

## The Wallace Collection announces its 2026 programme

### **Art as soft power during wartime, Churchill as artist rather than statesman and the Renaissance's greatest dynasty...**

In 2026, the Wallace Collection will bring fresh perspectives to the creativity of Sir Winston Churchill, Britain at war, and Renaissance power, through a major exhibition and two FREE displays.

#### **The Wallace Collection at War**

**15 April – 25 October 2026**

**FREE Display**

At the outset of the Second World War in September 1939, the Wallace Collection's treasures were evacuated for safety. In their absence, the museum's home, Hertford House, briefly became a stage for cultural diplomacy and public persuasion.

This focused display explores the extraordinary story of two exhibitions held in 1942: *Artists Aid Russia* raised funds for Clementine Churchill's Red Cross Aid to Russia Fund, while *25 Years of Progress* transformed empty galleries into immersive information halls with banners, photomontages and statistics.



*Artists Aid Russia* included more than 900 works by contemporary artists, from academicians to modernists, and proved to be very popular with the public. Many of the exhibits had a distinct Russian or Soviet focus – not with any particular political allegiance, but with the aim of expressing solidarity with the Russian people at a critical, turning point in the war. As an exhibition, *Artists Aid Russia* contrasted dramatically with the one that followed. *25 Years of Progress* was an overt demonstration of Soviet propaganda. Organised by the Hungarian-born modernist architect Ernő Goldfinger (1902-1987) in collaboration with a number of Anglo-Soviet societies, it marked an exceptional moment in the history of the Wallace Collection, when empty galleries were transformed into propaganda halls dominated by the Red Flag and images of Joseph Stalin.

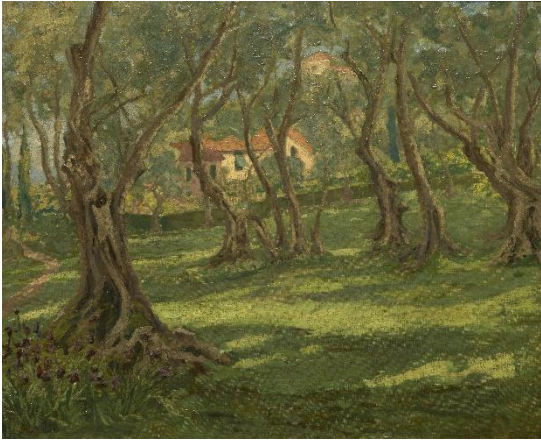
Opening in April, this free display reveals how a building typically associated with aristocratic privilege – Hertford House was formerly the principal London residence of the marquesses of Hertford and Sir Richard Wallace (1818-1890) - became a forum for soft power in promoting Anglo-Soviet friendship. Crucially, it also provides a context for the museum's accompanying exhibition, *Winston Churchill: The Painter* which highlights the role played by Lady Churchill (1885-1977) in supporting her husband's diplomatic objectives through her charitable work.

Director of Collections and Research and curator of the display, Dr Alison Smith, says: "Seeing how Hertford House was used during the war is a reminder that museums are civic spaces. Archival catalogues, posters and photographs let us rebuild two lost exhibitions that illustrate, even when emptied of their collections, that museums can still convene people and ideas."

## **Winston Churchill: The Painter**

**23 May – 29 November 2026**

**Ticketed exhibition**



Universally renowned as an inspirational statesman, writer, orator and the man who led Britain to victory in the Second World War (1939-45), what is arguably less well known about Winston Churchill (1874-1965), was that he was also an enthusiastic amateur painter.

In this major retrospective and first exhibition of Churchill's creative oeuvre in the UK since his death, the Wallace Collection will bring together more than 50 paintings that represent the very best of the former Prime Minister's output.

Half of the loans are coming from private collections and have rarely, if ever, been seen before in public. The exhibition will also showcase a large group of works from Chartwell, a major lender to the exhibition, which was Churchill's family home for over 40 years of his life and is now managed by the National Trust.

Following a chronological approach, *Winston Churchill: The Painter* will span his activity as an artist from his first attempts during the First World War (1914-18) through to the 1960s, shortly before his death. Churchill's own paintings will be complemented by a small group of loans of works by his artistic mentors and friends, such as Sir John Lavery (1856-1941) and Sir William Nicholson (1872-1949), which will help visitors to explore his artistic development.

The relationship between the Wallace Collection and Churchill dates back to the Second World War when, in 1942 the museum hosted the *Artists Aid Russia* exhibition, which was staged to raise funds for his wife, Clementine Churchill's Aid to Russia Fund – the focus of a free display, *The Wallace Collection at War* (15 April – 25 October 2026), timed to coincide with the exhibition.

Curator of Paintings and curator of the exhibition, Dr Lucy Davis, says *"From tentative beginnings to the bold canvases of the 1940s and 1950s, visitors will see Churchill develop as a painter – how he learns from Lavery and Nicholson, to working confidently outdoors in Marrakech and France. With rarely seen loans from private collections alongside works from Chartwell, we reveal Churchill's attention to light and his mastery of the physical quality of paint."*

The Wallace Collection is grateful for the support of the Churchill family and Churchill Heritage Ltd in the development of this exhibition. The exhibition has been made possible by the generosity of the Blavatnik Family Foundation and of other supporters.

## **Cosimo I de' Medici: Art and Dynasty**

18 November 2026 – 21 March 2027

FREE Display

For many, the name 'Medici' evokes thoughts of wealth and power. From the end of the 14th century, the family rose from bankers to de facto rulers of Florence, later becoming grand dukes of Tuscany and even popes.

This display will focus on one particular scion of the family who contributed significantly to the Medici's rise to fame: Cosimo I de' Medici (1519-1574), Duke of Florence, first Grand Duke of Tuscany and one of the 16th century's most powerful princes.

At the heart of the display is a monumental wine cooler made in Urbino in 1574, emblazoned with Cosimo's personal emblem of a turtle with a sail – a witty device for his celebrated motto *festina lente*, or 'make haste slowly' – and infused with references to classical antiquity. The central scene in the bowl depicts a Roman naval battle, while underneath the rim two monstrous-looking satyrs appear to be struggling to support its weight. The cooler's sheer size (it is over 70cms tall) and pictorial richness reflect a court that fused artistic patronage with great spectacle.



These messages are amplified further through other objects, including a beautifully engraved sword that belonged to Cosimo from the mid-16th-century, demonstrating how arms could act as wearable propaganda, while a portrait of *Eleonora di Toledo* (1522-1562), Cosimo's politically astute Spanish-Neapolitan wife, brings to life the power brokering that underpinned Medici rule.

Seen together, the works offer us a glimpse of Renaissance splendour and the ways images and objects were harnessed to secure dynastic ambition.

Curatorial Assistant and curator of the display, Julia van Zandvoort, says: "These splendid objects related to Cosimo's court show how design and image can be choreographed to project dynastic authority. This display helps visitors 'read' historical objects as instruments of power, not just things of beauty."

Dr Xavier Bray, Director of the Wallace Collection, says: "2026 at the Wallace Collection is very much about art as soft power. 'Winston Churchill: The Painter' reveals the private discipline behind the world leader, our wartime display shows Hertford House as a civic stage for persuasion and solidarity, and Cosimo's Florence demonstrates how art projected authority across a dynasty. Together they open the museum to new conversations and invite visitors to look again at creativity as a force that shapes public life."

### **NOTES FOR EDITORS**

#### **IMAGES**

1. Evacuation of Boucher's *The Rising of the Sun*, late August or early September 1939 © The Wallace Collection
2. Sir Winston Churchill, *La Dragonnière*, Cap Martin C267, 1930s. Private Collection. © Churchill Heritage Ltd. Photograph by Howard Agriesti.
3. Sir Winston Churchill, *The Tower of the Koutoubia Mosque* C381, 1943. Private Collection. © Churchill Heritage Ltd. Image courtesy Churchill Heritage Ltd.
4. Sir Winston Churchill, *Jug and Bottles* C176, 1930s. Private Collection. © Churchill Heritage Ltd. Image courtesy Sotheby's.
5. Workshop of Flaminio Fontana, Wine Cooler (detail), 1574 © The Wallace Collection



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### **About the Wallace Collection**

As one of Britain's preeminent cultural institutions, the Wallace Collection is home to one of the most significant ensembles of fine and decorative arts in the world. Highlights include oil paintings from the 14th to the late 19th centuries by artists such as Titian, Velázquez, Rubens and Van Dyck; princely arms and armour; and one of the finest collections of 18th-century French paintings and decorative arts. Visitors can also enjoy superb medieval and Renaissance objects, including Limoges enamel, maiolica, glass and bronzes. Displayed at Hertford House, former home to Sir Richard and Lady Wallace, this outstanding collection is displayed in a manner designed to evoke the lives and tastes of its founders, creating a special ambiance that remains an essential part of its charm.

[www.wallacecollection.org](http://www.wallacecollection.org)

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