

The world's 50 greatest galleries

From Bilbao to Beijing, from the Louvre to the Leopold, our team of cultural experts picks the finest displays of great art

Your favourite museum may well be your nearest. Familiarity can breed a sense of friendship that leads to deep love. *The Times* has invited an expert team of culture lovers to nominate their 50 greatest galleries. Next week, it's 50 top museums.

The distinction between a museum and a gallery is blurry. But, for the purposes of these lists, a gallery is considered to be a place where artworks alone are displayed; while museums house a wider variety of objects that relate to our past and the way we live now.

So, this summer holiday, when you start to tire of poolside indolence, take the opportunity to see some of the world's most impressive, spectacular, insightful and forward-looking repositories of culture. Museums and galleries are not just for art-world insiders. They are for us all.

Rachel Campbell-Johnston

1 Uffizi Gallery, Florence

The word masterpiece can be bandied about too easily in Italy but the Uffizi is packed with them. It was here that the Medici family displayed its magnificent collections. The gallery's architect, Giorgio Vasari, said it was here that the greatest artists of the Italian Renaissance would gather "for beauty, for work and for recreation". Now their cultural splendours adorn the courtyards and walls with a host of treasures from the serene beauties of an earlier medieval era to the exuberant dramas of the high Baroque.

Don't miss *The Birth of Venus* by Botticelli

2 Prado Museum, Madrid

The Spanish royal family were avid but discriminating patrons of art. Now, the collections they amassed over centuries form the passionate heart of the Prado, the country's principal art museum. Behind the imposing Neoclassical façade lies the home of national stars such as Goya, Velázquez and Zurbarán. Here is what unquestionably counts as the finest single collection of Spanish art. The gallery, with its recently extended display space, also includes the most moving Flemish masterpieces and several marvels of the Italian High Renaissance.

Don't miss *Las Meninas* by Velázquez

3 The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg

Russia can feel like it's a trek from the more conventional art centres of Rome, Paris and London, but the Hermitage's



RON WATKIN / GETTY

collection of more than three million objects must surely count among the most spectacular in the world. Its marvels span civilisation from the earliest Stone Age to the Modern period. Its highpoint is the 100 rooms and more devoted to the glories of west European art, from unknown medieval masters through Rembrandt and Rubens to Titian, Cézanne and Picasso.

Don't miss *The Hermitage Rembrandts*

4 The Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), New York

MoMA has so many must-see masterpieces that it is hard to know where to start, but if you head straight for the fourth and fifth floors of this recently revamped building, the story of Modernism, from 1880 to 1980, will unfurl.



Giuseppe Momo's spiral staircase, above, in the Vatican Museum, Rome; *Las Meninas* by Diego Velázquez, above right, in the Prado Museum, Madrid; Van Gogh's *Self Portrait with Felt Hat*, below, in the Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam

The *Times* list of the 50 best galleries in the world was compiled with nominations from: Charles Asprey, a London-based collector and publisher; Iwona Blazwick, director, Whitechapel Gallery; William Boyd, novelist; Rachel Campbell-Johnston, chief art critic, *The Times*; Jeremy Deller, artist; Derwent May, journalist and author; Andrew McKenzie, UK board director, Old Master Paintings, Bonhams; Simon de Pury, art auctioneer and collector; Bob and Roberta Smith, artist; Cristina Ruiz, editor-at-large, *The Art Newspaper*; Claire Shea, curator at the Cass Sculpture Foundation; Edmund de Waal, artist and author of *The Hare With Amber Eyes*



As you travel through a labyrinth of interlinked rooms, connections and references and allusions emerge. Picasso talks to Matisse but also to Mondrian. He glances across at Max Beckmann who chats with Diego Rivera while looking over his shoulder to catch Pissarro's eye. It's a bit like being invited to a cocktail party in which the history of Modernism is being discussed by all its main players.

Don't miss *The Dance* by Matisse

5 Kunstmuseum Basel, Switzerland

My favourite... by Simon de Pury

In 1661, the city of Basel acquired the Amerbach Cabinet, which was the beginning of the oldest public municipal museum in the world. Being a native of the city I owe it my first exposure to and passion for art.

Don't miss *The 20th-century holdings of works by Picasso, Braque and Gris*

6 The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

There are worlds of art within these walls. From Jackson Pollock's *Autumn Rhythm (Number 30)* to Caravaggio's *The Musicians*; from the Temple of Dendur, brought in its entirety from the banks of the Nile, to a suit of armour worn by Henry VIII, its curling etching designed by Hans Holbein himself. New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art — founded a year after the end of the American Civil War — is the jewel in the city's artistic crown.

Don't miss *The seven Unicorn Tapestries, some of the finest examples of medieval art, in the Cloisters*

7 Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna

This palatial museum, which stands on the Ring, the grand boulevard that encircles Vienna, is home to the great art collection of the Habsburgs, the dynasty that ruled the Holy Roman Empire from 1452 to 1740. Their reign included the years of the European Renaissance and successive emperors amassed works by all the outstanding European artists. There are paintings by Titian, Rubens, Rembrandt, Velázquez and Vermeer, and objets d'art, including the famous gold salt cellar by Benvenuto Cellini.

Don't miss *The Huntsmen in the Snow*, a superb wintry scene by the Flemish painter Pieter Bruegel the Elder

8 The Louvre, Paris

It's a bit like riffling through an art-history book but finding that the illustrations are all the original pieces. The Louvre, its landmark building an historic monument in its own right, is the home of dozens of the most celebrated images in the world. Here you can find anything from *Venus de Milo* to *Mona Lisa*. You could get lost inside the labyrinth of galleries and years later still be finding stuff you hadn't seen.

Don't miss *Mona Lisa*

9 The National Gallery, London

In its enthusiasm for blockbuster exhibitions, the British public can



sometimes overlook the spectacular quality of permanent collections. The National Gallery, housing a collection of west European paintings from the 13th to the 19th centuries, has masterpieces to match any that arrive for loan shows. The Sainsbury Wing includes a collection of early Renaissance wonders which surpasses any other outside Italy — what's more, you can enjoy them in contemplative peace.

Don't miss *Venus at her Mirror* by Diego Velázquez

10 The Frick Collection, New York

Henry Clay Frick was one of the great barons of America's age of industry: the

Frick Collection is housed in what was, remarkably, his home — one of the last surviving mansions of the Gilded Age. Bellini, Rembrandt, Vermeer, Goya, Whistler: these astonishing works of art are displayed in what is, essentially, a domestic setting. Frick was the sort of man who hung five paintings by Gainsborough in his dining room and whose tea service was composed of 17th-century porcelain from the Qing dynasty. A wonder around every corner.

Don't miss *Holbein's portraits of Henry VIII's ministers*, *Thomas More* and *Cromwell*. You decide whose side you're on

11 Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam

My favourite... by Edmund de Waal

I remember the old place with everything bathed in ersatz Rembrandt gloom. Everything was brown pots, pictures, furniture and discovering anything was happenstance, a much overrated experience outside novels. The new Rijksmuseum is a triumph. There is the self-confident rediscovery and restoration of the original 19th-century museum, gilded, mosaiced, frescoed and capacious. This allows you to see the collections as if for the first time; collections that span Delftware to Vermeer. It is exhilarating to have them back.

Don't miss *The Interior of St Odulphuskerk in Assendelft* by Pieter Jansz Saenredam (1649)

12 Borghese Gallery, Rome

The brute ambition of the Mafia-like Borghese family who presided over Roman society, not just as princes and pontiffs but also as artistic patrons, becomes more apparent when you visit the gallery that houses the bulk of its collection. Here are the possessions of a dynasty whose proclivity for powerful drama erupts in its taste for the dramatic masterworks of classical antiquity and also for such contemporaries as the rogue Caravaggio and the rumbustious Peter Paul Rubens.

Don't miss *Apollo and Daphne* by Bernini

13 Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam

The refurbished Van Gogh museum celebrates the exhilarating imagination and impetuous force of a painter who, though in his time written off as a mad failure, has become one of the most popular and recognisable artists in the world.

Don't miss *The Sunflowers*

14 Musée d'Orsay, Paris

Gare d'Orsay was the Paris station for the southwest of France, but its platforms became too short for modern trains. The idea of turning it into an art gallery was accepted by the French Government, and so, it was opened in 1986. Its collection of French 19th-century art consists of a wonderful array of the great Impressionists including Degas, Manet, Monet, Renoir, and many others.

Don't miss *Renoir's Bal du moulin de la Galette* of 1876

Next week
The 50 best
museums in
the world



Andy Warhol's signature Campbell's Soup Cans at MoMA, New York

15 Yale Centre for British Art, New Haven, Connecticut

Paul Mellon, who died in 1999, gave his collection of British art and this fine gallery to Yale University. It was opened in 1977. The architect Louis I. Kahn created a building, with an interior of marble, white oak and Belgian linen that would show the pictures in as much diffused natural light as possible. It contains the largest collection of British art outside of Britain, with paintings and prints by artists such as Holbein, Gainsborough and Turner, as well as many rare books and manuscripts.

Don't miss *A Lion Attacking a Horse* (1762) by George Stubbs

16 Tate Modern, London

My favourite... by Iwona Blazwick

The wow-factor of the Turbine Hall is just one reason why Tate Modern is such a great building to visit. But it is also the prelude to a journey through space and time offered by the collection displays and exhibitions. This museum gives the beginner's guide to every aspect of modern and contemporary art. All the major movements in the art of our time are represented and intelligently contextualised. Tate Modern's increasing openness to showing work by women and by non-Western artists also provides a counterpoint to traditional collections.

Don't miss *Living Sculpture, 1966*, by Marisa Merz

17 Museum of Islamic Art, Doha, Qatar

Even in Doha, with its famously eclectic skyline, this modernist ziggurat of a building is a landmark in its own right.



18 Hamburger Bahnhof, Berlin

It's not just the huge Neoclassical façade of this museum with its two towers and now-trademark night-lighting by the modernist Dan Flavin that will impress visitors. The displays inside are just as imposing. This museum is dedicated to art created since the 1960s; to all that is testing to the parameters of tradition and taste.

Don't miss *The Friedrich Christian Flick Collection*

19 Vatican Museums, Rome

"Since God has given us the papacy, let us enjoy it," declared Pope Leo X. Thanks to the immense art collections built up by a succession of avaricious pontiffs, the Vatican City has a complex of art galleries with painterly masterpieces, ancient Etruscan treasures and, of course, some of the greatest works by the high Renaissance artists whom the popes commissioned, including frescoes by Raphael and Michelangelo.

Don't miss *The Sistine Chapel*

20 The Barnes Foundation, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

My favourite... by Jeremy Deller

In 1922, Albert Coombs Barnes, a successful chemist, established the Barnes Foundation for the purpose of "promoting the advancement of education and the appreciation of the fine arts". It's a great, eclectic collection, displayed unusually, mixing time and space and placing Impressionist and Modernist masterworks alongside ancient sculptures and native crafts. Way ahead of its time.

Don't miss *"At-Montrouge"* — Rosa La Rouge by Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec