

Sir John Leighton to retire as Director General of National Galleries of Scotland

The Director-General of National Galleries of Scotland, Sir John Leighton, has announced he will step down in February 2024.

Sir John joined the National Galleries of Scotland as Director-General in 2006 and has led the organisation through a period of significant change, combining an ambition for artistic excellence with a drive to open up the collection to the broadest possible public. Since 2006, attendance at the organisation's three galleries in Edinburgh has risen by over a million visitors, reaching an average of 2.5 million visits annually in the years before the pandemic.

Working with the Board of Trustees, Leadership Team, colleagues across the organisation and a great many donors and stakeholders, Sir John has helped the National Galleries of Scotland to realise its mission – to make art work for everyone – across three galleries in Edinburgh, on tour and online. Since 2006, the collection has been enhanced with many outstanding additions across the entire span of the collection, from Old Masters through to modern and contemporary art and photography.

There has been a hugely successful programme of exhibition activity, showcasing art from Scotland and around the world.

The superb collections of the National Galleries of Scotland have been shared across the country and abroad. This includes the Artist Rooms programme, launched in 2009 as a partnership with Tate and still one of the most successful partnerships of its kind in the UK.

Sir John led the fund-raising campaign for the joint acquisition of two masterpieces by Titian, *Diana and Actaeon* and *Diana and Callisto*, with the National Gallery in London, thereby securing the continuation of the superlative Bridgewater loan of masterpieces to the National Galleries of Scotland. In 2017, the acquisition of Landseer's iconic painting *The Monarch of the Glen* was another notable public fundraising campaign.

During Sir John's tenure, the National Galleries of Scotland has pursued an ambitious programme of investment in its buildings and infrastructure. Major projects have included the redevelopment of the Portrait gallery, completed in 2011. Later this year, the organisation will open amazing new spaces at the National for the world's most important collection of historic Scottish art. This will realise a long-standing ambition to transform the experience of a key part of this country's national heritage. Another major project, *The Art Works*, is currently under development in Granton, North Edinburgh. This will create a new home for looking after and sharing the national collection of art, combining environmental and social sustainability.

Sir John said: 'It has been an extraordinary privilege to work with the amazing colleagues, trustees, patrons, Friends and all the supporters of the Galleries and I am immensely proud of our collective achievements across so many activities and projects. With the completion of the Celebrating Scotland's Art project at the National later this year and with the Galleries firmly back on track after the disruption of the global pandemic, this seems the right time for me to hand over to new leadership. In these difficult times, and as society

continues to recover from the impact of the pandemic, I know that the National Galleries of Scotland will continue to play a key role in society in Scotland, offering inspiration and joy to a very wide public.'

Benny Higgins, Chair of National Galleries of Scotland Board of Trustees, said: 'Sir John Leighton has served the National Galleries of Scotland with distinction and unswerving commitment. His strong, thoughtful leadership has enabled the Galleries to progress in the best and most challenging of times. He will leave an enduring legacy. On a personal front, it has been a pleasure to work with someone who exhibits humility and strong values at all times. When the time comes, he will move on with the most deserving best wishes.'

The process of recruiting of a new Director-General will begin immediately and will be led by the Chair and a committee of Trustees.

