

Government Art Collection: Selected by Simon Schama: Travelling Light

In this display historian and broadcaster **Simon Schama** chooses works from the Collection that explore ideas of travel.

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

His selection includes a portrait of Romantic poet and famous traveller Lord Byron by **Thomas Phillips**, brought back specially for the display from the British Ambassador’s residence in Athens, Greece. Artists’ journeys are recorded in **Edward Lear’s** *View of Beirut* (c.1861) and **Rachel Lowe’s** video tracing her attempt to capture the landscape rushing past a car window.

The influence of foreign culture is seen in Bloomsbury Group painter **Vanessa Bell’s** portrait of a woman as a *Byzantine Lady* (1912), an example of fashionable orientalism. With its sails made from African cloth, **Yinka Shonibare’s** *Nelson’s Ship in a Bottle* (2009), a smaller version of the recent Fourth Plinth sculptural commission in London’s Trafalgar Square, explores the legacy of the British Empire.

The Government Art Collection is usually on display in more than 400 locations all over the globe, and includes paintings, sculptures and other works of art from the 16th century to the present day. This display is a collaboration between the Government Art Collection and the Whitechapel Gallery, and part of the Gallery’s ongoing programme opening up important public and private collections for everyone.



The Whitechapel Gallery’s Collections Programme is supported by:

