

Press release

William Morris Gallery to unveil major rehang of its collection galleries on the 130th anniversary of William Morris's death



Image credits from left to right: Exterior of William Morris Gallery, 2024 © Photo by Chiara Dalla Rosa; Lock of William Morris's hair in silver frame (c. late 1890s) © William Morris Gallery.

On 3 October 2026, to commemorate the 130th anniversary of William Morris's death, William Morris Gallery will reopen following the first major rehang since reopening in 2012. Designed in collaboration with Sam Jacob Studio, the newly restored galleries will present much-loved works – including Morris's original textile and wallpaper designs and early examples of his furniture – alongside significant new discoveries and recent acquisitions that offer new perspectives on Morris's life, work and enduring legacy.

William Morris Gallery is the original home of William Morris – the house where he lived as a teenager and where his ideas were first formed. Today it holds the world's most comprehensive collection of his work, and remains a place where his thinking comes into practice. Since reopening in 2012, the Gallery has welcomed more than 1.6 million visitors and has become a vital cultural hub for Walthamstow and the surrounding area. In consultation with local residents and community groups, the reimaged galleries have been designed to feel more welcoming,

accessible and homely, reflecting the character of the house while creating a more inclusive experience for all visitors.

The new displays place greater emphasis on previously overlooked stories and wider cultural influences, stemming from the Gallery's research. They foreground the contributions of women artists in Morris's circle, including May Morris and Kate Faulkner, explore the profound impact of South Asian and Islamic art on his designs, and examine the continuing relevance of Morris's ideas across design, politics and environmental thought.

Among the highlights on public display for the first time are Morris's banner for the Hammersmith Socialist League, of which he was founder and an active member, generously loaned by The Working Class Movement Library in Manchester; his personal copy of *One Thousand and One Nights*, the collection of North African, West Asian, Central Asian and South Asian folktales that shaped his imaginative writing and interest in Asian decorative arts; and May Morris's design for *Flower Garden* embroidery, created while she was Director of Embroidery at Morris & Co., her father's furnishings and decorative arts firm. Rare personal items, including a lock of Morris's hair cut from his head after his death by his close friend and fellow socialist John Carruthers, offer a personal insight into the man behind the designs. Together, the objects on display reveal the rich and interconnected stories behind Morris as designer, writer, political activist and entrepreneur, while offering new perspectives on the artistic, cultural and intellectual networks that shaped both his work and that of Morris & Co.

The enduring relevance of Morris's work and values will be represented in the Morris Today gallery, opening in 2027, which will invite contemporary artists and designers to create new commissions in response to Morris's ideas and influences. The first commission will be announced in early 2027.

In the spirit of Morris's own values around sustainable craft and production, the Gallery has commissioned local craftspeople to contribute to the designs of the house, which have included wood-turners, glass blowers, furniture makers and embroiderers.

The rehang coincides with the opening of *Earthly Paradise: Radical Living in the UK*, a major new exhibition that explores the people and places that have helped shape art and activism across Britain over the last 200 years.

Hadrian Garrard, Director of William Morris Gallery, said: "At a time where the national institutions continue to mount multi-million pound extensions and new glass and steel wings designed by starchitects, this is a local project that has involved many voices and practitioners from the very start. We have the same level of ambition and reputation as any national museum, but in the spirit of Morris, this is an intricate and collaborative capital project which has sustainability at its heart."

Rowan Bain, Principal Curator of William Morris Gallery, said: "People come to Morris through different routes, whether a love of pattern and craft, an interest in his radical politics or curiosity about the world he helped create. These new displays explore the creative collaborations,

experimentation and commitment to meaningful work that sat at the heart of Morris's vision. We hope visitors leave with a deeper understanding of why Morris and his contemporaries continue to inspire us: through their belief that art, creativity and collective action can help shape a better world.'

Sam Jacob, Director, Sam Jacob Studio said: "It's both a challenge and a privilege to have designed the William Morris Gallery. His work was radical in its time, yet has also become deeply familiar. Rather than making grand architectural gestures, the project uses decoration, colour and materials as powerful design tools, just as Morris did. His concerns around the environment and equality have shaped our approach, so too how references to the past can be made meaningful and useful in the present.

We have restored a domestic character to Water House, Morris's teenage home, while evoking the different moods and qualities of the homes he created later in life. The result responds to Morris's life, ideas and work, while allowing the Gallery's extraordinary collection to take centre stage."

This project has been made possible with generous support from The Garfield Weston Foundation and the Wolfson Foundation.

Design by Sam Jacob Studio and delivery by contractor The Moule Partnership.

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NOTES TO EDITORS

Gallery opening hours are Tuesday to Sunday, 10am – 5pm; Admission free (suggested £5 donation).

About William Morris Gallery

Owned and run by Waltham Forest Council, William Morris Gallery is the only public Gallery devoted to William Morris: designer, craftsman and radical socialist. Housed in the Grade II* listed building that was Morris's family home from 1848 to 1856, it displays the world's largest collection of his work. In recent years the Gallery has developed an ambitious programme of contemporary and historical exhibitions by artists including Jeremy Deller, Yinka Shonibare CBE, Althea McNish and May Morris. Other special exhibitions have explored 20th-century political posters, African textiles and the Japanese folk craft movement.

William Morris Gallery
Forest Road London
E17 4PP
wmgallery.org.uk

About The Garfield Weston Foundation

The Garfield Weston Foundation is a family founded grant-maker supporting charities operating in a wide variety of sectors across the UK that make a positive difference within their communities.

Established by W. Garfield Weston in 1958 through an endowment of shares in the family business – now known as Associated British Foods plc – the Foundation continues to be guided by the Weston Family. The Trustees, each of whom are direct descendants of the founder, play an active, informed role in its work.

This successful model has ensured that our charitable donations have grown as the businesses have grown, enabling the Foundation to award grants totalling nearly £1.7 billion since its establishment. The most recent financial year 2024-2025 saw the Foundation give away almost £130 million to 2,967 charities.

About the Wolfson Foundation

[The Wolfson Foundation](#) is an independent grant-making charity with a focus on research and education. Its aim is to contribute to civil society by supporting high-quality projects in science, health, heritage, humanities and the arts.

Since it was established in 1955, the Wolfson Foundation has awarded over £1 billion (£2 billion in real terms) to around 14,000 projects throughout the UK, all on the basis of expert review.

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