



News Release

V&A receives major grant to launch Research Institute

vam.ac.uk/VARI

The V&A has been awarded a generous grant of £1.75M (\$2.5M) by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation to launch a new V&A Research Institute (VARI). The grant will support a five-year programme of activities that will take the Museum's thriving research culture into a new phase, making its collections and expertise more visible and connecting them more fully with both academic partners and practitioners of art and design. VARI will host collaborative research and residency projects, expand the Museum's programme of teaching and training and generate further print and digital publications including a refreshed version of the V&A Online Journal.

The first phase of VARI (2016-21) will focus on a series of projects that are designed to enhance access to key parts of the V&A's collections, and to help it develop new approaches to storage, display and interpretation. This comes as the Museum continues its ambitious programme of FuturePlan to refresh and redesign its public spaces in South Kensington and plans V&A East in the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park and new storage facilities in East London.

Initial research projects will include the conservation and digital reproduction of the Leman Album, an 18th-century volume containing the earliest surviving set of European silk designs; a study of the 19th-century legacy of the 'Cabinet of Curiosities' (encyclopaedic collections from Renaissance Europe), and its potential for 21st-century collecting and display; enabling 'crowd-sourced transcriptions' of some of the V&A's unparalleled collection of manuscripts by Charles Dickens by making them available online with tools to transcribe the text; and 'Encounters on the Shop Floor,' a project which will bring together practitioners in the arts, humanities, sciences and social sciences to explore making and embodied knowledge.

VARI will also support an augmented programme of residencies to build bridges between South Kensington and East London, a group of fellowships (internal and external, short- and long-term, junior and senior), a series of Andrew W. Mellon Visiting Professors and a set of new staff positions including a digital producer and a teaching and training coordinator. These positions will build on the V&A's unique programme of exhibition research and its world-leading postgraduate programme in the History of Design, run in partnership with the Royal College of Art. Together,

these projects and people will enable the Museum's research activity to be more joined up and more outward facing, and create new opportunities for education and communication across the collections. VARI will also share learning with other institutions by providing resources to help address challenges across the sector such as combining storage with public access; developing standards for describing, preserving and displaying digital collections and integrating the work of practicing designers and artists with traditional academic inquiry.

Martin Roth, Director of the V&A said: *"The V&A was the first museum in the world to establish a dedicated department for research, more than thirty years ago. With the establishment of V&A East in the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park, and the development of new storage and study facilities being planned, this is an incredible opportunity to help reinvent the collections for the digital, democratic age. The new Research Institute will help the Museum to make the most of these once-in-a-lifetime opportunities."*

Bill Sherman, Director of Research and Collections at the V&A said: *"VARI will give new life to the Museum's original mission of using exemplary collections to advance knowledge of the designed world. It will make the objects we house and the expertise we host more accessible to the broadest possible audience. We are grateful to the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation for its extraordinary support and for prompting and shaping our approach."*

The project grows out of a year-long pilot project in 2014-15, supported by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, which used the V&A's textile and fashion collections as a testing ground for museum-based, object-led research. The programme set out to foster new forms of collaboration between experts in curation, conservation and collections management; academics from across the humanities, social sciences and sciences; artists, designers and performers; and pioneers in the field of research administration.

– ENDS –

Notes to Editors

Research at the V&A

Research has always been at the heart of the V&A, which grew out of the Government School of Design and the Department of Science and Art. It was the first national museum to establish a dedicated Research Department, which works with experts throughout the Museum and a wide range of partners in the fields of art, design and performance; conservation and collections management; and object-led, museum-based inquiry. Research enhances the expertise of our staff, knowledge of our collections, and access to our holdings, ensuring that the collections entrusted to our care will continue to inspire creativity and curiosity for many years to come.

The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation

The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation endeavors to strengthen, promote, and, where necessary, defend the contributions of the humanities and the arts to human flourishing and to the well-being of diverse and democratic societies. To this end, it supports exemplary institutions of higher education and culture as they renew and provide access to an invaluable heritage of ambitious, path-breaking work.

<https://mellon.org/>

For further PRESS information, please contact Laura Mitchell in the V&A press office on 020 7942 2503 or email l.mitchell@vam.ac.uk (not for publication). A selection of press images is available to download free of charge from <http://pressimages.vam.ac.uk>



victoriaandalbertmuseum



@V_and_A



@vamuseum