



News Release

Funding for Exhibition Road Building Project nears completion with major gift as construction moves into final stage

The V&A is delighted to announce a major gift from the Blavatnik Family Foundation to support the completion of the Exhibition Road Building Project - to create a grand new entrance to the museum, a magnificent open courtyard and a purpose-built gallery for its world-class temporary exhibitions. Private fundraising has now reached 95% of the £49.5M project and in recognition of this generous gift, the V&A will name the entrance hall of the new building after the Blavatnik Family Foundation.

Funding has already been raised from donations by private individuals, trusts and foundations and other funding bodies. The new 1,100m² column-free exhibition gallery beneath the courtyard will be one of the largest temporary exhibition galleries in the UK and known as The Sainsbury Gallery in recognition of the joint gifts from The Monument Trust and The Headley Trust. The Sackler Courtyard, a new 1,200m square metre public space, will be so named in recognition of the generous grant awarded by The Dr Mortimer and Theresa Sackler Foundation.

Designed by AL_A, the London practice headed up by Stirling Prize-winning architect Amanda Levete, the building project is the V&A's largest architectural scheme in the last 100 years, opening in 2017. The gift coincides with a milestone in the project construction. The intensive groundworks and structural build, which began in 2014, has been successfully completed and the final phase of the project to install the bespoke elements that will characterise the scheme is underway.

The bulk excavation work was completed at the end of 2015, with more than 22,000 cubic metres of soil now removed from the site, the equivalent of ten Olympic swimming pools, almost all of which will be recycled for use in landscaping and other projects in the UK. Clay excavated below ground level has been dated by archaeologists and engineers to approximately 50 million years old, placing it in the Paleocene period. The gallery structure has now been created using 256 tonnes of steel and in the summer, the oculus – the carefully engineered skylight to bring natural light into the new gallery – will be lifted into place.

The first of the 14,500 porcelain tiles, which will create the world's first porcelain courtyard, will be laid later this year. Each of the rhombus-shaped tiles, currently being created in 13 different patterns in the Royal Tichelaar factory in Holland, takes five days to make from

pouring to glazing and are crafted by hand, reflecting the project's dedication to quality, innovation and craftsmanship.

The project will feature a permeable entry point through the Aston Webb screen, creating a new relationship between the heart of the V&A and Exhibition Road and allowing a seamless transition between street and museum. This will all be set within the beautiful historical facades on the west side of the V&A's Grade I listed architecture which have never before been on public view. Visitor numbers to the V&A in South Kensington have grown in the last decade from 1 million to 3.46 million in 2015/16, the highest number on record, and this development will allow the Museum to continue offering an excellent visitor experience.

Martin Roth, V&A Director, said: *"We are delighted with the progress in this ambitious project, which will transform the experience of the V&A for our visitors, create further connection with our neighbouring museums and enable us to present more of our collection of art and design as well as international design exhibitions in spectacular new gallery space. AL_A's project will encompass everything the V&A embodies; ambition, enriching and intelligent design and creative inspiration. We are particularly thrilled and grateful to the Blavatnik Family Foundation with the generous gift that takes us close to completing the fundraising of this project."*

– ENDS –

NOTES TO EDITORS

- AL_A won the international competition in 2011 to design this important development. Wates are the lead contractors delivering the project and Arup are the structural engineers.
- We are also grateful to the Garfield Weston Foundation, The Heritage Lottery Fund (who awarded the scheme a grant of £4,999,000 in autumn 2013) and other generous donors including Peter Williams and Heather Acton and the Friends of the V&A.
- The Exhibition Road Building Project is the crucial scheme in achieving the long term aims of our second phase of FuturePlan, the V&A's programme of restoration and redesign. FuturePlan aims to create beautiful and contemporary new settings for the V&A's outstanding collections while restoring much of the building's original architecture and improving visitors' experience of the Museum.

For further PRESS information about the Exhibition Road Building Project, please contact the V&A press office on +44 (0) 20 7942 2502 or email press.office@vam.ac.uk (not for publication).

A selection of press images are available to download from pressimages.vam.ac.uk



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