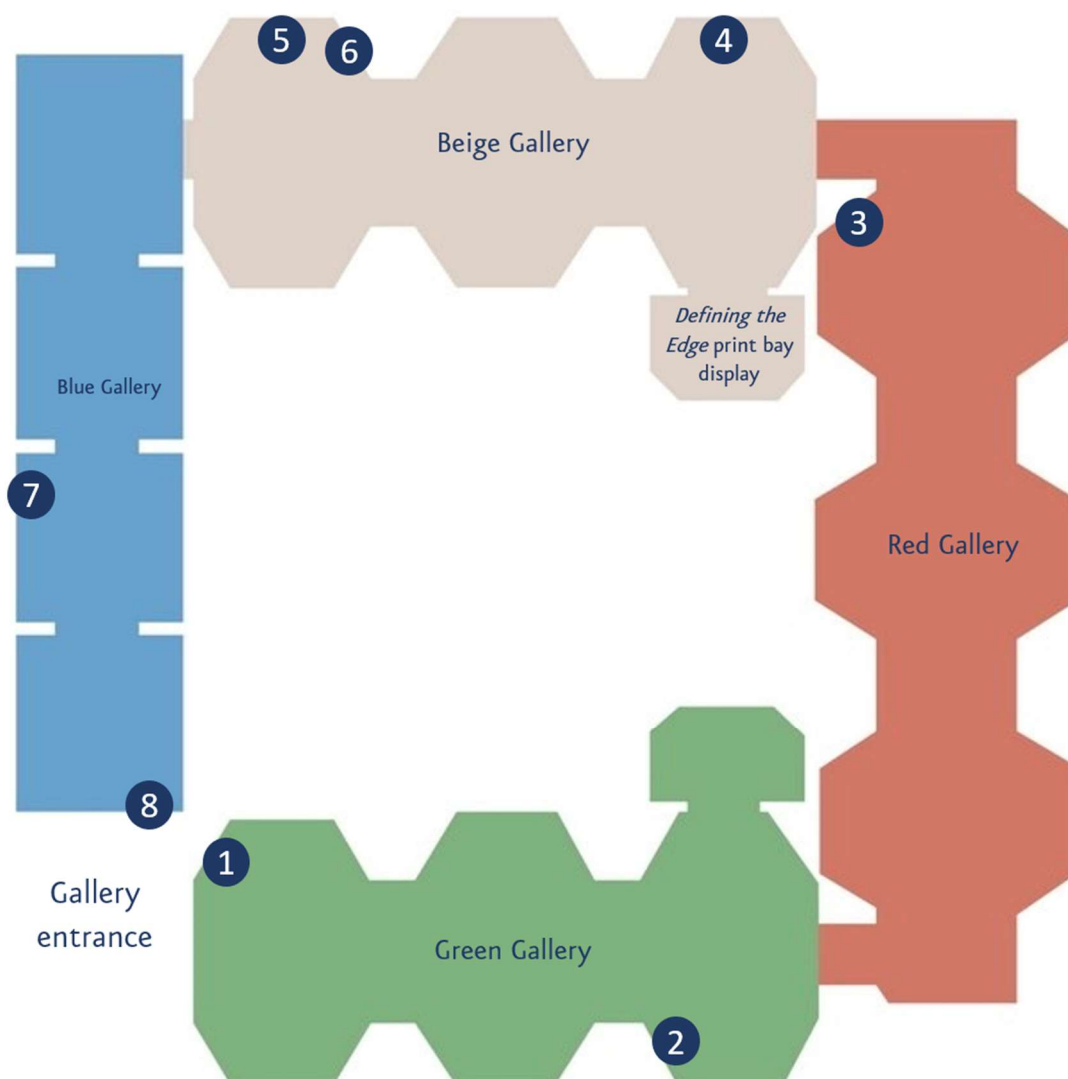


DISCOVER OUR COLLECTION THROUGH *FRAMES*

Frames are complex objects. They provide insights into wider histories of furniture, interiors, and decorative arts in their ornamentation and materiality, reflecting centuries of changing techniques and tastes.

Frames reveal past ways of collecting art. Very few paintings are still in their original frames, as they were constantly replaced or altered by different people to keep up to date with new fashions. Each of these reframing decisions is a clue to what previous owners and collectors prioritised in relation to the painting.

This guide covers a wide chronological range, including at least one frame from each gallery. It provides more information about some of the most intricate, but often overlooked, aspects of the Barber's collection.



GREEN GALLERY

Simone Martini (1284-1344)

Saint John the Evangelist

Siena, 1320

Purchased 1938 (No.38.12)

Frame: carved and water-gilt poplar
with ogees and punched details;

Siena 1320



This painting has an integral frame, meaning the gold frame and central panel were carved from a single piece of wood. If you look closely, you can see that there are no joins where the vertical and horizontal sections of frame meet, or where the frame meets the flat panel.

The entire panel, with its frame, would have been made by a local carpenter before being delivered to Simone's workshop, where it was prepared, gilded, and finally painted. This is the reverse of how most paintings today are made, which are usually painted first and framed last.

Simone could integrate the framing section directly into his composition as it was present from the beginning. The small circular marks (known as punching) decorating the area behind Saint John are also used to decorate the spaces between the curves of the frame.

Running along the left edge of the panel are marks from where hinges were attached, revealing that this is one wing of a larger object – likely one of three panels (forming a triptych). Having an integral frame gave the painted surface extra protection, particularly when the triptych was closed. The three panels were at some point separated. The Barber panel was displayed in an outer 'shadow-box' from at least 1938 to project the fragile gilding from being damaged. The shadow-box that you can see here is a replacement dating from the painting's recent conservation at the National Gallery, London, completed in 2022.

GREEN GALLERY

Jacopo Robusti, called Tintoretto
(1518-1594)

A Portrait of a Young Man

Venice, 1554

Purchased 1937 (No.37.13)

Frame: carved and gilt pine, with
'Sansovino'-style scrolling clasps,
around 1600



This immense, gilt frame is one of the most elaborate in the Barber's collection. It projects into the surrounding space at its extended corners whilst exaggerated scrolling clasps curve inwards to emphasise the painting at the centre. At the top, a cherub's head watches over the room.

Many of its features are Venetian in style, which seems appropriate for the painting given that this is where Tintoretto worked. Its ornamental design is reflected not just in other frames but in Venetian furniture and architecture from the time. Similar scrolling clasps are included in the ceiling decoration of the Ducal Palace in Venice.

The name given to the most elaborate Venetian frames – 'Sansovino' frames – is itself taken from the prominent Venetian architect Jacopo Sansovino. This is a 19th-century misnomer, as Sansovino had nothing to do with the making of these frames, yet it reflects the close relationship between framing designs and architectural interiors.

It is likely that this is not the original frame for this painting, but one made slightly later around 1600, possibly in Lombardy, based in part on Sansovino models. It testifies to the enduring fascination with these opulent Sansovino frames, from the 16th-century up to the present day.

RED GALLERY

Nicholas Poussin (1594-1665)

Tancred and Erminia

Rome, about 1634

Purchased 1938 (No.38.9)

Frame: oak, carved and water-gilt, with added boxwood elements, later oil-gilt, around 1715



This frame was made around 1715 but was not created to go with this specific painting. It was probably applied to Poussin's painting after the artwork had been imported to England.

Subtle features of the frame indicate it was altered to fit this painting. The section designed to look like fringing, where the top part of the frame meets the canvas, is carved from boxwood – a different type of wood to the rest of the oak frame. It is a clever addition to make the height of the frame better fit that of the canvas.

The section running around the back edge of the frame is also carved from boxwood, suggesting it was also added later. This is carved in an 'egg and dart' pattern – named for its repetition of ovals and lines – which was very popular in the late 17th- and 18th- centuries. This egg and dart section seems a less practical addition and was perhaps included to make the frame better fit with the architecture of the room it was displayed in or with other frames in the owner's collection, showing how frames were repurposed and adapted to keep up with changing tastes in interiors.

BEIGE GALLERY

Bartolomé Esteban Murillo
(1617-1682)

The Marriage Feast at Cana

Seville, about 1672

Purchased 1947 (No.47.9)

Frame: gilded and painted
wood, 2022



Murillo's large painting has only just gone back on display after being loaned to two exhibitions in the USA. This is a rare opportunity to see it displayed in a modern frame, made specifically for it. The frame this painting is usually displayed in is ornate and very heavy, as you can see in the image below. Temporarily reframing it makes it much easier to handle and transport as the new frame is much lighter and less fragile.

It also changes the appearance of the painting. The thick, gold frame emphasises the yellow tones in the painting, particularly drawing attention to the shaft of light illuminating the table and reflecting onto the ochre-coloured jugs and vases in the foreground. The modern frame, on the other hand, is much darker, drawing the eye more towards the shadows within the composition.



This painting's usual frame is believed to have been made in about 1772 when the painting was in the collection of the Prince of Conti, a major collector and patron of arts. It is probably the Barber's finest frame and an important historic object in its own right. It is currently in storage but will be reunited with Murillo's painting in the Spring – come back then to see this painting reframed!

BEIGE GALLERY

Thomas Gainsborough
(1727-1788)

The Harvest Wagon

Bath, exhibited 1767

Purchased 1946
(No.46.8)

Frame: gilt Rococo
frame, pine, around
1765



Stylistically this frame looks as if it was made around 1765, making it contemporary for the painting, but when the frame and painting were put together and by whom is uncertain.

Along its edge are ornamental scrolls – called *cartouches* – which join to create a series of gaps in the frame. The cartouches create a sense of rhythm, like cresting waves. This rhythm relates to the dynamic composition of Gainsborough's painting, with its sweeping diagonal grouping of the figures at the centre. This pairing of frame and painting seems carefully thought through, with the form of the frame enhancing the sense of motion of the scene.

Gainsborough was very involved in the framing of his paintings. He often sent paintings to prospective owners already in frames, which he bought directly from local framemakers. The frames he chose varied significantly, following changing tastes and the demands of different buyers, but were also chosen in response to the atmosphere and feelings of his compositions.

BEIGE GALLERY

Thomas Gainsborough (1727-1788)

The Honourable Harriot Marsham

London, late 1770s

Purchased 1946 (No.46.9)

Frame: 'Carlo Maratta' frame, around 1778



This portrait is framed in a very different in style to *The Harvest Wagon*. The rectangular frame creates a more rigid and regular boundary for the painting, with symmetrical acanthus leaf ornamentation.

This style of frame was particularly fashionable in Britain, its popularity reflecting the growing prominence of neoclassical architecture here by the end of the 18th-century.

The differences in style between the framing of Gainsborough's paintings at the Barber could be due to the different tastes of previous owners and the wider architectural styles of the rooms they were intended for, but also the fact that the paintings themselves vary so much in content and atmosphere. The rigidity of this frame suits the stillness of the sitter.

Aside from the physical picture frame, the sitter is also surrounded by an oval border, painted to resemble stone. This framing device was very fashionable in the 18th century and is similar to those used in contemporary portrait prints – which you can see in the current print bay display, *Defining the Edge: Frames and Borders in Prints*. The oval frame creates moody shadows and directs the viewer's eye inwards to focus on the sitter's face, accentuating the intimacy and intrigue of the portrait.

BLUE GALLERY

James McNeill Whistler (1834-1903)

Symphony in White, No. III

London, about 1865-7

Purchased 1939 (No.39.24)

Frame: reeded frame, around 1870s,
later extended



Whistler is an unusual artist in that he designed the picture frames to accompany his paintings himself. He boasted to a friend in 1872 that ‘my frames I design as carefully as my pictures – and thus they form as important a part as any of the rest of the work’.

The overall style of this frame is generally in keeping with Whistler’s designs, but two key features suggest a direct relationship with the artist. On the right, about two-thirds of the way up, you can see a mark in the gilding (see image). This is Whistler’s butterfly monogram, which he used in place of a signature from the 1870s onwards – although here it is bizarrely upside-down.



Another clue is that the cross shapes covering the floor in the painting are repeated on the frame itself. These are hard to spot as they have since been gilded over but are on the same section of frame as the butterfly (see image). This suggests the frame was once conceived of as a continuation of the painted surface.

At some point this painting was covered up when the frame was gilded. It was also

extended – the outer section was added later, doubling the width of the frame. Exactly when and why these changes happened is still a mystery.

BLUE GALLERY

Fernand Léger (1881-1955)

Composition with Fruit

Paris, 1938

Purchased 1985 (No.85.1)

**Frame: painted wooden frame,
2016**



This painting is one of the most recently framed in the Barber's collection. Its frame was made in 2016 by frame expert and conservator Timothy Newbery, who also completed a survey of the Barber's frames that has provided the basis for this trail.

Newbery based the design of this frame on examples that appear in photographs of Léger in his studio. The use of white and grey paint and raised band in the moulding creates a defined line within the frame, which echo the graphic black outlines in Léger's composition.

The frame the painting came to the Barber in was a generic one. The decision to commission a new frame was based both on the need to provide more protection for the painting and to contextualise it better visually.

FURTHER RESOURCES

D. Gene Karraker, *Looking at European Frames: A Guide to Terms, Styles and Techniques* (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2009)

Lynn Roberts (editor), 'The Frame Blog': <https://theframeblog.com>

Nicholas Penny, *A Closer Look at Frames* (London: National Gallery Company, 2009)

Paul Mitchell and Lynn Roberts, *Frameworks: Form, Function & Ornament in European Portrait Frames* (London: Merrell Holberton Publishers, 1996)

Paul Mitchell and Lynn Roberts, *A History of European Picture Frames* (London: Merrell Holberton Publishers, 1996)

Timothy Newbery, *Frames and Framings* (Oxford: Ashmolean Museum, 2006)