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English Heritage lends its Rembrandt self-portrait to Gagosian gallery in exchange for support

Self-portrait with Two Circles at Kenwood House is the charity's greatest painting, along with a Vermeer

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Rembrandt van Rijn, Self-Portrait with Two Circles (around 1665) Photo: © Historic England Photo Library

English Heritage is to lend Rembrandt's self-portrait from Kenwood to a commercial gallery for financial and other support. The painting will be the centrepiece of an exhibition at London's Gagosian Gallery on Visions of the Self, which opens next month. Other self-portraits by Picasso, Bacon, Freud and Basquiat will be shown alongside contemporary artists, including Baselitz and Hirst. A new work by Jenny Saville, inspired by the Rembrandt, will be unveiled.

Rembrandt's late Self-portrait with Two Circles (about 1665) is English Heritage's greatest painting, along with a Vermeer. Both are at Kenwood House, in north London. The Rembrandt was lent to four American museums in 2012-13 (Houston, Milwaukee, Seattle and Arkansas) and to London's National Gallery and Amsterdam's Rijksmuseum in 2014-15. It is much requested for exhibitions.

A Gagosian statement describes the arrangement with English Heritage as a "partnership". It says that this will involve Gagosian "supporting the [English Heritage] charity and its sites, artworks and artefacts". Initially the gallery will pay for the conservation of the Rembrandt's 18th-century frame, with other developments in "planning stages".

Anna Eavis, English Heritage's curatorial director, says: "Working with Gagosian will allow us to create exciting juxtapositions between our collections and the gallery's modern and contemporary program."

A Gagosian spokesman says that the gallery will be "paying for the conservation of the frame", although the arrangement is "not a financial partnership". It remains unclear whether Gagosian will be making further financial contributions.

The Rembrandt was bought by the Earl of Iveagh in 1888. He gave his house and collection to the nation in 1927 and Kenwood is now administered by English Heritage. The self-portrait is due to return to Kenwood in late May and in October it will be the focus of a display to mark the 350th anniversary of the artist's death.