Self-Portrait as the Allegory of Painting (La Pittura), c.1638–9, Artemisia Gentileschi places emphasis on the physicality of painting, depicting herself wearing a dirtied apron, brush in hand, leaning on a stone slab used for grinding pigments. In an era when few women had the opportunity to train as professional artists, Artemisia was

the first woman to join the prestigious Florentine Academy and her paintings were in high demand among the European nobility, including Charles I, who owned this self-portrait.





The exhibition also contains a number of works created in the Low Countries between 1630 and 1680, the heyday of the so-called Dutch Golden Age. Scenes of everyday life, such as the

leisurely card game depicted in Pieter de Hooch's *Cardplayers in a Sunlit Room*, 1658, are imbued with an arresting realism through the artists' command of perspective, colour and detail. Compositional devices such as the false arches in Rembrandt's *Agatha Bas*, 1641, Gerrit Dou's *The Grocer's Shop*, 1672, and Jan Steen's *A Woman at her Toilet*, 1663, project people and objects into the viewer's space, heightening the illusion of three-dimensionality.

Artists from the Low Countries also produced works belonging to the more traditionally prestigious branches of art, such as narrative paintings and commissioned portraits, often larger in scale. While working in Rubens' studio in 1618–19, a young Sir Anthony van Dyck produced *Christ Healing the Paralytic*, populating the canvas with dynamic figures to maximise the drama of the scene. The subjects of Dutch and Flemish portraits exude character and vitality, often achieved through the artists' innovative handling of paint. In Rembrandt's *A Rabbi with a Cap*, 1635 (on display in Scotland for the first time in 60 years) the artist uses the stick end of his paintbrush to scratch fine lines into wet paint, evoking the ageing man's wispy beard. In Van Dyck's double portrait of Thomas Killigrew and William, Lord Crofts (?), 1638, the carefully rendered posture and expression of the recently widowed Killigrew convey the sitter's melancholy.



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The exhibition concludes with a series of evocative landscape paintings. In *The Farm at Laken*, c.1617–18, Sir Peter Paul Rubens delights in showing us the natural beauty and fecundity of his Flemish homeland. Two atmospheric landscapes are on display in Scotland for the first time. The diffuse golden light and harmonious composition of Claude Lorrain's *A View of the Campagna from Tivoli*, 1645, feels a world away from the ominous skies and crashing waves of Gaspard Dughet's *Seascape with Jonah and the Whale*, 1653–4, yet both demonstrate the expressive potential of landscape painting.

More than two thirds of the paintings in the exhibition were acquired by George IV, one of history's most extravagant monarchs and a prolific collector of art. 2022 will mark the bicentenary of George IV's visit to the Palace of Holyroodhouse in 1822. This was the first visit of a reigning monarch to Scotland for nearly two centuries and involved elaborate pageants organised by Sir Walter Scott. A series of events and activities will take place at the Palace in August to bring this extraordinary event to life for visitors.

An in-conversation between the exhibition curator and a

paintings conservator, [‘Masterpieces Over Time’](#), will be streamed live from The Queen’s Gallery at 7pm on Tuesday, 29 March. Weekly short talks, [‘Monday Masterpieces’](#) will take place in the Gallery every Monday at 11am.