

art
for the
nation

the
highlights
collection

Introduction

Art for the Nation

showcases the National Maritime Museum's fine-art collection in the beautiful surroundings of the Queen's House. The collection is rich and diverse, reflecting the different personalities of the collectors, their response to maritime art and their views on what collecting it for the nation constituted.

This trail offers an alternative route through the exhibition. It explores eight of its highlights, focusing on both famous and relatively unknown artists whose work is represented in the Museum's collection.

1. Room 8

John Montagu, 1718–1792
4th Earl of Sandwich,
First Lord of the Admiralty
Thomas Gainsborough, 1783

2. Room 12

Captain the Honourable Augustus Keppel 1725–86,
Sir Joshua Reynolds, 1752–53

3. Room 16

Vaitepiha Bay, Tahiti
William Hodges, 1776

4. Room 18

The Parting Cheer
Henry Nelson O'Neil, 1861

5. Room 21

Withdrawal from Dunkirk, June 1940
Richard Ernst Eurich, 1940

6. Room 21B

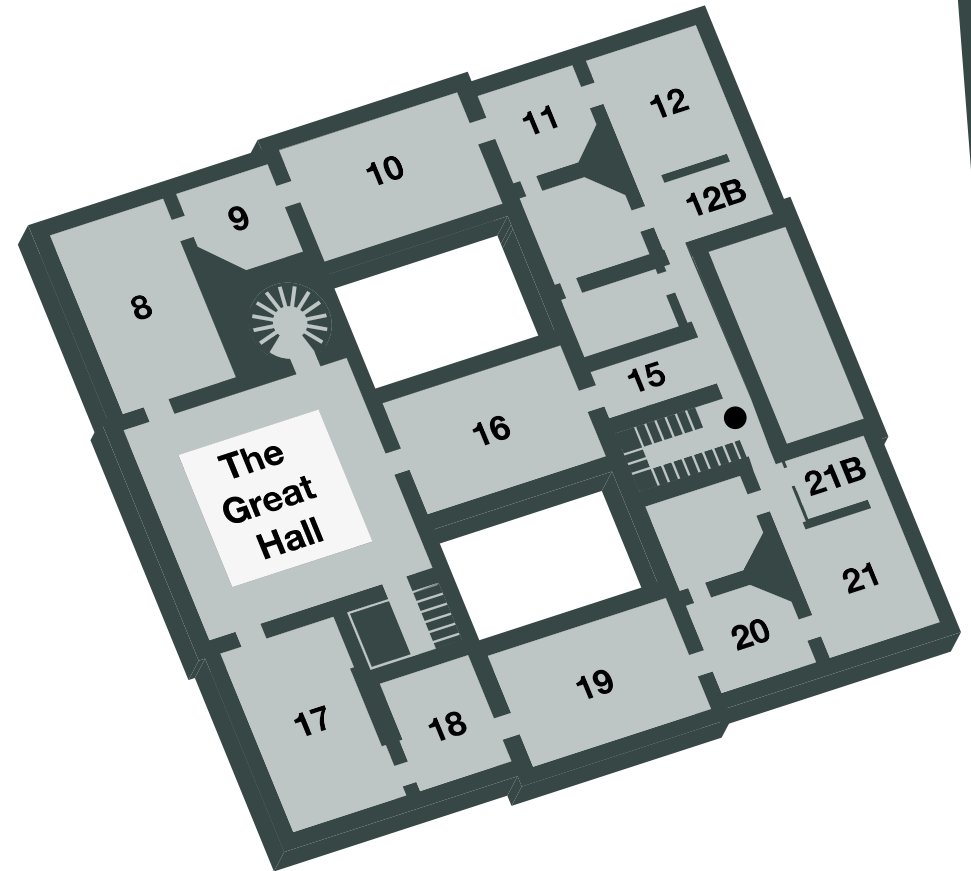
A Convoy
Herbert Barnard John Everett, 1918

7. South-East Parlour

The Battle of Trafalgar
21 October 1805
JMW Turner, 1822–24

8. South-West Parlour

The Battle of Texel,
11–21 August 1673
Willem van de Velde, the Younger, 1687



● Stairs to the South-East and South-West Parlour

1. Gainsborough

Room 8

John Montagu, 1718–92
Fourth Earl of
Sandwich,
First Lord of the
Admiralty

*Thomas Gainsborough,
1783*



Thomas Gainsborough (1727–88) is considered to be one of the most important and influential portrait and landscape painters of 18th-century England. Born in rural Suffolk, he had a natural gift for painting. However, unlike many other artists he did not venture to Italy to study the great masters of art but remained in England throughout his life. This approach greatly influenced his artistic style, liberating him from the application of formal art rules and allowing him the creative freedom to paint in a fresh and informal manner, responding directly to his observations of nature.

The Painting

Admiral Sir Hugh Palliser commissioned this painting of John Montagu, Fourth Earl of Sandwich and First Lord of the Admiralty, as an expression of his thanks to Montagu for appointing him Governor of the Royal Hospital for Seamen at Greenwich in 1780. Palliser remained in this post for the rest of his life. Gainsborough portrays Sandwich in a dignified yet relaxed and informal pose. He is shown standing in front of the Hospital holding a plan of its infirmary, which was built in 1764–68 during his previous term as First Lord of the Admiralty.

Sandwich

Sandwich (1718–92) was First Lord of the Admiralty on three separate occasions. The most notable was his last term during the War of American Independence (1775–83) when he initiated notable reforms in the dockyards and ship construction. A supporter of exploration, he initiated an attempt to reach the North Pole and sponsored Captain James Cook's Pacific voyages. Cook named the Sandwich Islands (now Hawaii) after him. The sandwich is also named after him, reputedly as a handy snack at the gambling table. However this is a scurrilous myth. Sandwich was not a gambler and it was more probably to sustain him during long hours at his desk at the Admiralty.

Sandwich was a hard-working, approachable person with wide and varied passions. He enthusiastically pioneered cricket and promoted what was at the time termed 'ancient music'. A devotee of the music of George Frideric Handel, he saved his work from obscurity by organizing a performance of *The Messiah* for King George III, which helped ensure its lasting popularity. His private life was just as colourful but sadly marred by tragedy. His wife was declared insane and his mistress, the singer Martha Ray, with whom he had five illegitimate children, was shot dead on the steps of Covent Garden Theatre by a rival suitor.

2. Reynolds

Room 12

Captain the Honourable
Augustus Keppel,
1725–86

Sir Joshua Reynolds,
1752–53



Joshua Reynolds (1723–92) was introduced to Augustus Keppel early in 1749 and a strong friendship rapidly developed between them. That same year, Keppel invited Reynolds to accompany him on a mission to the Mediterranean. Reynolds accepted and it was during this adventure that he painted the first of six portraits of his friend. Reynolds continued on alone to Italy. He was to remain there for two years where his study of the masters of the Italian Renaissance – Raphael, Michelangelo, Titian and Caravaggio – was to have a profound influence on him. He believed that they were the unrivalled exemplars of true art.

On his return to London, his newly sophisticated work found favour with a fashionable London clientele, placing him at the centre of the contemporary art scene and re-establishing an international interest in British art. In 1768 Reynolds became the first president of the Royal Academy, where his lectures promoted his belief in the rules of taste and the importance of authority in art. He remains one of the most important figures in the history of British art.

The Painting

Painted as a tribute to Keppel on Reynolds' return from Italy, this portrait made the artist's name in London and it remained in his studio for years so his patrons could see it. Reynolds was an astute businessman. He was fully aware that the portrait would attract distinguished patrons and help advance his own career by its striking portrayal of one of the most highly regarded young naval commanders of the day.

Reynolds believed in elevating his subjects with the sense of grandeur and nobility normally sought in history painting, centred on subjects from classical antiquity and the Bible. This portrait certainly achieves that. Keppel is shown as a heroic and dignified figure. A sense of his strength of character, courage and resolve are heightened by the dramatic backdrop of rocks, wreck and storm. This force of nature is controlled and pacified by the dominant Keppel. The pose used was inspired by the Apollo Belvedere, a classical statue in Rome.

Reynolds shows Keppel wearing the new Royal Naval officers' uniform of 1748, the first time there had been one in Britain, and which George III had approved at the request of officers themselves. It has the effect of reinforcing his connection to the sea and establishes him firmly as a naval hero.

Keppel

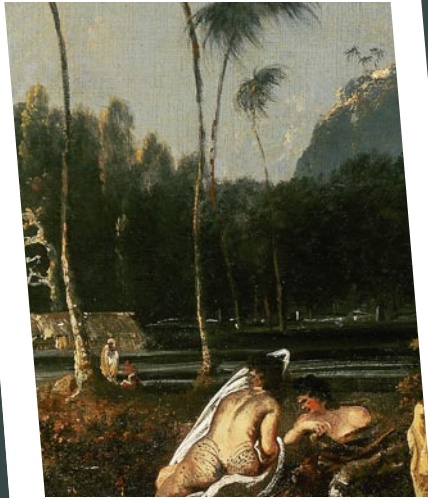
Augustus Keppel began a long and distinguished naval career by going to sea when he was ten. In 1778 he was commander of the Channel Fleet but found it ill-prepared in an inconclusive battle with the French off the Brittany coast. He afterwards expressed dissatisfaction with the support he received from his second-in-command, Hugh Palliser. Palliser demanded a court-martial on Keppel's conduct, but Keppel was resoundingly acquitted. The dispute split the Navy on political lines and Keppel never served at sea again.

3. Hodges

Room 16

Vaitepiha Bay, Tahiti

William Hodges, 1776



William Hodges (1744–97) was employed by the Admiralty as landscape artist on Captain James Cook's second voyage of exploration to the Pacific (1772–75). His task was to provide a visual record of the expedition. He made numerous drawings and some small oil studies on the voyage, and worked from these back in his London studio.

In 1779 Hodges became the first professional landscape artist to visit India, where he lived for four years, gaining the patronage of Warren Hastings, Governor-General of Bengal. In 1794 he opened an exhibition of his own work in London but Prince Frederick, the second son of King George III, was offended by two paintings, seeing them as subversive to the war effort against Revolutionary France. Frederick ordered the exhibition to close and this in effect ended Hodges' career as a painter. He sold his work, moved to Devon and became a partner in a bank which collapsed. He died a day or so later, officially from 'gout of the stomach' but suicide was rumoured.

The Painting

By painting in oil in the open during the voyage, Hodges anticipated the French Impressionists, who scandalized the late-19th-century French art establishment by doing finished paintings outside, directly from nature. As a result, many of Hodges' paintings have a sense of spontaneity about them. He paid close attention to the light of the southern hemisphere. His use of it, as a compositional element in its own right, was a real departure from classical representation of landscape, and critics complained it gave his work a rough, unfinished look.

In this painting, Hodges depicts the beauty and serenity of a brave new world. Vaitepiha Bay was the first place where Cook anchored in Tahiti on his second voyage and Hodges expresses his own sense of first looking at a world so far untouched by Western encounter. He presents an idyllic and exotic paradise, hinting at the island as a place of temptation and pre-supposing the islanders' loss of innocence from encounter with Europeans.

James Cook, 1728–79

Captain Cook's three epic voyages of exploration to the Pacific, changed Europe's understanding of the world. Although planned as scientific explorations they had underlying imperial motives and the colonization of Australia and New Zealand soon followed. Cook's greatest achievements included the first full circumnavigation and charting of the New Zealand coast, the discovery of the east coast of Australia and the discovery of Hawaii. Other successes include the fact that, prior to Cook, no one had made such long voyages of exploration with so little loss of life – both on board ship and in encounters with previously unknown societies. No-one had also surveyed such vast areas of coastline so accurately or quickly, and no-one had brought back such large numbers of scientific specimens and collected such detailed information on the people, plants and animals they encountered.

4. O'Neil

Room 18

The Parting Cheer

Henry Nelson O'Neil,
1861



Henry Nelson O'Neil (1817–80) was born in St Petersburg but his family emigrated to London when he was just six years old. He studied art at the Royal Academy schools and formed a progressive young artists group called 'The Clique'. The group opposed the Pre-Raphaelite brotherhood but O'Neil was the most virulent in his condemnation of the movement, attacking them in both satirical paintings and in writing.

The Painting

The Parting Cheer was painted in 1861 and is a key mid-19th century British image addressing the subject of emigration. Between 1815 and 1914 nearly 23 million people emigrated from the British Isles. Although many went to Australia, New Zealand and Canada, the greatest number sought a new life in America. However, O'Neil does not focus on the emigrants, whom he only sketches in shadow: he concentrates instead on those left behind. Irrespective of gender, social class or cultural background, he unites those on the quayside with emotion; be it grief, joy, pride or regret. Children provide a source of comfort and solace, acting as affirmation of the continuity of the next generation.

In the background the Thames is shown as an industrial landscape. Its smoking chimneys and ships' masts hint at the real cost of empire and underscore the historical reasons for mass migration. On the far right, O'Neil's inclusion of a black man represents both immigration and emigration. Painted when the American Civil War of 1861–65 had just begun, the inclusion of this man illustrates O'Neil's support of the anti-slavery movement and the promotion of racial integration.

Acquisition

The Parting Cheer is one of the Museum's important recent acquisitions. It was purchased in 2004 with support from the Heritage Lottery Fund, the Art Fund and the Friends of the Museum. It had previously been in an American collection. The Museum's interest in the picture was twofold. First because of the themes represented: the mass movement of people by sea in the 19th century, and especially of Europeans seeking new lives in colonial territories overseas. The second reason is more art-historical. This was a very rare opportunity to obtain a work of such importance by O'Neil on a theme that matches the Museum's maritime historical interests.

5. Eurich

Room 21

Withdrawal from Dunkirk, June 1940

Richard Ernst Eurich, 1940



Richard Eurich (1903–92) was born in Bradford and studied at the Slade School of Art. He once commented, 'the traditional sea-painting of van de Velde and Turner should be carried on to enrich and record our heritage'. This interest in maritime art prompted the Admiralty to appoint him an official war artist during the Second World War (1939–45). After the war he taught at the Camberwell School of Art.

The Painting

Eurich's *Withdrawal from Dunkirk* refers to the vast military operation that took place between 20 May and 4 June 1940, when more than 300,000 French and British soldiers were evacuated to England under enemy fire. The rescue fleet consisted of a motley collection of vessels ranging from destroyers down to fishing boats. Civilian crews were called into service and, after crossing the Channel, helped ferry troops from the beaches to larger ships waiting offshore.

Panoramic in effect, this painting is viewed from a low vantage point, as if the viewer is on board a low-flying enemy aircraft. The prominence given to the sea and sky, in stark contrast to the tiny figures of the troops, suggests the gravity and enormity of the situation and man's position in a war-torn world.

Despite its meticulous attention to detail, the painting is not based on Eurich's personal experience. He painted it in Southampton using notes and sketches made the previous summer (before war broke out), eyewitness accounts and photographs. The Navy made the unusual decision to use the image for their Christmas card in 1940.

War Artists

December 1939 saw the formation of the War Artists Advisory Committee, chaired and largely instigated by the Director of the National Gallery, Sir Kenneth Clark. The role of the committee was to purchase and commission artwork to form an historical record of the war. Clark was reluctant for these works to be seen as propaganda, believing they should be valued aesthetically and for their worth as historical records.

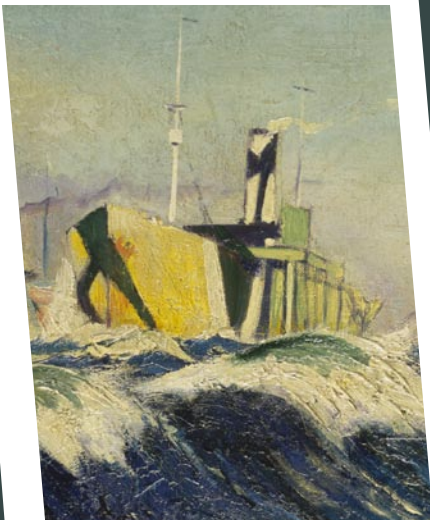
At the end of the war, Clarke was a little disappointed, feeling that no really great works had been produced. None the less, the WAAC collection, much held here and in the Imperial War Museum, is of wide and varied interest. *Withdrawal from Dunkirk* is a major example and a key work by Eurich.

6. Everett

Room 21B

A Convoy

*Herbert Barnard John
Everett, 1918*



John Everett (1876–1949) is unique among the artists represented in the Museum: he bequeathed practically his entire life's work to it, amounting to 2752 paintings, drawings and photographs produced over fifty years. Such a comprehensive legacy provides a rare opportunity to examine one artist's lifetime response to the sea.

Everett was a man of independent means. He had no need to earn his living from art and sold few paintings. Combined with his fear of publicity, this has led to long neglect of his work. It is only now that his diverse and rich output is getting the recognition it deserves. Everett's two passions were art and sailing and these he combined to great effect.

A portrait of Everett by William Orpen can be seen in Room 20.

The Painting

Everett's work combines a real sense of modernity with the English tradition of marine painting. This painting illustrates a convoy of ships during the First World War (1914–18) but is painted from a low vantage point, giving the effect that the viewer is also on board a ship, riding the waves. The lurch of the central vessel highlights the sense of motion, and both its flag and smoke convey a strong wind.

The British marine artist, Norman Wilkinson, invented dazzle-painting for ships during the First World War. It involved painting them in contrasting colours and shapes in irregular, angular patterns, to deceive and confuse the enemy about their size, outline, angle, speed and distance away. Everett effectively illustrates dazzle-painting here. He painted this picture in 1918 when he was working as an artist for the Ministry of Information.

Convoy

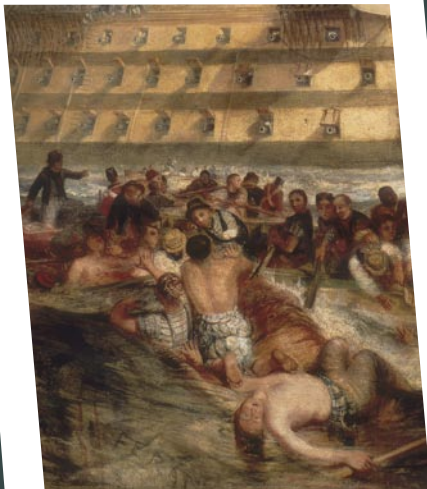
Convoy – the practice of merchant ships sailing in large groups, either for self-protection, or under the protection of warships – is one of the most ancient among seafaring societies. Historically it has also been by far the most effective, but one which has often been forgotten 'between wars'. Convoy took on new urgency in the First World War, both because of the old problem of enemy surface raiders and the entirely new threat posed by submarines. It proved just as effective as it had always been, compared to the catastrophic consequences of ships sailing independently and getting picked off one-by-one. The reasons for this are mathematical: the ocean is so large that – at least before modern radar and satellite surveillance – it was just as easy to hide 100 ships in it as one. Moreover, while one may need perhaps four warships to protect 100 merchantmen, one may need only six to protect 200. Any attack on so many may sink a few but not all and, once begun, it is the attacker who runs the greatest risk as the escorts counter-attack. It is therefore a highly effective method of protecting ships, lives and cargoes.

7. Turner

South-East Parlour

The Battle of Trafalgar
21 October 1805

JMW Turner, 1822–1824



Joseph Mallord William Turner (1775–1851), the artistically precocious son of a London barber, exhibited his first watercolour at the Royal Academy when he was just 15 years old. There was never any question as to his talent and his early work was greatly admired. Many artists remained in awe of his ability but his work became increasingly controversial and misunderstood as time progressed, as he moved away from conventional representation to an art based on light and colour.

Turner was a commercially astute artist. He fostered a school of steel-plate engravers who made his work known through high-quality, popular publications. For his original work, in oil and watercolour, he built up a following of discerning and wealthy patrons, many from the new industrial and commercial classes.

Turner died in the care of his long-time housekeeper and mistress, Mrs Sophia Booth, in their cottage on Chelsea embankment in 1851, leaving his works to the nation.

The Painting

The Battle of Trafalgar focuses on Nelson's flagship the *Victory*, defeating the French *Redoubtable*, the ship from which Nelson was shot. The painting was intended to be hung high, so Turner presents a harrowing foreground, which puts the viewer face-to-face with the death and suffering of war. The dead figure, floating upside-down in the central foreground, magnifies the fall of Nelson. This is no conventional glorification of victory.

Representing War

This painting is a major work by one of Britain's greatest artists. It was commissioned by George IV, seventeen years after the battle it shows, for the state rooms of St James' Palace. Trafalgar was seen as one of England's most important naval victories; and its reputation and Nelson's – who died in his hour of victory – was cemented after Napoleon's final defeat at Waterloo in 1815.

Instead of presenting a triumphalist image of war, Turner's is loaded with ironic juxtapositions and references to the cost of victory. He confronts the viewer by questioning the real meaning of triumph. The painting was immediately criticized by government and naval experts who expected a literal reading and celebration of the event. The work soon became an embarrassment at St James's so the king presented it to the Naval Gallery at Greenwich Hospital. Today, it is one of the most famous works in the Museum.

Turner compresses time by portraying a series of events in a single allusive image. The flags on *Victory*'s mainmast spell 'duty', echoing Nelson's famous Trafalgar signal 'England expects that every man will do his duty'. Floating as a fragmented inscription in the bloodied waters is Nelson's motto, '*palmas qui meruit ferat*' or 'let him who has earned it have the reward.' Nelson's death constituted the ultimate act of duty and *Victory*'s collapsing foremast, which bears his personal flag, further emphasizes his final sacrifice, that of his life.

8. Van de Velde

South-West Parlour

The Battle of Texel,
11–21 August 1673

*Willem van de Velde,
the Younger, 1687*



Willem van de Velde the Elder (1611–93) and his son Willem van de Velde the Younger (1633–1707) are recognized as the most accomplished and successful of Dutch marine painters. Van de Velde the Younger was greatly admired by both Turner and Constable and inspired future generations of marine artists in England.

The van de Veldes worked as a team both in Holland and from 1672–73 in England, where they were employed by Charles II to paint sea battles. He granted them this very room, here in the Queen's House, as their studio and they worked here for about 20 years. The Elder was an excellent draughtsman who sailed with the fleet and made many on-the-spot drawings. The Younger used these drawings for his paintings. Their work was in such demand at the time that they often used many assistants, so its quality does vary considerably.

The Painting

Van de Velde painted many pictures of the Battle of Texel but this is the largest and regarded as the most important. The battle was the last of the Third Anglo-Dutch War (1672–74), in which the English and French joined together in an unsuccessful attempt to destroy the Dutch fleet, to allow for an invasion of Holland from the sea.

The painting depicts the Dutch victory, with Cornelis Tromp's 80-gun flagship, the *Gouden Leeuw* (Golden Lion), dominating the work. In full sail she fires on the British and French. Guns are aimed at the 96-gun English ship, the *Charles*, with its red flag falling as the topmast is shot away. In the right foreground another English ship is sinking.

A Dutch Commission

Despite the van de Veldes being Dutch, they concentrated on depicting marine battles from the English side while enjoying the patronage of Charles II. However, this work was painted for Cornelis Tromp, the Dutch lieutenant-admiral who led a squadron of ships in the battle. It was painted in 1687 while van de Velde the Younger was making a visit to Amsterdam. For this reason it is one of relatively few paintings of that date which is largely if not entirely by his own hand.

The painting was purchased by the Museum in 1952 as a valuable addition to its existing collection of work by the van de Veldes, with the assistance of the Art Fund and other donations. Its previous owner was Lord Halifax, Foreign Secretary in the late 1930s and British Ambassador in Washington during the Second World War.

For further information about these highlights or details about other works in the collection visit

Art for the Nation

Admission free

Open Daily 10.00 - 17.00

www.nmm.ac.uk/mag

www.nmm.ac.uk/collections



at the National Maritime Museum

Sponsored by



When you have finished with this leaflet please recycle it