



# THE NATIONAL GALLERY *at* 200 FOR THE NATION – FOR THE WORLD

*Strategic Plan 2021–2026*

THE  
NATIONAL  
GALLERY



# Foreword



Tony Hall  
Lord Hall of Birkenhead  
*Chair of the Trustees of  
the National Gallery*

In 2024 the National Gallery will be 200 years old. That gives us a unique chance not only to celebrate the collection and all its wonderful paintings, but also to rededicate it to the people that own it – the citizens of the United Kingdom.

The Covid pandemic has reminded us all of the importance of the things that bring us together and make us who we are – culture more broadly and art in particular. While the Gallery’s sad but necessary closure came at a time when our public needed it most, it also emphasised why the period of recovery from the crisis is a moment to be ambitious for what we believe matters.

What we are describing in this document is how we want to work over the next few years to build still further the National Gallery as the Nation’s Gallery. We want to welcome more people into the Gallery than ever before. We want to engage young people from all backgrounds with the wonders of our collection. We want to use our skills in the digital world to win new audiences both in the UK and across the globe. We want to be a resource for the nation and for the world.

The National Gallery is a jewel. We have an amazing collection. We have an incredible staff with both a knowledge and a passion for what they do. Let’s use our 200th birthday to inspire the nation with what we have – and what is theirs.



# Introduction



Gabriele Finaldi  
*Director, The National Gallery*

Over its two centuries of history, the National Gallery has successfully changed and developed, responding to the needs of the time and often leading the way for art museums.

In the last generation it has become renowned as a dynamic institution, growing its visitor numbers and broadening its audiences, acquiring major masterpieces, introducing a strong exhibition programme, blazing a trail in museum art history, adopting innovative research and public-facing technologies, and seeding the international museum community with its curators and educators.

More recently, we have committed to a strong contemporary art strand, an ambitious programme of digital transformation, advancing intellectual leadership and increasing our levels of self-generated income. All of this has been or is being achieved.

The Covid-19 pandemic has brought with it unprecedented difficulties – months of closure, the disappearance of mass visiting and a collapse in our income. But we have responded with resilience, vastly increasing our online presence, reopening with a spectacular programme of activities and exhibitions, supporting our staff, working towards the completion of a major capital project and planning significant corporate reorganisation.

The next five years will see us fighting our way out of the crisis, building on our strengths, responding to challenges and opportunities, and forging a pathway to the National Gallery of the future:

- Committed to belief in the transformative nature of great art
- A resource for the people of this country and beyond, for learning, enjoyment and well-being
- Engaged with a broad, inclusive audience, in a rich and open cultural dialogue
- A world leader in academic research on historic painting for the ultimate benefit of the public
- Seizing the opportunities offered by new technologies and reaching out digitally to the whole world
- Environmentally responsible

This Strategic Plan represents a five-year transformation effort that will set us on a course for this future. Looking to our Bicentenary year as a major milestone to celebrate and build upon, it describes a series of new initiatives and capital projects under the banner NG200. These include an improved welcome for visitors at the Sainsbury Wing entrance, a new Research Centre and a reimagining of the public realm along the northern edge of Trafalgar Square.

The Bicentenary gives us the opportunity to relaunch the National Gallery as a Gallery for the Nation. And as we build the National Gallery of the future, we can look ahead with confidence, relying on 200 years of experience, on the support of the UK Government, of our Trusts, of friends old and new, on a committed staff and on the most perfect collection of paintings in the world.



# Strategic Vision



Detail from Orazio Gentileschi's *The Finding of Moses*, acquired in 2020

We already know what it means to have the best collection of European art, to run great exhibitions and to serve the largest audiences. In the next five years we want to build on these strengths and show what an institution can be in the role it plays in national life, the scale of its digital audience and the public benefit its research creates.

Our Bicentenary in 2024 is a key moment in this creation of the new National Gallery. We will demonstrate the values we hold, and the value we create as we enter our third century with renewed and bold ambition.

The Gallery's history provides us with a set of enormous strengths on which we build, but also a continually renewing set of challenges as we navigate the changing world around us. Our greatest strength is our unique collection of the finest art in the European tradition. Sharing our art with the nation and beyond is what we are here for, and ultimately why we do all that we do.

Our collection, housed in our great buildings, has been seen by hundreds of millions of people since we first opened in 1824, and time has brought us an audience from every country on the planet. No new building can ever imagine what its future audiences will be like many decades hence, and so our need to adapt continues as it did when previous major capital projects – the Sainsbury Wing, the North Galleries and the creation of the Wilkins Building itself – began.

In the 30 years since the Sainsbury Wing was completed, visitor numbers have trebled, and it is now the Gallery's principal entrance. As part of the NG200 capital project we want to reconfigure this entrance and upgrade visitor amenities, creating new spaces that will provide a welcome experience befitting a world-class institution. In addition, we will reimagine the connection with Trafalgar Square to enhance the Gallery's presence and create a more attractive setting for visitors and the public.



Today, our audiences are not just visitors to Trafalgar Square. They come to us online through websites and social media and we go out to them through our national and international programmes; our learning and education work; and our brand, commerce and communications. It is this multivalent life, always finding new ways to share our art, that defines the Gallery and will continually redefine it in the future.

The Covid pandemic has presented a unique challenge to the world. For the National Gallery it has caused a crisis of demand, artificially constraining access to the Gallery for the audiences who have historically come in such numbers – over 300 million in our history, and over 6 million in 2019.

While lockdown has constrained our Gallery audience, it has seen us accelerate the growth of and engagement from our digital audience. By committing to an extended programme of digital activity across the Covid period, and by testing new opportunities in areas such as digital events, we saw a 50% rise in our digital reach from 2020 to 2021, and a 16% growth rate which – if maintained or beaten – will see us reach 1 billion people by 2025. This growth has shown long-term potential for us to operate at a global digital scale, and to create new income streams.

As well as building our digital audience, the last year has helped us focus on the value our research can bring. Whether shared in social media or as the basis of our exhibitions, research is critical to our role as a national and global museum. We want to put it at the heart of what we do and how our audience understands us. A new Research Centre will support our vision of becoming a world leader in research into historic painting. The years ahead will show an exciting, dynamic commitment to show fully what research for public benefit can mean.



Jacopo di Cione's *San Pier Maggiore Altarpiece*, 1370–1



# Our Priorities for the Future





The Sainsbury Wing  
Trafalgar Square



Van Gogh's *Sunflowers* displayed on digital outdoor screens across the UK during the Gallery's closure in May 2020



The exhibition *Sensing the Unseen: Step Inside Gossaert's 'Adoration'* was shown both in the Gallery and online, 2021



Paul Ackroyd, Senior Conservator, working on Peter Paul Rubens's *Birth of Venus*

## The Gallery at 200

The Bicentenary in May 2024 will be the moment when we show what the National Gallery can be for our audiences in the future.

We will complete or begin a set of major capital projects (NG200) that will reshape the Gallery estate for our third century: a new welcome in the Sainsbury Wing, a new Research Centre and a remodelled public realm on Jubilee Walk.

We will celebrate the role our audiences and our wider partners play in helping others engage with great art by staging a programme of inspirational exhibitions, events and outreach across the nation.

## The Gallery across the Nation

We will raise the profile of our national work – demonstrating that we are a national institution at the heart of national life.

We will create a national learning service, increasing participation in areas of greatest need.

We will share our collection across the UK in innovative ways, creating new partnerships and strengthening existing ones, and support the work of collections throughout the nation by sharing our skills.

## The Gallery across the World

We will redefine the Gallery as a global digital institution.

We will dramatically increase our digital audience and build a membership business anchored in digital content.

We will build the revised process, teams and infrastructure to support our work as a digital media organisation that can potentially reach hundreds of millions of people across the world.

## Research for Public Benefit

Research underpins our entire programme of public engagement, both digital and physical, from exhibitions and display, to publications, talks and films.

We will build a new Research Centre at the Gallery and online and create a digital dossier that makes everything we know about our pictures available to everyone.

This will help us to build a thriving, dynamic research community for the Gallery which helps us to be the world's pre-eminent centre for research into historic painting.





Visitors to the Sainsbury Wing

Our Bicentenary will have two strands – a series of capital projects under the banner the ‘NG200 Project’ that will help redefine our visitor experience, and an ambitious programme of public engagement.

The NG200 Project aims to transform the existing Sainsbury Wing entrance into a more open, inclusive and enjoyable environment for visitors to relax, reflect and plan how they wish to engage with one of the world’s finest art collections.

Transforming the welcome to the Gallery will deliver a world-class experience with a more seamless journey – from queue management and security control, to visitor services and orientation. Resolving the design and operational shortcomings of the Sainsbury Wing entrance sequence will deepen the audience’s understanding of and connection with the collection. It will also create spaces for revenue-generating opportunities (events, sales and membership), which will allow us to be more financially resilient.

Outside, we aim to provide a more obvious connection with Trafalgar Square. Affirming the visibility of the Sainsbury Wing through public realm interventions will allow the building to relate more strongly to the Wilkins Building and improve the visitor welcome.

The reconfiguration of the Sainsbury Wing entrance will enable the newly remodelled areas to promote health and well-being, with good standards of hygiene, ventilation and water systems, as well as well-planned access and respite spaces.

In addition to work on the Sainsbury Wing, we want to create a new Research Centre with exemplary facilities that communicates the Gallery’s work as a global thought-leader and supports its growing research community, as well as providing an open-access resource for research in art history, the digital humanities, conservation and heritage science.

Critical to the success of all our capital projects will be energy-saving initiatives that help to reduce our carbon footprint. While Covid and Brexit shape our current strategic environment, the climate crisis is likely to become the defining challenge of the years ahead.

The public engagement programme will be presented as a year-long festival with exhibitions at the National Gallery, a public art commission and a national programme, including significant loans to both cultural sector and civic society venues. These activities will be supported by a national learning programme, a broadcast partnership, by events in Trafalgar Square and across the country, by digital programming and a nationwide marketing campaign.

*The Gallery at 200*

The Gallery of the future





*Artemisia Visits* HMP Send, Woking, during a nationwide tour in 2019

We want to be a truly National Gallery. Through partnerships with other institutions, helping them to develop key skills and capabilities, by creating a new national learning service, and by telling the story of what we do more effectively, we will create a step-change in our relationship with the nation.

At the heart of this change will be the way we work with audiences. Working in partnership with children and young people across the UK we will inspire positive change through art and culture and contribute to the well-being of the nation.

Our national learning service will support the Gallery's aspiration to share the collection with the widest possible audience and will establish a stronger national network. We will develop a new national children and young people's leadership network, reaching more young people in disadvantaged areas; creating partnerships and new categories to ensure inclusion.

Building on the success of *Artemisia Visits* we will continue the programme of community tours and develop a new museum partnership on the basis of shared collections. As part of our Bicentenary celebrations we will offer a tour of a small group of masterpieces from the collection across the UK: a National Gallery in miniature at each location.

To support the needs of collections throughout the UK, we will develop new ways of sharing a wider range of specialist skills from the Gallery. We will launch a funded national conservation programme supporting the conservation of major paintings in regional museums and offering residencies and training for regional museum conservators.

We will tell the story of this work in new ways, at both a political and public level. We will make new political relationships and strengthen existing ones. We will create a special website section and digital content that effectively tells the story of the Gallery's role in the nation – what we have done before, what we are doing now, what we will do in years ahead.

*The Gallery across the Nation*

A national institution at the heart of national life





Children discuss George Bellows's *Men of the Docks* in the film 'One Painting, Many Voices', 2020

In the next five years we will build a radically bigger digital audience and in so doing create a hybrid institution of a new kind. Covid has shown that cultural institutions can have an impact on a global scale online, and the Gallery has been leading the way. Now we want to build on the audience and the business model which supports that to create a digital Gallery meaningful to audiences across the world. This will lead us to a new position, where we have established a thriving digital media business inside the Gallery and an audience that could reach many hundreds of millions of people in the next five years – a landmark moment that will help define what the Gallery could be in its third century.

Social media, rather than our website, is where we can reach the biggest audience. As a first step to expanding that audience, we will diversify the social media channels we serve to include programmes we do not already use (TikTok, Snapchat) as well as doubling down on the ones we do. In parallel with this expansion, we will extend the volume and variety of editorial digital content we produce to include a wider range of formats, from shorter- and longer-form videos and podcasts, to series and educational event programmes.

Refocusing parts of our marketing spend into customer acquisition in these channels – through targeted, income generating investment – will play a key role in growing our audience.

Getting more people to sign up with us creates more opportunity to create new members. To help us capture and retain members we must expand the range and diversity of content and personalisation on our website. A crucial part of this can be achieved through our exclusive digital content offer, where we craft the content that people want, and which keeps them hooked.

Exclusive content for members is likely to come from three kinds of material: documentary film based around our exhibitions or other Gallery related content; live and interactive digital events; and educational courses, live and pre-recorded video-based instructional courses in the history of art and other Gallery-related themes. Key to retaining audiences will be both continuously creating new material, and personalising the marketing of material, to the right members of the audience at the right time.

*The Gallery across the World*

A global digital institution





Tracing of the underdrawing of Leonardo da Vinci's *Virgin of the Rocks* revealing the first abandoned composition

As we enter our third century, we want to become the world's leading centre for research into historic painting. We are already the best in this country – with this investment we can be the best in the world. We will build an active, public-facing research culture that foregrounds our research and expertise as much as our paintings as a trusted resource, with value for more diverse audiences from across the UK. With this, we can care better for the paintings that we hold in trust for the nation. Using research, both we and others can create meaningful, successful content that uses our paintings in ways that chime with contemporary life and concerns.

We will ensure that a public impact or outcome is built into all our research projects, from the start.

Rebuilding our Research Centre as a physical and digital entity will enable us to house and present our extensive and expanding research collections. It will provide space and a collaborative, nurturing environment for National Gallery researchers, into which we can invite other voices into our research community, including external researchers, students and young people.

By organising events for researchers nationally and internationally, and through partnerships with Higher Education Institutes as well as working with our own Learning team, we will build a more diverse community of practice, training and developing research into historic painting.

We will create a 'digital dossier' – a way of making available the many types of curatorial, scientific and conservation content and data we have generated over the last two centuries. This will stimulate the uses of our collection and the knowledge we hold about it across both formal and informal research and education.

Finally, we will take advantage of funding opportunities, such as the UK government's commitment to research infrastructure, to make the National Gallery the national hub for art historical, conservation and scientific research about historic painting. This will enable us to share this information digitally and to be a model of excellent research-led public engagement.

*Research for Public Benefit*

A dynamic research community





THE  
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