



**Government Art Collection: Selected by Simon Schama:  
Travelling Light**

16 December 2011 – 26 February 2012, Gallery 7

The Whitechapel Gallery presents historian and broadcaster **Simon Schama's** personal selection of works from the Government Art Collection.

The exhibition sees Simon Schama explore ideas of travel in the works of British artists from the 16<sup>th</sup> century to present day. Britain has always been an island nation of explorers, from aristocrats embarking on the Grand Tour to romantic exiles like Lord Byron. In this display, Schama explores the nature of British culture that longs to go abroad, and the way artists have brought a distinctly British view to their depictions of people and places overseas.

A highlight of the exhibition is a 1814 portrait of Romantic poet and famous traveller Lord Byron by **Thomas Philips**, brought back specially for the display from the British Ambassador's residence in Athens, Greece. The romantic urge for adventure and escape is seen in Bloomsbury Group painter **Vanessa Bell's** portrait of a woman as a *Byzantine Lady*, 1912 and Edward Lear's painting *View of Beirut*, c.1861.

Schama's selection also includes **Howard Hodgkin's** *Mud on the Nile*, 1993 and **Yinka Shonibare's** *Nelson's Ship in a Bottle*, 2009, a model for his recent Fourth Plinth sculptural commission for London's Trafalgar Square.

**Grayson Perry's** *Map of an Englishman*, 2004, is an extraordinary chart of the artist's mind. Resembling an early Tudor map, it illustrates an imaginary brain-shaped island surrounded by jagged seas named 'Schizophrenia', 'Delirium' and 'Anorexia Nervosa'.

Schama also places a strong emphasis on the journey itself and its fleetingness, as captured in **Rachel Lowe's** *A Letter to an Unknown Person No. 3*, 1998, in which the artist's hand strives to sketch the landscape as it rushes past a moving car's window.

The display also includes works by artists including **Tacita Dean**, **Roger Hilton**, **Richard Long** and **Cornelia Parker**.

Simon Schama said: '*Travelling Light* is what British artists have sought and – sometimes – how they've found it. Known for our contrasting characters, we often look inwards to the insular pastoral before breaking loose offshore towards bluer horizons and palmier strands; only to then better understand what it is to be at home.'

**Press Release**

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*Travelling Light* is all about - setting off, trying to picture something, never-quite-catching it but in the process doing something beautiful.'

Showcasing Schama's personal take on the role of international cultural diplomacy, this is the third in a series of five displays of works from the Government Art Collection.

*Government Art Collection: Selected by Simon Schama: Travelling Light* is part of the Whitechapel Gallery's ongoing programme opening up important public and private collections for everyone. It is followed by two further displays exploring the diverse nature of the Collection and its role promoting British culture on the world stage, including:

- Staff from 10 Downing Street choose their favourite works (*The Government Art Collection: 12 from No 10*, 9 March – 10 June 2012)
- The Government Art Collection commissions a new work of art for the Whitechapel Gallery exhibition to be displayed alongside previously commissioned works of art during the Cultural Olympiad (*Government Art Collection: Commissions Now and Then*, 21 June – 2 September 2012).

For 113 years, the Government Art Collection has acquired more than 13,500 paintings, sculptures and work in other media dating from the 16<sup>th</sup> century to the present day. On display in more than 400 embassies and government buildings worldwide, their purpose is to promote British art and artists. It is shown for the first time in a public art gallery.

The exhibition *Government Art Collection: Selected by Simon Schama: Travelling Light* is curated by the Government Art Collection in collaboration with the Whitechapel Gallery. The displays are shown in the dedicated Collections Gallery.

#### Notes to editors

- Simon Schama (b. 1945, London, England) is a British broadcaster and historian. He has taught extensively in both UK and US universities and is currently Professor of Art History and History at Columbia University, NY, USA. His award-winning books have been translated into fifteen languages and include: *The Power of Art* (2007), based on his BBC TV series, and *Scribble, Scribble, Scribble: Writing on Politics, Ice Cream, Churchill and My Mother* (2011). Schama writes for a number of publications including the New Yorker, Harper's Bazaar and The Financial Times.
- The Government Art Collection showcases British art in Government buildings including Downing Street, the Home Office and British Embassies and Residences in nearly every capital city across the world. The Collection promotes British art and culture to the world and facilitates diplomatic and cultural links by selecting works of art with connections between the host country and the UK.

- *Government Art Collection: Selected by Simon Schama: Travelling Light* is a collaboration between the Government Art Collection and the Whitechapel Gallery. The presentation of the Government Art Collection is part of the Whitechapel Gallery's ongoing programme of opening up important public and private collections for everyone. It will be followed by a display of rarely seen work from the **Jumex Collection**. Founded by Eugenio Lopez and based in Mexico City, it is one of the foremost collections of contemporary art in Latin America, including work by Olafur Eliasson, Francis Alÿs, Doug Aitken, Maurizio Cattelan, Gabriel Orozco and Gabriel Kuri. Over a year a series of 4 displays and special events aims to create a vibrant link between Mexico and Britain. From 11 September 2012, Gallery 7
- Following the end of the five displays at the Whitechapel Gallery the exhibition will tour to Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery (16 November 2012 – 24 February 2013) and Ulster Museum (15 March – 9 June 2013)
- The Whitechapel Gallery Collections programme is supported by Hiscox.

#### Visitor Information

**Government Art Collection: Selected by Simon Schama: Travelling Light**, 16 December 2011 – 26 February 2012. Admission free. Opening times: Tuesday – Sunday, 11am – 6pm, Thursdays, 11am – 9pm. Whitechapel Gallery, 77 – 82 Whitechapel High Street, London E1 7QX. Nearest London Underground Station: Aldgate East, Aldgate, Liverpool Street, Tower Gateway DLR.  
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#### Press Information

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