# National Gallery's groundbreaking £375 million expansion signals a new era for British modern art



Britain’s art world has recently witnessed a landmark moment with the National Gallery in London unveiling two record-breaking donations, totalling £300 million, which together with an additional £75 million from the National Gallery Trust will fund a bold expansion project. This initiative, named Project Domani, aims to build a new wing that will significantly broaden the gallery’s traditional focus, encompassing modern art from the 20th and 21st centuries for the first time. The funding comes from prominent donors, including the Cardiff-born tech financier Michael Moritz and the Julia and Hans Rausing Trust, marking a transformative step for the gallery amid a competitive and evolving international art landscape.

Historically, the National Gallery’s collection has centred on works preceding 1900, leaving modern and contemporary art largely to institutions like the Tate. As part of this expansion, the gallery plans to replace an existing hotel and office space adjacent to its Trafalgar Square site with a striking new wing. A global architectural competition has been launched to select a fitting design for the project. National Gallery director Gabriele Finaldi described this as one of the gallery’s most ambitious developments, signalling a departure from past practice and an embrace of broader artistic horizons after its bicentenary year.

The Julia Rausing Trust’s £150 million pledge stands as the largest single cash donation ever made to a museum or gallery worldwide. This historic gift, alongside Moritz’s substantial contribution, not only provides financial muscle to the gallery but also signals a new era of collaboration, particularly with the Tate, as the two institutions explore ways to complement their collections rather than compete. This is significant in the context of British art philanthropy, which has tended to lag behind the United States, where museums such as the Museum of Modern Art in New York or the Getty in California benefit from far larger endowments and a more established culture of mega-giving by billionaires.

The American art market’s financial might has long fostered intense competition among auction houses and galleries, driving record-breaking prices for works by artists such as Mark Rothko, whose pieces have fetched upwards of $186 million. This has made it increasingly difficult for UK institutions to acquire highly sought-after modern artworks, a challenge that the National Gallery now hopes to address through Project Domani. Yet, this shift also raises concerns about the growing rivalry between UK galleries. Previously, a 'non-compete' understanding between former directors of the Tate and National Gallery encouraged specialisation that benefited the public by maintaining a diverse but complementary national collection. Breaking this convention amidst already limited UK resources could be counterproductive.

Michael Moritz himself, a seasoned collector of British modern art including works by Lucian Freud, Francis Bacon, and Frank Auerbach, underscores the blend of personal influence and public curation entailed in the gallery’s new path. While the gallery has traditionally focused on thematic acquisitions designed to support exhibitions, the infusion of major private collections may reshape curatorial approaches and public expectations. This development illustrates the complex interplay between private wealth and public cultural institutions in shaping national art heritage.

Meanwhile, broader philanthropic activity in the UK arts sector highlights mixed trends. For instance, Goldsmiths, University of London, recently received a valuable £6 million donation comprising cash and a 60-piece art collection from former investment banker Peter L. Kellner. This gift is particularly notable as an unrestricted asset that can support teaching, research, and exhibitions at a challenging time for the university, reflecting the vital role of private donations in sustaining cultural education and access amid financial pressures.

In sum, the National Gallery’s ambitious expansion, backed by unprecedented donations, opens a new chapter for British art institutions. It signals a desire to compete on the global stage with American counterparts while navigating the delicate balance between competition and collaboration at home. How Project Domani will reshape the UK’s cultural landscape remains to be seen, but it undoubtedly reflects evolving patterns of philanthropy, market dynamics, and institutional identity within the art world.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/money/comment/article-15097767/ALEX-BRUMMER-Donors-divide-art-world-giants.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[3]](https://fundraising.co.uk/2025/09/10/largest-single-cash-donation-to-a-museum/), [[5]](https://www.juliarausingtrust.org/landmark-150m-donation-to-the-national-gallery/)
* Paragraph 2 – [[2]](https://apnews.com/article/55862f914a06bdd4408c9651843f2d27), [[4]](https://www.ansa.it/sito/notizie/cultura/arte/2025/09/09/la-national-gallery-si-espande-nuova-ala-per-larte-moderna_f762c2aa-6b5f-4310-b8ea-3f303f557a44.html)
* Paragraph 3 – [[3]](https://fundraising.co.uk/2025/09/10/largest-single-cash-donation-to-a-museum/), [[5]](https://www.juliarausingtrust.org/landmark-150m-donation-to-the-national-gallery/), [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/money/comment/article-15097767/ALEX-BRUMMER-Donors-divide-art-world-giants.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/money/comment/article-15097767/ALEX-BRUMMER-Donors-divide-art-world-giants.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[3]](https://fundraising.co.uk/2025/09/10/largest-single-cash-donation-to-a-museum/)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/money/comment/article-15097767/ALEX-BRUMMER-Donors-divide-art-world-giants.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490)
* Paragraph 6 – [[6]](https://www.ft.com/content/1facf792-babe-487b-a14f-70d7ab6b5f28)
* Paragraph 7 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/money/comment/article-15097767/ALEX-BRUMMER-Donors-divide-art-world-giants.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[3]](https://fundraising.co.uk/2025/09/10/largest-single-cash-donation-to-a-museum/), [[5]](https://www.juliarausingtrust.org/landmark-150m-donation-to-the-national-gallery/)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/money/comment/article-15097767/ALEX-BRUMMER-Donors-divide-art-world-giants.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://apnews.com/article/55862f914a06bdd4408c9651843f2d27> - The UK's National Gallery in London has announced plans to use £375 million in donations to fund the construction of a new wing that will, for the first time, showcase modern art. Traditionally focused on Western paintings predating 1900, the gallery aims to expand its scope to include artworks from the 20th century onward. The new wing will be built adjacent to the current Trafalgar Square site, replacing an existing hotel and office space. An architectural competition will be held to select the design.
3. <https://fundraising.co.uk/2025/09/10/largest-single-cash-donation-to-a-museum/> - The Julia Rausing Trust has pledged £150 million to fund a new public wing at The National Gallery in London. This is the single largest donation ever pledged by The Julia Rausing Trust and also the largest single cash donation given to a museum or gallery anywhere in the world. The project, named Project Domani, aims to develop the gallery's historic collection to include modern paintings of the 20th and 21st centuries and marks the beginning of a new collaboration with Tate.
4. <https://www.ansa.it/sito/notizie/cultura/arte/2025/09/09/la-national-gallery-si-espande-nuova-ala-per-larte-moderna_f762c2aa-6b5f-4310-b8ea-3f303f557a44.html> - The National Gallery in London has launched one of its most ambitious expansion projects, announcing a global architectural competition for the creation of a new wing to house a collection of modern art. This marks a significant shift for the renowned gallery, which has traditionally focused on masterpieces up to 1900, while contemporary works are usually allocated to the Tate, another major art institution in the capital. Director Gabriele Finaldi expressed enthusiasm about the future after the bicentenary, referring to the expansion plan as 'Project Domani', an homage to his Italian roots.
5. <https://www.juliarausingtrust.org/landmark-150m-donation-to-the-national-gallery/> - The Julia Rausing Trust has announced a landmark pledge of £150 million to fund a transformational project at the National Gallery, creating a brand-new wing and public realm. This gift is the single largest donation ever pledged by The Julia Rausing Trust and marks the largest single cash donation to a museum or gallery globally. The National Gallery plans to develop its historic collection to include great modern paintings of the 20th and 21st centuries and will begin a fundamental new collaboration with Tate.
6. <https://www.ft.com/content/1facf792-babe-487b-a14f-70d7ab6b5f28> - Goldsmiths, University of London, has received a transformative £6 million donation from former investment banker and discreet arts patron Peter L. Kellner, comprising £2 million in cash and a valuable 60-piece art collection currently valued at £4 million. The donation comes as a lifeline amid budget cuts and declining student numbers that recently forced the university to reduce staff by nearly 20%. Notably, the collection is gifted as an unrestricted asset, allowing Goldsmiths to sell pieces or use them for teaching, research, or exhibition purposes at its Centre for Contemporary Art.