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# See How History's Great Artists Painted Their Dogs

A new exhibition showcases portraits of pets by the likes of Leonardo da Vinci and David Hockney



David Hockney's *Dog Painting 19* (1995) © David Hockney / Richard Schmidt Collection / The David Hockney Foundation



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Plenty of exhibitions focus on humanity's foundational relationships: humans and nature, humans and God, humans and each other.

But what about humans and their most loyal companions?

Opening tomorrow at London's Wallace Collection, "Portraits of Dogs: From Gainsborough to Hockney" traces the relationship between artists and their pet canines throughout history. After years of pandemic delays, museum officials say they are now prepared and excited to share the unique collection with the world.

"The way that our relationship with dogs—that unexplainable, loving bond—transgresses into art history is fascinating, and a greater reflection of society," Xavier Bray, the exhibition's curator, tells BBC Culture's Matthew Wilson.



Leonardo da Vinci's *Studies of a Dog's Paw (verso)* (circa 1490–95) National Galleries of Scotland / Purchased by Private Treaty Sale with the aid of the Art Fund 1991 / © National Galleries of Scotland



Edwin Landseer's *Queen Victoria's Spaniel 'Tilco'* (1838) Anglesey Abbey / © National Trust

The curators sought out pieces with no human presence, instead letting images of the dogs stand on their own. Even so, “the commissioned portraits reveal as much about the owners as they do about the dogs themselves, the personality of the owner reflected in the character of their beloved pet,” writes the museum in a statement.

The oldest pieces on view date back to the late first century C.E.: two marble sculptures of Vertragus dogs, a Celtic breed thought to be an ancestor of the greyhound.

Meanwhile, the exhibition will also display works made by David Hockney in the 1990s. At the time, the influential British artist was mourning the death of a close friend, the curator Henry Geldzahler. Painting his beloved dachshunds helped him move through his grief.

“I felt such a loss of love I wanted to deal with it in some way,” Hockney told the Los Angeles Times’ Barbara Isenberg in 1995. “I realized I was painting my best friends, [Stanley and Boodgie]. They sleep with me; I’m always with them here. They don’t go anywhere without me and only occasionally do I leave them. They’re like little people to me. The subject wasn’t dogs but my love of the little creatures.”



Jean-Jacques Bachelier's *Dog of the Hanava Breed* (1768) © The Bowes Museum, Barnard Castle

The exhibition, which features more than 50 artworks, will also explore how human perceptions of particular breeds have changed over time. As BBC Culture writes, "The first 'dog portraits' were created to celebrate the impressive sensory skills of hunting dogs, and proudly included the names of particularly skillful mutts."

More recent artists seem to gravitate toward the dachshund. Hockney had dachshund paraphernalia throughout his house, according to *AnOther magazine's* Belle Hutton. Pablo Picasso painted a small dachshund named Lump, and Andy Warhol had among his veritable zoo of pets a brown shorthair named Archie.

Bray says that the Wallace Collection is a fitting setting for this particular display. Two of the museum's most popular portraits depict canines: Rosa

Bonheur's *Brizo, A Shepherd's Dog* (1864) and Edwin Landseer's *Doubtful Crumbs* (1858-9).

"Bonheur's portrait is a superbly lifelike and intimate portrayal of her French otterhound, Brizo," says Bray in the museum's statement. "By contrast, Landseer is more interested in introducing a biblical parable into his portrayal, exemplifying the 19th-century urge to moralize through dog portraiture."



Edwin Landseer's *Doubtful Crumbs* (1858-9) © The Trustees of the Wallace Collection

Other highlights of the exhibition include sketches of dogs made by Queen Victoria, as well as a study of a dog's paw drawn by Leonardo da Vinci.

Bray also wrote the exhibition's illustrated catalog, *Faithful and Fearless: Portraits of Dogs*, which was published in 2021. He says that these artworks help us see artists and historical figures in new, intimate ways.

“The relationship with dogs humanizes people, and brings the best out of them,” Bray tells BBC Culture. “The connection calms people; anxiety can be conquered by it. It can be a transformative relationship.”

*“Portraits of Dogs: From Gainsborough to Hockney” will be on view at the Wallace Collection in London from March 29 to October 15.*

<https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/dog-portraits-wallace-collection-london-180981889/>