

## His artistic hour: Churchill's paintings get exclusive Atlanta showing

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By Jill Vejnaska - The Atlanta Journal-Constitution



Winston Churchill painted this landscape, titled "A Distant View of Eze," around 1930. It is part of the exhibition "The Art of Diplomacy — Winston Churchill and the Pursuit of Painting," opening Oct. 3 at the Millennium Gate Museum in Atlanta. REPRODUCED WITH PERMISSION OF ANTHEA MORTON-SANER ON BEHALF OF CHURCHILL HERITAGE LTD.

From "This was their finest hour" to "Never give in, never, never, never, never," Winston Churchill's soaring oratory was one of his most powerful weapons.

His *secret* weapon?

A paintbrush.

“It was taking up painting that gave him perspective,” said Duncan Sandys, 41, Churchill’s great-grandson, who now lives in Atlanta. When then-First Lord of the Admiralty Winston Churchill was demoted as a result of the disastrous Allied losses at Gallipoli during World War I, he was depressed and feeling adrift.

“Painting helped him rebuild his life, basically,” explained Sandys, whose grandmother, Diana, was the oldest child of Winston and Clementine Churchill. “He said, ‘The painting came to my rescue.’”

Now, “the painting” is coming here. On Friday, a one-of-a-kind exhibition of Churchill’s landscapes and other subjects opens in Atlanta’s own one-of-a-kind setting: Millennium Gate Museum, the Arc de Triomphe-like structure that soars above 17th Street in the middle of Atlantic Station.

“The Art of Diplomacy — Winston Churchill and the Pursuit of Painting” features 33 of the nearly 500 canvases that the iconic British leader completed between 1915 and 1965, as well as photographs, letters, Churchill’s easel and other personal belongings. The exhibition, which also highlights some less well-known connections between Georgia and the Churchills, is exclusive to the state (a scaled-down version featuring six of “Sir Winston’s” paintings will briefly visit seven other Georgia cities) — quite intentionally, said Sandys, a onetime city councillor and lord mayor of Westminster in London who now works as a consultant.

“The people of Georgia have welcomed me and been so kind to me,” said Sandys, who “married a daughter of Macon” and eventually moved here about three years ago. “This is something I can do to thank them and help them.”

In particular, the Atlanta stop promises to be an attention-grabber worthy of the larger-than-life, cigar-chomping Churchill himself: Sandys’ family has lent the entirety of its collection — 17 Churchill paintings, most of which hang in the family home in England. Over half of the 33 paintings have never been seen in public before, including one, “Lake Geneva, Switzerland,” that’s usually at Chequers, the country house retreat that is to British prime ministers what Camp David is to American presidents.



HANS WILD

Winston Churchill painting in his studio at Chartwell, his principal home in county Kent, England, until his death in 1965. CONTRIBUTED BY HANS WILD

Visitors to the Millennium Gate Museum will also get to see the only painting that the otherwise prolific Churchill completed during World War II, when he was busy rallying his country and the Allied nations to vanquish Hitler. After their 1943 summit meeting in Casablanca, Churchill persuaded U.S. President Franklin Delano Roosevelt to accompany him to Marrakech, where he painted “The Tower of the Katoubia Mosque.” Churchill presented the oil painting to FDR, whose son, Eliot, sold it to a private collector in 1950. Since then, it’s been sold several more times, most recently about three years ago to “an A-list couple in Los Angeles whom everyone would know,” said Jeremy Kobus, director of the Millennium Gate Museum. Those owners have never publicly identified themselves or loaned out the iconic painting for display.

Until now.

“On Oct. 2, we’ll say who it is,” Millennium Gate Museum founder and Atlanta resident Rodney Mims Cook Jr. promised during an interview on the top floor of the 101-foot-tall arch that offers breathtaking views of the city’s skylines from Buckhead to Midtown to downtown. “Initially we were just getting the painting. And then (the owners of ‘Katoubia Mosque’) liked the idea of the exhibition so much, they decided to let us do that, too.”

Cook first met Sandys through a friend in England, Lady Henrietta Spencer (“She said, ‘My cousin Duncan has moved to your city, please look him up and take good care of him,’” Cook related). Later, Cook hit on the idea of an exhibition in honor of the 50th anniversary of Churchill’s death at age 90 in January 1965.

But it wouldn’t be just any exhibition. Beyond showing off some historically significant “daubs,” as Churchill referred to his paintings, “The Art of Diplomacy” would examine the act of painting itself: How did Churchill’s unique skills as a leader and thinker influence him as an artist? And how did his development as a painter influence his approach to complex, unprecedented problems in the real world?

Meanwhile, the exhibition asks us to think, how much differently might things have turned out had Churchill *not* discovered his secret weapon? “His painting may have helped to save Western civilisation,” noted art historian Ernst Gombrich wrote about Churchill, who once said he would have been unable “to live ... to bear the strain of things” without his daubs.

“The idea of art, of painting, being the savior of the Western world,” Cook reflected, “that’s pretty exciting.”

## **EXHIBIT PREVIEW**

### **“The Art of Diplomacy — Winston Churchill and the Pursuit of Painting”**

Oct. 3 -Feb. 1, 2015. \$12, \$10 students, military and senior citizens.  
Millennium Gate Museum, 395 17th St. N.W., Atlanta. 404-881-0900,  
[www.churchill-atlanta.com/museum](http://www.churchill-atlanta.com/museum).