

Emanation — Navigation — Circulation





Emanation — Navigation — Circulation

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The past year has been marked by an extraordinary level of activity across the museum on every front, culminating in the V&A's accolade as the Art Fund Museum of the Year 2016. In sheer number of projects, the V&A can plausibly claim to be one of the world's most ambitious museums.

Next year we will open the new Exhibition Road extension in South Kensington, designed by Amanda Levete Architects (AL_A), with its vast subterranean Sainsbury Gallery, Sackler Courtyard and Blavatnik Hall. Away from South Kensington, our partnership with the China Merchants Group and China Merchants Shekou Holdings to create a new design platform – Design Society – will comprise a new V&A gallery and will also open in 2017. Rapid progress is being made in the construction of the V&A Museum of Design, Dundee, Scotland's new international centre of design, which will open in Kengo Kuma's impressive waterfront edifice in 2018. Looking further ahead, plans are taking shape for the project currently referred to as V&A East, our branch of the museum at the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park in east London. The largest purpose-built museum in Britain for over a century, V&A East will display more of the V&A's treasures in innovative ways to engage new audiences. Furthermore, we have ambitious plans to renovate the north-east quarter of the museum, beginning with the South Courts, and to upgrade the Museum of Childhood in Bethnal Green.

We have welcomed a record number of visitors to our sites in the past year. Although visitor figures are only one criterion by which we judge our success, it is nevertheless gratifying when the public programme and permanent galleries are so well attended. The V&A is arguably at its best when staging a perfect balance between impeccable, academic exhibitions and crowd-pleasing, zeitgeist-interrogating blockbusters, drawing hundreds of thousands of visitors. Both, of course, must be rigorously scholarly in their own idiom.

It is precisely this dynamic combination of intellectual and physical expansion, of a diverse and challenging public programme and ambitious construction projects involving new partnerships and experimenting with new models of working, that is driving the V&A to new successes and consolidating its reputation as the world's leading museum of art and design.

On behalf of the Board, I would like to thank our outgoing director, Martin Roth, who is, sadly, leaving the museum after five successful years, for everything he has done. Many important renovations and innovations have taken place during his tenure, including the opening of the Europe 1600–1815 Galleries and the establishment of VARI, the V&A Research Institute, which was launched in June following an extremely generous £1.75 million grant from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.

I would also particularly like to thank the museum's senior management team, in addition to the keepers, curators and innumerable museum staff, for their enormous dedication and efforts, and to express my gratitude to the many philanthropists and donors upon whose generosity we always rely. Let me finally acknowledge the work and commitment of our Trustees, who give so freely of their time and expertise, and are involved in every area of the museum's activities.

Nicholas Coleridge CBE
Chairman, Victoria and Albert Museum



Martin Roth. Photo: Thierry Bal

A message from the director

I am often asked why I was attracted to the V&A. The answer is the collection. It's always the collection that draws you to an institution, and then you look at the curatorship and what people do with the collection. The V&A has one of the best collections and teams of staff in the world, and it has been a privilege to work with it and them.

When I accepted the offer of the post of director of the V&A nearly six years ago, I had my own personal five-year plan. It was to make a successful global institution even more so in terms of its public programme and capital projects, to increase its effectiveness and efficiency regarding business and fundraising, to grow its outstanding Research Department, and also to develop its social and political impact.

I gave to the V&A all my passion, knowledge, experience and many sleepless nights. And, with the support of the museum's exceptional Trustees and an outstanding senior management team, I have achieved those aims. Today, the V&A is a forward-looking, risk-taking, innovative institution that builds on its successes year on year.

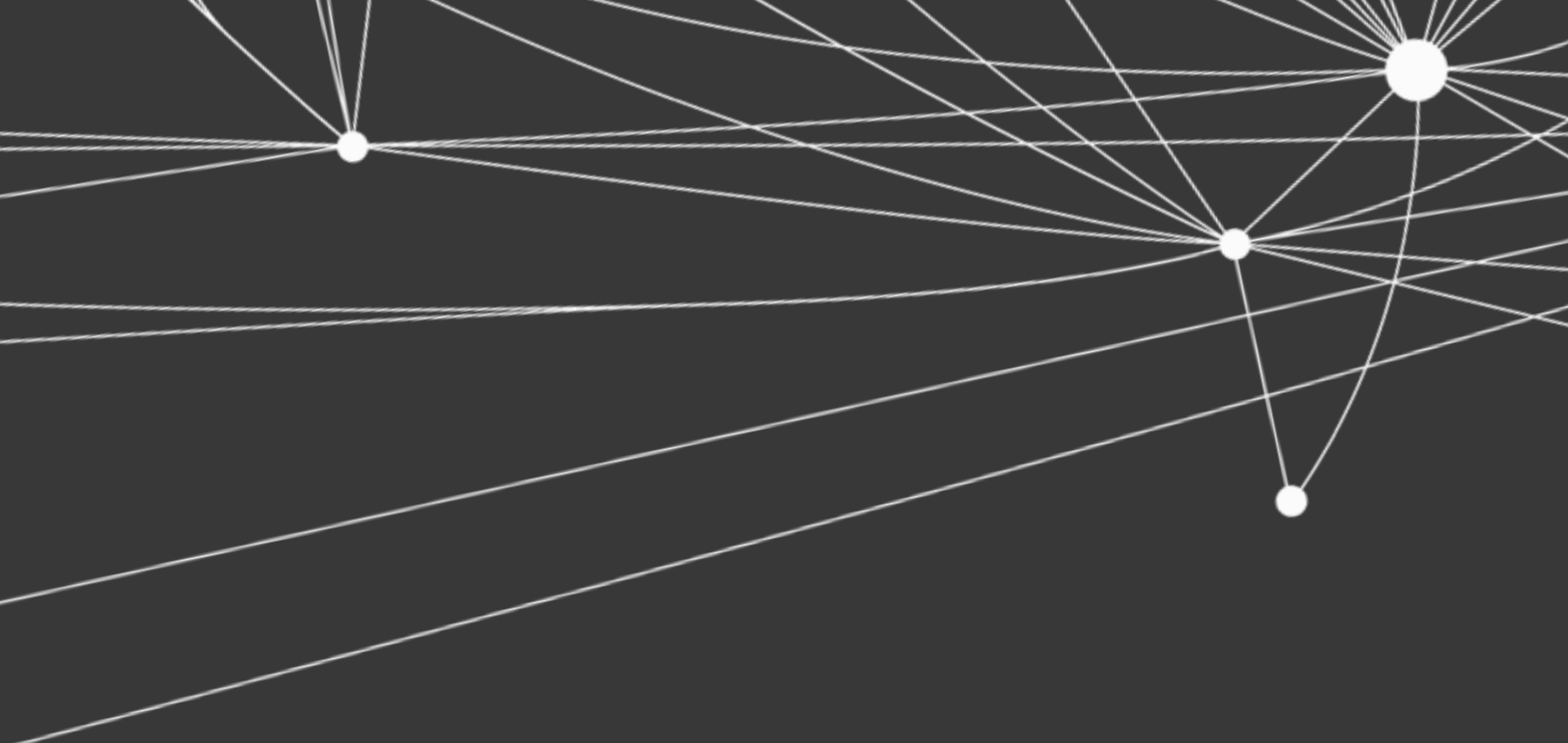
As I depart, the museum moves closer to completing the major construction project on Exhibition Road, which will deliver a flexible subterranean exhibition hall (The Sainsbury Gallery) and new courtyard entrance (The Sackler Courtyard and Blavatnik Hall) in 2017. Next year will also see the opening of the V&A Gallery, Shekou, at Design Society in Shenzhen. In 2018 the V&A Museum of Design, Dundee, will open its doors, and plans are progressing for V&A East, which will make its mark on the east London cultural landscape early next decade. This appetite for growth and renovation will continue with plans to develop the Museum of Childhood that will make it a twenty-first-century museum that matches the quality of our other sites.

In addition to these construction projects, the Europe 1600–1815 Galleries reopened to widespread critical acclaim, the V&A Learning Academy has been established to consolidate our learning offer and streamline it with our commercial enterprise, and VARI – the V&A Research Institute – has added another jewel to the V&A crown following a generous £1.75 million grant from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. It is precisely because of its ambitious, enterprising spirit that the V&A was awarded the Art Fund Museum of the Year accolade this summer. I leave the V&A in a strong position and in very safe hands.

I would like to close by thanking all the staff, and I mean all the staff – the keepers, curators, conservators, gallery assistants, heads of departments and their incredible teams, security personnel, volunteers (the list is endless) – for their immense efforts and dedication to this great museum. I also wish to thank the visitors, Members, donors and the museum's many partners and collaborators for the support they have shown me during my time at the V&A. I am also enormously grateful for the warm welcome I have received in London. I wasn't expecting it and I am profoundly thankful for it.

Martin Roth

Director, Victoria and Albert Museum



Culture with clout

B E N J A M I N W A R D

When former Chancellor of the Exchequer George Osborne rose to deliver his autumn statement to the House of Commons on a cold, dull day in late November 2015, cultural institutions across the UK braced themselves for grim news. Rumours were circulating of cuts as deep as 40 per cent, and while optimists hoped to escape with something closer to ten, it was not a day that many in the sector were relishing.

Well into his speech and having already outlined sweeping austerity measures as part of his long-term economic plan, Osborne turned to culture: “One of the best investments we can make as a nation is in our extraordinary arts, museums, heritage, media and sport,” he began. Citing the remarkable £250bn return that a £1bn investment in the arts delivers, he made a wholly unexpected commitment at the despatch box that echoed one of the cultural sector’s long-vaunted mantra: “Deep cuts in the small budget of the Department of Culture, Media and Sport [DCMS] are a false economy.”

The settlement anointed Osborne as culture’s unlikely saviour. He would protect free museum entry, introduce the prospect of support for temporary exhibitions with tax credits and, with specific reference to the British Museum, Science Museum and the V&A, would provide £150m to move their reserve collections out of storage at Blythe House and into more appropriate and accessible facilities. Furthermore, this would be done without the raid on lottery funds that was widely expected.

For senior managers at publicly funded institutions, surprises are rarely welcome – least of all unexpected announcements from the Treasury. However, as the V&A’s deputy director and chief operating officer Tim Reeve recalls, anyone who claims to have seen this coming is being economical with the truth: “Everyone was absolutely astonished. Even the senior civil servants that we deal with on a day-to-day basis were surprised. Discussions in the lead-up to the statement were mostly concerned with where between 25 and 40 per cent cuts would fall; no one was talking about a ‘flat-cash’ result being within the realms of possibility. Within 24 hours we went from expecting the worst to something that we had never dared hope for: getting Blythe House agreed, getting a ‘flat cash’ settlement for four

years and receiving a ringing personal endorsement for the sector from the Chancellor in the House of Commons. It was a very motivational thing to hear from the second in command.”

Prior to last November, Reeve used this publication to explain how the V&A had faced up to the austerity of the coalition’s first Comprehensive Spending Review of 2010 (which saw Arts Council England shorn of almost a third of its funding budget). The picture he painted was not one of a “desolate landscape”. Instead, he chose to celebrate a “thriving” sector’s resilience, acknowledging the Government’s firm push towards “a more efficient, effective, fleet-of-foot, modern and streamlined way of doing what we do”. Was it this reaction and the emergence of a more balanced and entrepreneurial funding model that encouraged the Government to stay its hand in 2015? “Possibly. We’d taken a bit of punishment, but had found it unexpectedly constructive. Although at times uncomfortable, it invited us to be more entrepreneurial, a little more creative, and made us think hard about our cost base. However, while we were keeping positive, we knew that if new cuts reached even ten per cent, we would not be able to avoid confronting some very difficult decisions. The scenario planning we undertook made for pretty stark reading. It’s important not to forget that ‘flat-cash’ is still a decline in real terms. We still have to be extremely prudent, but what this settlement does do is give us a very good chance of maintaining the successful balance of funding sources we have nurtured since 2010.”

Shocked perhaps by 2010, the sector has in recent years recognised a need to state its case with greater emphasis, and has organised on a number of levels to ensure that lobbying is co-ordinated, authoritative and effective. The Creative Industries Federation (founded by V&A Trustee Sir John Sorrell alongside a team of cultural heavyweights) is not yet two years old, but has undoubtedly already lent the sector the “extra clout” it promised. Complementing its membership model is “What Next?”, an experimental grassroots movement that is bringing arts and cultural organisations together across the UK in an effort to strengthen the role of culture in society. Both are widely credited for getting their evidence in front of decision makers effectively.

While the positive settlement has provided a welcome moment to draw breath, Reeve cautions that there are no guarantees of emerging from a full parliament unscathed. “In-year” and “in-settlement” adjustments have precedence – “not enormous but a per cent here and there, and at quite short notice” – so this is not a time to be complacent, but to make the most of the platform that has been secured: “What we have is a bit of breathing space; we can commit to some of our big ideas with confidence.”

The V&A’s continued success is in a large part thanks to its acclaimed programme of temporary exhibitions, as the figures in this Annual Review so clearly demonstrate. However, the tax relief included in last year’s announcement remains in consultation. How important is it for the museum that it goes ahead?

“The proposal – which is modelled on a successful similar scheme for theatre – is intended to incentivise institutions like ours, as well as smaller institutions, to carry on putting on a varied programme of great exhibitions because they are part of the reason people flock to cultural institutions around the country. While the settlement more broadly recognises the importance of free museums and free access to our collection, this specifically acknowledges the added value and distinctiveness of our exhibitions, and what our ‘paid-for’ offer brings to the table. It’s inspired, and would significantly mitigate the risks we are currently exposed to when committing to these shows. Without it, the danger for an institution spending millions in this area is that we end up having to do fewer exhibitions that run longer just to smooth our financial exposure out a little. For us I think that would be wrong.”

The aspect of the 2015 settlement that was perhaps least surprising concerned Blythe House. It would be sold as a way for the Government to release equity from valuable real estate, clearly, but also to empower its tenants to bring the objects stored there into public view. On the table for a number of years, Reeve sees the confirmation of the proposal as a creative opportunity for the museum, and for its partnerships around the UK: “When this idea was first mooted in 2013, we had just opened the Clothworkers’ Centre for the Study and Conservation of Textiles and Fashion at Blythe

House – a world-class conservation facility that has been met with universal acclaim. It is an extraordinary demonstration of what can be done to transform reserve collections in open, innovative ways.

“However, it didn’t take us long to realise how exciting it would be to give a much bigger swathe of our collection similar treatment. When we move the collections to a new facility and open the doors to the public, I like to think people won’t even consider the word storage – they will genuinely see it as a wholly new type of more interactive museum display.”

At this point it must be noted that last year’s spending review was by no means met with universal praise from the sector. Local authorities saw their budgets slashed, with a knock-on effect for the many smaller regional cultural organisations that depend on local support. Reeve is mindful that this has prompted some to criticise a funding environment that is excessively London-centric, but believes that by seeking to play a role in addressing this, the V&A can only benefit: “I think that national institutions like us have a responsibility, now more than ever, to make sure this settlement creates a ripple effect across the country. We have the Museums Review as a real moment for national and regional institutions to work together on the future of public funding, as well as this very particular opportunity to oxygenate the collections that are currently at Blythe House and develop this as a re-imagining of the Circulation Department philosophy.” (Closed in 1976, the V&A’s Circulation Department collected and shared the best of contemporary design with regional museums, galleries and art colleges. On accepting the Art Fund’s Museum of the Year Prize, Martin Roth announced that it would be revived.)


Moving such extensive collections might be a daunting prospect, but Reeve sees the process as an invaluable tool from which new partnerships could arise: “You open everything up, get everything out, assess the condition of objects, conserve objects, digitise objects, create 3D and virtual records, and all the while you have this opportunity for people to come in and help us to understand the collection. This is a time to make sure that other national museums, regional museums and all sorts of other organisations work with us on ideas of how they can help us to circulate and present our collection in new ways.”



Clothworkers' Centre for the Study and Conservation
of Textiles and Fashion at Blythe House







If a week was a long time in politics when Harold Wilson coined the phrase in the mid-1960s, 2016 has surely more than made a case for updating the saying to an hour. Since last year's autumn statement not only has the nation's political script been rewritten, but many of its cast have been replaced. Those ending their tenures alongside the Chancellor included Ed Vaizey, the longest-serving arts minister in British political history, who Reeve is keen to thank for his support of the creative industries and for championing their economic and societal value. However, he sees the new political line-up as a positive opportunity for the sector to make its case with renewed vigour: "Following this summer's changing of the guard both in Whitehall and at City Hall, we have key new individuals in positions of great significance for the museum and for our sector. We must seize the opportunity to convince them that what we do is valuable, important and increasingly relevant."

Finally, with the discussions surrounding Britain's departure from the European Union and the potential impact of the change on all sectors showing no signs of abating, is uncertainty tempering Reeve's cautious optimism?

"Let's not insist on knowing what all of this means too soon or earlier than is realistic," he advises. "We have to work on the assumption that things will inevitably be different – but there's really no compelling evidence yet to say whether to expect better or worse."

"Ultimately, the V&A – and the wider creative industries that we are part of – has a great and powerful story to tell. We've got momentum, we've got great ideas, fantastic partners, unbelievable collections, we have won the Art Fund Museum of the Year Prize, and we've got a funding settlement that should last another three or four years. This is as clear an endorsement of our strategy as we can ask for."

Benjamin Ward is an independent consultant to museums and others in the cultural sector and a writer based in London

The background is a dark gray. It features several thin, white, curved lines that sweep across the frame. In the lower right quadrant, there is a series of four white dots connected by thin white lines, forming a path that curves downwards and to the right. Another set of lines and dots is visible in the lower left corner, partially cut off by the edge of the image.

Perfectly pitched

J O S H S P E R O

Commerce has always been part of the V&A. The royal commission which founded it was given the obligation to “increase the means of industrial education and extend the influence of science and art upon productive industry”, hence the museum’s focus on making and manufacturing, and on spreading the knowledge of these areas. It’s not just a practical philosophy, but a positively capitalist one. And if the institution is, in part, about teaching industry how to make better objects and more money, the reverse is also true: it is learning from the creative and manufacturing sectors – as well as its own collection – about how to support its income.

Alex Stitt, the V&A’s director of commercial & digital development, provides an example of this beneficial cycle in a world of “peak stuff”: “This mug I’m drinking tea from comes from the V&A. It is high quality, it’s got a beautiful pattern from an Islamic tile on it, and the money that I spent on it has been recycled to preserve an antique carpet. That is what people want from transactions.” In 2014/15, trading brought in a record £3.5m.

Sarah Sevier, head of retail, says developing such items is more than a process of falling in love with a piece in the collection and deciding it ought to go on a postcard. The starting point, she stresses, is in analysing the previous season’s sales results and creating the sort of matrix you would find in a full-time retail company: most popular categories, price and the audience’s price tolerance. “We’re not up for selling at either lower or upper high-street levels, as it were – it doesn’t work. There is a point at which the V&A customer will respond well.” Then it is off to trade fairs in London, Paris and New York and the browsing of websites, magazines and consumer reports. Her team also considers, vitally, the forthcoming public exhibition programme. Items are designed in-house and plans are taken to manufacturers.

So what is the essence of a V&A product? Sevier points to three things: “wit, craft and enthusiasm”. What she means is that the museum does not take itself too seriously, engages the best manufacturing inside Britain and out, and avoids an attitude of disdainful coolness – that off-putting aesthetic designed to welcome only initiates, not everyone.

Throughout the design process, Sevier must always consider the profile of her audience, and she seems to have a particular profile in mind: “Our favourite customer is somebody who is buying not only for her husband, her daughter and her grandchild, but [takes] the opportunity for self-gifting.” She says that perhaps ten years ago a consumer’s average age was in the fifties, sixties and seventies, but this has now spread to the thirties and forties too.

The best-selling product over several years has been “a hand-painted ceramic button”. Of course, there are items she has also learned do not work despite corporate enthusiasm: non-exhibition-based t-shirts. “Absolutely brilliant, clever designs coming from the collection, reusing fantastic graphics, but no, shoppers don’t really want it.”

Customers are particularly keen on jewellery, Sevier says. One of the V&A’s great commercial successes, affordable jewellery (up to £60) and “under-glass jewellery” (up to £1,000) provide “a considerable proportion” of annual turnover. One of the biggest events of the next year for the V&A, then, will be the reshaping of the main shop, which runs between the atrium and the Dorothy and Michael Hintze Sculpture Galleries, with a new specialist jewellery area. Alex Stitt says the shop will be more structured, able to cater for schoolchildren, tourists and Christmas-gift shoppers alike, and better at telling “retail narratives”.

It will also sell books from the V&A’s two new licensing deals: with publishers Penguin Random House, for children’s illustrated books and products; and Thames & Hudson, for adult illustrated books. Stitt moved away from a model where all books were produced in-house because it was a financial challenge to the museum, tying up money in stock, and because external publishers can print more titles and distribute them more broadly. “There are more and better books coming out under the V&A’s brand than there were – at less risk and no compromise in quality – and it will quite quickly become more profitable.”

The V&A retained the right to print catalogues and scholarly books: “Last year was the year of [the exhibition about fashion designer Alexander] McQueen, and we sold tens of thousands of £35 catalogues.”



Alexander McQueen catalogue and tote bag

Licensing deals, such as the one with Penguin Random House, are important to the museum, as long as the product is right. There will soon be V&A paints in heritage colours, says Stitt, and “V&A-branded bed linen is sold in Japan in enormous quantities”. Sevier points to clothes: “The fashion brand Oasis has recently produced a fantastic licensed range featuring designs from the V&A archive.” There are 65 V&A licensees around the world.

But is there a danger in any of this looking like exploitation? Stitt robustly denies the suggestion: “How much did you pay to come to the V&A? Nothing... How much does it cost to keep the V&A open? Tens of millions of pounds. The bit in the middle is through people making contributions, through supporting our work, through pleasurable transactions.”

The commercial can, however, sometimes seem to overwhelm or subvert the cultural. Stitt mentions Barnaby Barford’s 2015 installation *The Tower of Babel*, a mass of ceramic shopfronts arranged in the Medieval & Renaissance Galleries that were also individually for sale. Doesn’t that run the risk of confusing the artistic and commercial purposes of the museum? “Yes! But the V&A has always run that

risk. We’ve never been a pure museum that’s just about fine art.” He defends the V&A taking a risk that “perhaps other museums might be less comfortable with” because of its broad applied-arts remit.

There is another side to the museum’s commercial activities, which stems from its founding principle of inspiration and education for all. This is the Learning Academy, the home of all its year-long, shorter, evening and weekend courses, as well as conferences, workshops, symposia and study days. The 2016/17 brochure offers full programmes of study such as *London Life and Times: Medieval to Modern 1066–2000* and the new *Textiles: Ancient to Modern*, but also short, seasonal programmes such as *The Classical World and Classical Revivals* and *Fire, Earth and Water: Ceramics of East Asia*.

Dr Amy Mechowski, head of the Learning Academy, recognises that the V&A cannot rely solely on existing, though loyal, participants, so the evening and weekend courses are designed to appeal to the interests of a broader audience, diverse in its social background and age. Conscious that female students predominate, new courses and lifestyle events such as those centred on the history of menswear in the twentieth century and contemporary men’s fashion aim to draw a male audience, with potential for an afternoon workshop on “how to buy the perfect suit”. When asked if this might seem frivolous, she explains that participants would be learning about the history of fashion and design as well as fabric conservation, even as they socialise and share thoughts on planning their wedding or an important upcoming job interview.

There are also career-based Continuing Professional Development courses on curating, conservation, interpretation and working with artists and designers. This is part of a sector-wide trend, as museums develop “courses that are aimed at either students who have graduated with their BA or MA in the history of art and design or perhaps even museum studies, and are looking for a way to familiarise themselves with some of the more practical aspects of working in the museum sector, or museum professionals who are seeking to gain specialist knowledge in their field or diversify their skill set”.

The Learning Academy is forward thinking and future-focused. The *Creative Business Masterclass*, aimed at people inter-



Detail of *Tower of Babel* by Barnaby Barford, 2015
© Barnaby Barford

ested in building a successful design or craft business, features museum expertise as well as entrepreneurs in design such as Tatty Devine and Crafty Fox. Mechowski adds that the V&A has much more to offer those between the ages of 25 and 40, a generation which already visits the museum, but hasn't tended to take advantage of its courses and other learning opportunities.

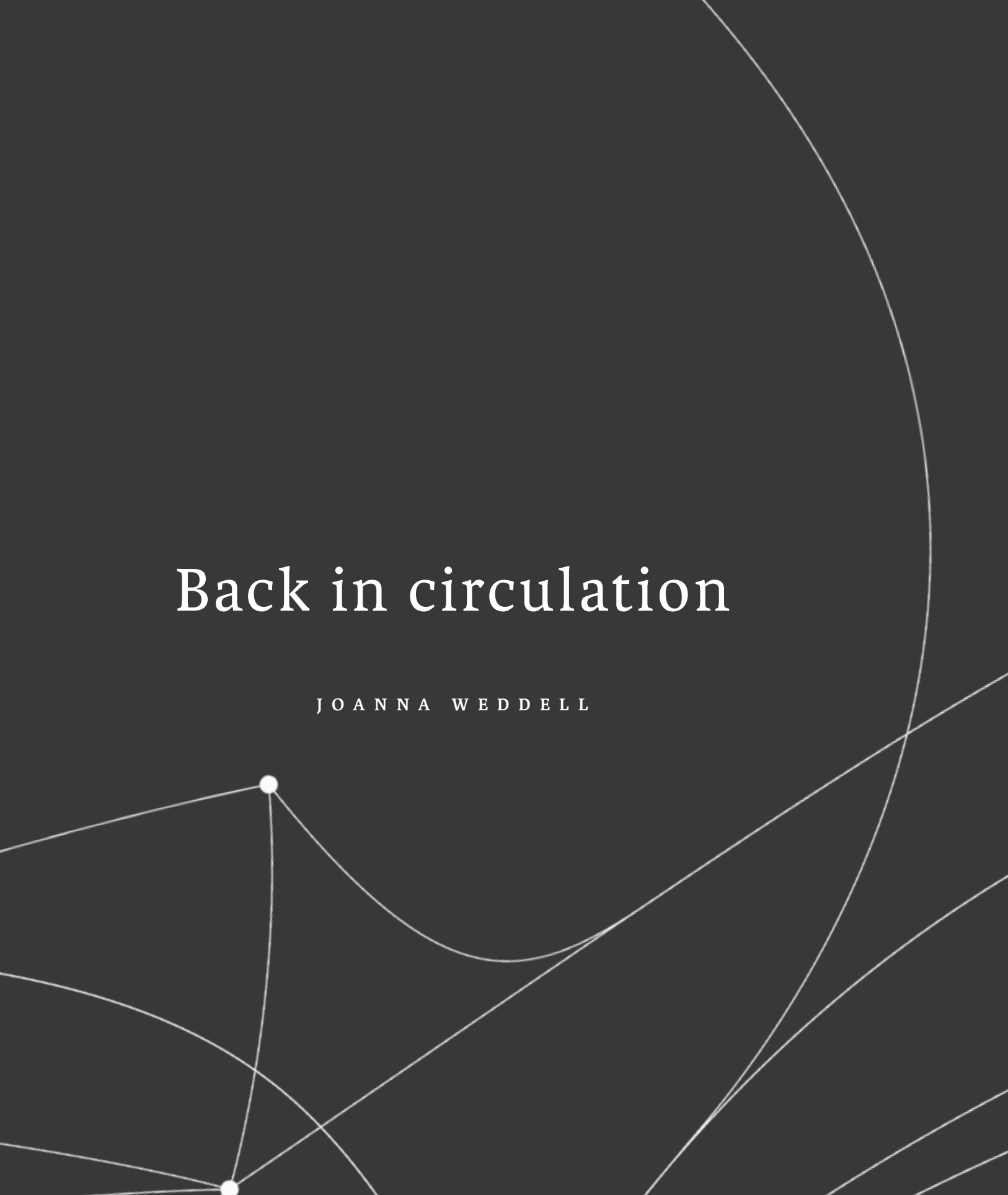
Whether about medieval embroidery, contemporary jewellery, or digital design, the courses must always "come back to the collections and to the history of both the museum and building itself". As Mechowski says: "The offering of the Learning Academy is and must be uniquely V&A, playing to the museum's strengths and featuring the best of its rich resources and expertise." This umbilical link is what tethers all the commercial activities.

There is even a meta angle to all of this, says Alex Stitt: "We're the envy of the museum sector in terms of the variety and quality of what we offer, and indeed we've just run a course called *The Enterprising Museum*, where people paid to come from all over the world to learn from us about how to be creative and enterprising in the way you offer a commercial window into the work of the museum." The museum is turning its money-making activities into a money-making activity.

Josh Spero is deputy editor, special reports, and consulting editor, events, at the *Financial Times* and *Tatler's* art critic

Back in circulation

J O A N N A W E D D E L L



On 6 July 2016 the V&A won the 2016 Art Fund Museum of the Year Prize. Director Martin Roth announced that the £100,000 award would be used to “make our unparalleled collections of art and design accessible to the widest possible audiences”. He went on to say: “With this prize we plan to revive the museum’s legendary Circulation Department, which collected and shared the best of contemporary design with regional museums, galleries and art colleges, but which closed in 1976. We will ‘recirculate’ our collections, taking them beyond our usual metropolitan partners and engaging in a more intimate way with the communities we reach.”

So what was this legendary department? Circulation, known in-house as “Circ”, was closed by director Roy Strong in 1976 in response to government cuts. He saw the “task of serving the regions” as “extraneous to the main functions of the museum”. Circ occupies a unique position as the prototype and the oldest precedent of what we now think of as the touring exhibition. The nineteenth-century Design Reform movement sought to enable British industrial design to compete with foreign markets, through the first Government School of Design in London, then in major manufacturing cities. It was decided regional art and design students needed to examine well-designed contemporary and historic objects, so in 1848 an adviser went to Italy with £100 to collect objects for circulation, and came back with Renaissance bronzes, Murano glass and Venetian lace. This collection became part of the Museum of Manufactures in 1852, then the South Kensington Museum in 1857. In the 1850s and 1860s the scheme extended to citizens in the provinces with a “comprehensive” circulating museum set up, with characteristic Victorian vigour, in a railway truck that toured 1,600 objects to 307,000 people. In 1899 the South Kensington Museum became the Victoria and Albert Museum and materials-based departments transferred part of their holdings to Circ’s touring collection. Unlike the main departments, which fostered a specialist connoisseur approach and had an unofficial “fifty-year rule”, Circ continued to collect commercially available contemporary design as an educational resource for manufacturers, designers and the public, a genesis distinct from aristocratic or royal collections.

When Circ reopened in 1947 it faced a very different landscape from that of 1848. As the V&A proposes a reinvention of the spirit of Circ for the twenty-first century, it is helpful to see this tradition of public service in its own context, rather than as a straightforward continuation of the Victorian project. In the post-war period, Clement Attlee’s government aimed to provide prosperity



and opportunity through state intervention and reconstruction. It needed to raise export levels to improve the balance of payments, so, once again, design improvement was a political and economic priority as manufacturers moved from war to peacetime production. As *The Times* noted in the obituary of keeper Peter Floud CBE (1911–1960): “In building up the Department of Circulation after the war he had almost to begin anew, transforming the character of the department and bringing it in closer touch with the needs of the post-war world.” According to Floud: “Britain not only led the world’s industrial revolution: she has a unique record of selective exhibitions of industrial designs,” which should be “regarded by enlightened opinion as an essential part of progressive government.” He explained that “the Circulation Department’s contemporary collections are now much more extensive than those of the main museum”. Circ staff felt that “we were there to help and educate the public” rather than “pursuing curatorial interests for the sake of it”.

Previously, provincial museums had year-long loans of single objects or single cases. Floud shortened loans to three months and created larger, self-contained exhibitions, such as survey shows of Gothic or Islamic art. These used Circ’s own collection, but also collaborative loans from a range of sources. Collecting favoured smaller, two-dimensional objects for ease of transport, with design objects outnumbering fine art at around 70 per cent to 30 per cent. The Circ approach to touring exhibitions can be summarised as comprising three core elements:

- Scholarship – for unique, historic objects
- Demonstrations of process and technique – to support students and industry
- Contemporary objects – shaping the “good” taste of the citizen.

Circ considered any secure venue, a city art gallery or a workingmen’s club, as long as it had free admission (art and design really was



Far left: two-part jelly mould by Wedgwood, 1790–1800

Left: *The Grammar of Ornament*, plate XXI, Greek No. 7 by Owen Jones, 1856

for all). Exhibition design also promoted egalitarian principles. Shows were fully labelled with explanatory notes on a lectern so that no catalogue purchase was necessary (though such absence of documentation has since contributed to Circ's low profile). Equality of access was further promoted by the charging structure with a standard transport fee irrespective of the borrower's location in the UK. Post-war, the trend was to put on Circ exhibitions at South Kensington "before being sent to the provinces", suggesting a rise in their status, content and ambition – as well as acting to validate the travelling shows.

Following the closure of Circ in 1976, the reaction from the regions revealed both the value of touring exhibitions and divisions between the regions and the cities. A Member of Parliament for Leeds South-East said: "This is another instance of the neglect of the provinces, and it fails to recognise the cultural needs and desires of the people who live outside the South East of England." Meanwhile, the national press commented: "Do the elitists in London truly believe that nothing matters north of Watford?" But others highlighted the detrimental effect of dependence on V&A shows that arrived in the regions "like neatly packaged manna from heaven", asking: "What cultural facilities are they generating through their own resources?"

A petition presented to the Secretary of State for Education and Science by David Hockney protested against Circ's closure, which "would irretrievably deprive the nation of ready access to a significant part of its art collections" and "deprive the whole country of a standard-setting and cost-effective service". There was some discussion about establishing a new national agency to co-ordinate regional loans, but "the idea of this museum continuing to 'serve' the regions is dead", as it was phrased with some finality in an internal memorandum.

The political, economic and, above all, cultural context had changed. The post-war principle of "the best for the most" had given way to "never mind the quality, feel the width", and cultural democracy from the grass roots up held sway. Cultural activity was to come *from* the regions not *to* them; stereotypes of metropolitan sophistication and provincial backwardness were to be overturned. On 25 April 1977 V&A staff held a wake "in affectionate remembrance of Circulation, c.1840–1976". The humorous tone masked the sadness at the closure of what was the largest department of the V&A.

In 1982 debate about a new touring exhibitions agency took place and the Museums and Galleries Commission set up a working party. The Chair stated that "it is wrong for a service for provincial museums to be the responsibility of a metropolitan museum", as "the provinces naturally are a lower priority". In 1999 V&A director Dr Alan Borg summarised what he saw as an altered landscape for museums: "The relationship between national and regional museums has changed rather dramatically and, even if we had funding to do so, I do not think reviving the Circulation Department would be welcomed... Increasing regional power and independence means that non-national museums want to be seen as 'equal' organisations and would regard a new Circulation Department as demonstrating a sort of cultural imperialism by the V&A." This shift was evident even before Circ's closure. In 1975 Sir John Pope-Hennessy, former V&A director and incumbent director of the British Museum, spoke about relations between national and provincial museums, saying: "I dislike the noun 'aid'. It seems to me derogatory and I am glad that the concept of reciprocity or 'interaction' has been substituted."

The V&A carried on "its long tradition of placing at the disposal of regional museums and galleries its expertise in every field of

activity within the sphere of the fine and decorative arts”. Services and long-term loans have continued, forming an unbroken and vital link between national and regional museums. In 2015–2016 the Purchase Grant Fund engaged with more than 91 different organisations throughout England and Wales, awarding 116 grants totalling £1,021,068 that enabled purchases costing over £3.1 million to go ahead. The V&A also has one of the highest numbers of loan venues of the nationally funded museums – 273 different locations in 2015–2016. During that twelve months seven travelling exhibitions toured to ten UK venues, attracting almost 180,000 visitors.

This range and scale shows a return to a circulating service comparable with that listed for the first time in the *Museums Journal*, August 1949, when venues included locations as far apart as Berwick-upon-Tweed, Hove, Carmarthen and Norwich, with shows on subjects such as ‘Early English Watercolours’ and ‘History of Lithography’. The current V&A UK touring programme grew out of revenue-generating international travelling shows and aims to “widen the reach of the V&A brand, increase access to our collections and assist cultural diplomacy”. UK touring shows are subsidised by the V&A, and regional access remains a live issue. UK museum partnership working was a condition of the V&A’s grant settlement from the Government for 2011–2015 and furthers the 2015–2020 strategic aim to “focus and deepen the relevance of our collections to the creative and knowledge economy”. As in 1947, the touring arm of the museum remains an important tool to address regional inequality. The creative industries are the most unevenly distributed part of the UK’s economy with 43 per cent of sector jobs in London and the South East.

Today, the V&A has different forms of collaborative regional engagement and operates through both formal partnerships and flexible alliances. The museum has committed to placing the Wedgwood collection on permanent loan at the Wedgwood Museum in Stoke-on-Trent since 2014; to continuing partnerships with Museums Sheffield until 2018; and to the V&A Museum of Design, Dundee, due to open in 2018. Not so distant from South Kensington are the Museum of Childhood in Bethnal Green and V&A East, open-

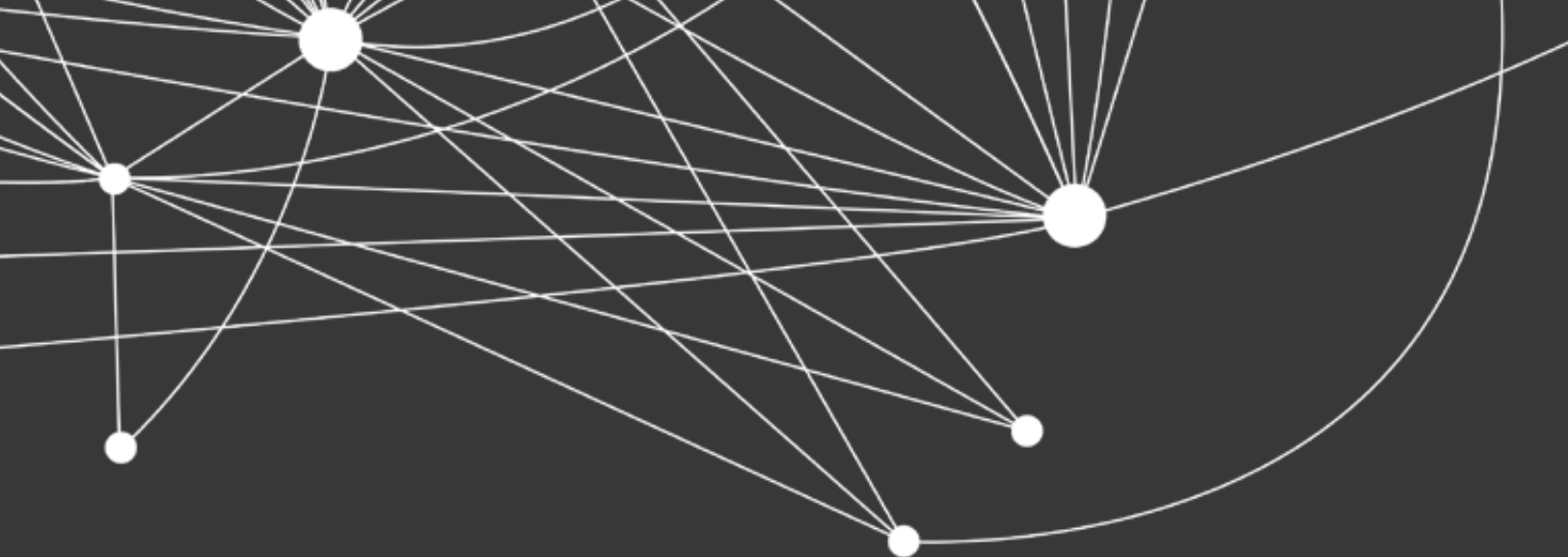
ing in Stratford in 2021. Additionally, the V&A Photography Curators’ Training Programme currently works in partnership with Nottingham City Museums & Galleries and Museums Sheffield.

Now in its fifth year, the V&A has a partnership with Culture Coventry and Pennine Lancashire Museums in the Museums and Schools programme to increase engagement with local schools, funded by the Department for Education through Arts Council England. The picture is certainly not that of the “passive metropolitan monolith” predicted on Circ’s closure, or of “cultural imperialism”.

Circ was founded in the era of Henry Cole and Owen Jones. As the V&A’s strategy for regional engagement responds to the digital age, we move from Jones’s *The Grammar of Ornament* to Instagram. Recent curatorial models engage with the digital availability of objects with the encouragement to download and reuse, and can be seen as the virtual version of Circ’s emphasis on technique and process. Like the nineteenth-century casts and collotype reproductions toured by Circ, digital copies are part of a whole range of possibilities generated by the original design object, creating new and informal networks and interactions. Design creativity is increasingly interactive and collaborative, generated by passionate amateurs as well as specialist designers; inventive users have become producers. Models for a new domain of creativity are those of a conversation where a platform, rules and tools are provided for end users actively to adapt existing designs.

The reinvention of Circ is currently a work-in-progress. National working in the twenty-first century is already about more than just “recirculating” the collections and is truly collaborative, working in partnership with people across the sector to celebrate and share knowledge of the designed world. The V&A is currently consulting its regional colleagues to ensure that the new model is mutually beneficial, as well as enabling people, wherever they live, to engage with the V&A, its collections and its knowledge. As Martin Roth explained, this new project to “recirculate” design objects aims to enable the V&A to “continue to deliver on our ambition to be both a national museum for a local audience and a local museum for a national audience”.

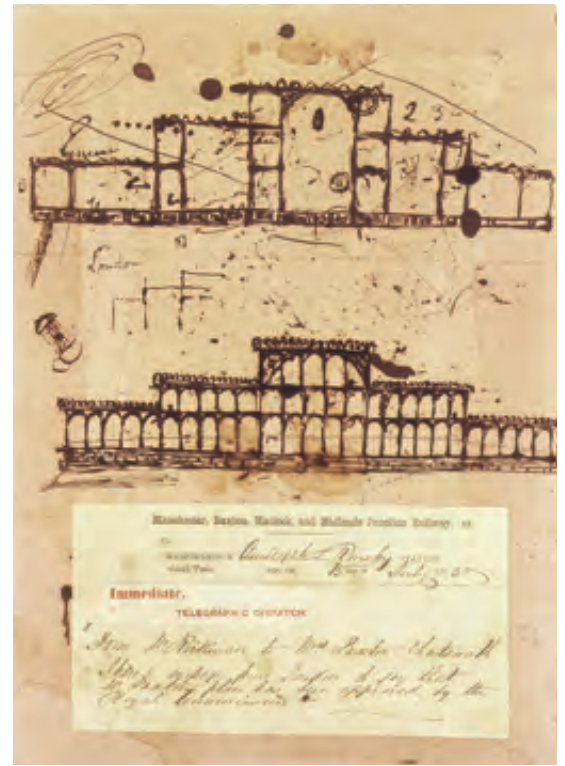
Joanna Weddell is completing an AHRC-funded Collaborative Doctoral Award, *Disseminating Design*, with the V&A Research Department and the University of Brighton. She is co-editor of *Design Objects and the Museum* (Bloomsbury, 2016) with **Liz Farrelly**.
With thanks to **Julia Brettell**, national programmes manager at the V&A



Engineering as a high art form

J O N A T H A N G L A N C E Y

First sketch for the Great Exhibition building by Sir Joseph Paxton, c.1850



For six months in 2016 visitors to the V&A could watch an industrial robot busy at work winding components for the Elytra Filament Pavilion set in the museum's John Madejski Garden. This ethereal installation, resembling a fan of hi-tech Gothic vaults spun by a mechanical spider, grew as sensors embedded in its fabric relayed information about visitor numbers and movements to a design team in Stuttgart – the people responsible for the shapes made by the robot. If the V&A's Engineering Season, of which the exhibition 'Engineering the World: Ove Arup and the Philosophy of Total Design' formed a part, had been extended by six months, this strangely beautiful structure might surely have grown out of its courtyard confines, stretching into the surrounding streets of South Kensington.

Created by the German experimental architect Achim Menges, director of the Institute for Computational Design at the University of Stuttgart, his research assistant Moritz Dörstelmann, the structural engineer Jan Knippers and climate engineer Thomas Auer, the pavilion was devised to explore the impact of emerging robotically fabricated technologies on architectural design, engineering and making.

What made it particularly enchanting, and relevant to the V&A's often forgotten engineering background and history, is the fact that its design was inspired by lightweight construction principles found in nature, and specifically by elytra, the filament structures of the forewing shells of flying beetles.

Elytra are made of chitin, polymer platelets derived from glucose that, aside from being extremely light and immensely strong, capture, reflect and transform light – jewel-like qualities perfect for a museum brimming with lustrous and glistening objects collected from across time and around the world. It also seemed appropriate that the pavilion was supported by the German motor manufacturer Volkswagen Group, whose history is rooted in a bug-like car known, because of the distinctive shape of its body shell styled by Erwin Komenda, as the Beetle.

"With the Elytra Filament Pavilion," said Menges, "we aimed to offer a glimpse of the transformative power of the fourth industrial revolution currently underway, and the way it again challenges established modes of design, engineering and making... Its

intricate filament canopy was at the same time architectural envelope, load-bearing structure and environmental filter, which could be extended and transformed over time."

"We may not know it," added the V&A's director Martin Roth, "but engineers organise the world we live in. Our lives are reliant on visible and invisible systems conceived, built, run or facilitated by the many disciplines of contemporary engineering. The V&A Engineering Season was a clear statement about our renewed interest in industrial design and the engineer. It built on our industrial design heritage and reflected the crucial role of engineering in the development of the V&A."

It did – and in a delightful way. The V&A was founded from the substantial profit made by the Great Exhibition of 1851 and on the intellectual foundations of this bravura Victorian enterprise, where art, science, decoration and engineering shared equal billing. The architect of the Crystal Palace, which housed the six-month show visited by more than six million people, was Joseph Paxton, the ingenious and energetic head gardener of the Duke of Devonshire's Chatsworth Estate in Derbyshire.

In the late 1830s, with the architect Decimus Burton, he had built a Great Conservatory at Chatsworth, measuring 227ft long by 123ft wide, constructed from cast iron, glass and laminated timber. Steam-heated, it was lit by 12,000 lamps and was an engineering as well as horticultural wonder of the day. But when in 1849 Paxton was swept up in the latest fad for trying to grow an exotic lily shipped from Guyana, and named after Queen Victoria, he discovered what proved to be an immensely profitable as well as practical connection between natural and man-made structures.

In August 1849 he arrived back in Chatsworth by train from a trip to Kew Gardens cradling a sample of the coveted *Victoria Regia* water lily. It measured just 5½ inches. Paxton designed and built a new Lily House, even lighter and more daring than the Great Conservatory, its modular prefabricated structure based on that of the lily's supremely strong yet extremely light leaves. Not only did *Victoria Regia* flower for the first time in Britain, but its floating leaves grew to a diameter of 4ft 8½in. This happened to be the gauge of the tracks of the Midland Railway of which Paxton was a director.

He demonstrated the strength of the Amazonian plant by having his seven-year-old daughter stand on one of its leaves for the edification and delight of the press. As *Punch* observed:

*On unbent leaf in fairy guise
Reflected in the water,
Beloved, admired by hearts and eyes
Stands Annie, Paxton's daughter.*

It was on his way down to a directors' meeting of the Midland Railway – still some years before St Pancras station was built with its daring iron and glass train shed engineered by William Barlow – that Paxton fully imagined the Crystal Palace that was to make the Great Exhibition of 1851 so memorable and fund the South Kensington Museum, the future V&A.

During that meeting, he doodled a design in ink on blotting paper (in the collections of the V&A; see image on page 23) for the gigantic iron, timber and glass exhibition hall, and history was made. Having rejected 245 earlier designs, the exhibition committee seized on Paxton's. It was rushed up – all 1,848ft of it – with the help of William Barlow, the engineering firm Fox and Henderson, the glass-makers Chance of Birmingham and 2,000 workers in eight months at the modest cost of £79,800. Trolleys on tracks enabled workers to install up to 108 panes of glass, made in Birmingham and transported by train to London and horse-and-cart from Camden, each day. There were 290,000 panes in all.

If Paxton had been able to grow his pavilion from carbon fibre using a robot, doubtless he would have jumped at the chance. As a gardener and keen naturalist, as well as inventor and, now, architect-engineer, he would have been fascinated by the connection between insect wing cases and robotically fabricated structures. Across more than 150 years, it is easy to imagine him shaking hands with Menges and his team. They would have plenty to discuss.

Speedy construction, however, saw the Crystal Palace leak badly as exhibits, whether well designed or grotesque, were installed in an equal hurry for the opening of the Great Exhibition in May 1851. Augustus Welby Pugin, the fiery Gothic Revival architect and curator of the exhibition's Medieval Court, was concerned about both the rain and the strength of the structure itself. On 23 March 1851 he wrote to the stained glass maker John Hardman: "The weather is dreadful. They say the Crystal Palace is a seive [sic]." By 20 April he had nicknamed Paxton's glasshouse "the Seive [sic]" in a letter to the decorator John Crace, complete with a sketch of umbrellas over exhibits.

Earlier in the year, Pugin had written to Hardman denouncing the Crystal Palace as "a bad, vile construction. I should make a bad job of raising exoticks [like Amazonian water lilies] & Gardeners are not the best constructors [sic] of great buildings. It appears to me awful but we shall see". And to Crace: "I cannot get the transept of the exhibition out of my mind. It is much too slight & I don't believe the pillars they are adding will do much good."

This distrust of lightweight structures, of prefabrication, of novel and radical engineering was to colour the history of the British architectural profession for much of the rest of the nineteenth century, and of the V&A until very recently. While in the eighteenth century art had included science and engineering, by the high Victorian era, as the V&A began to bloom, art had become an aesthetic, often snooty concern far removed from the practical yet inventive world of Paxton, factories, workshops and laboratories.

Science and art were famously divided even though for its first half century what became the V&A was a part of the government's Department of Science and Art. A separate Science Museum within the South Kensington Museum was founded in



1885. By 1893 it had its own director, while in 1909 it had settled across Exhibition Road in a new building. And, as it did, so the V&A – finally named by Queen Victoria when she laid the foundation stone of its grand new buildings, designed by Aston Webb in 1899 – became ever more antiquarian.

When, however, its first buildings were erected in South Kensington in 1857, a plaster cast replica of Michelangelo's *David* could be glimpsed from galleries jam-packed with drawings and models of the latest steam railway locomotives.

John Ruskin, the hugely influential critic, was just one of many cultured Victorians confused about how he should respond to the new engineering technology. In 1860 he wrote: "I cannot express the amazed awe, the crushed humility, with which I sometimes watch a locomotive take its breath at a railway station, and think what work there is in its bars and wheels, and what manner of men they must be who dig brown iron-stone out of the ground, and forge it into THAT!"

It was, though, hard for anyone to express anything like amazed awe when faced with the South Kensington Museum's first building. It might have sported a lightweight structure, been crowned with glazed triple vaults while offering what appeared to be generous and potentially flexible exhibition spaces, yet, none the less, the *Civil Engineer* dismissed it as "a huge lugubrious hospital for decayed railway carriages".

Hot in summer, cold in winter and plagued by leaks, the interiors of what were quickly dubbed the "Brompton Boilers", built by Charles Young & Co, were divided by glum wooden partitions. It was all a bit of a muddle with collections drawn from the Great Exhibition mixed up with decidedly eclectic displays of this, that and the other. Even the museum's founder and first director, Henry Cole, called it a "refuge for destitute collections".

Cole, however, had a great fondness for soldiers, and in particular the Royal Engineers who had played a part in the construction of

the Crystal Palace. Ulster-born Captain Francis Fowke RE, designer of the machinery section of the Paris Universal Exhibition of 1855, had been appointed chief architect to the Department of Science and Art. He designed new galleries for the museum, their frames clad in Italianate-style terracotta façades, well-mannered architectural veneers to conceal engineering structures that many Victorians found distasteful or simply too radically modern for comfort.

Today, though, it is Fowke's dashing engineering structures, such as the slender iron-framed main hall of the National Museum of Scotland, Edinburgh, that are, perhaps, more admired than the stolid architecture enveloping them. The Edinburgh institution was one of several "outreach" South Kensington museums including the Dublin Science and Art Museum of 1877 and the Bethnal Green Museum, where the "Brompton Boilers" found a new home in 1872 and which a century later became the Museum of Childhood.

"A man of science," according to Henry Cole, "possessing a fertility of invention which amounted to genius", Fowke designed military fire engines, a folding camera, a portable India rubber bath and collapsible timber and waterproof canvas military pontoons, assembled and demonstrated in the grounds of the South Kensington Museum.

When the art collector John Sheepshanks endowed the young museum with a treasure trove of artworks, including key paintings by Constable and Turner, Fowke rose to the occasion with his top-lit Sheepshanks Gallery. The first museum building to be gas lit, from 1865 it was open until 10pm two days a week, as Cole put it, to "furnish a powerful antidote to the gin palace".

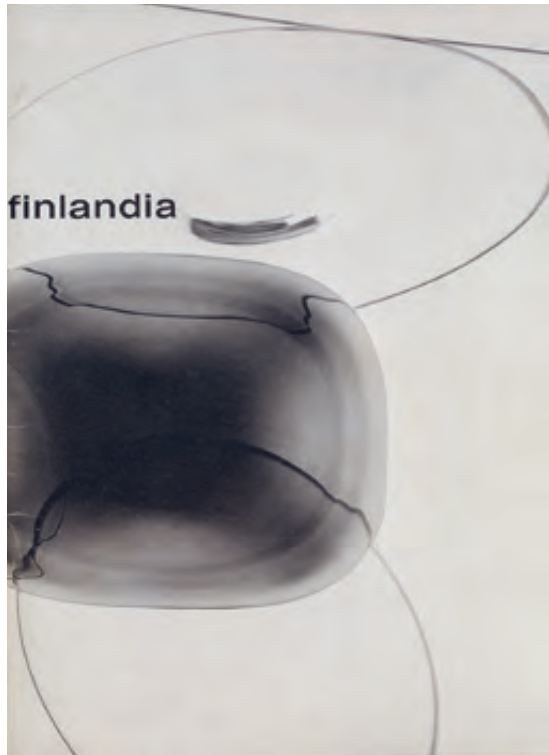
Now the working classes, and especially skilled workers, had their place in the South Kensington Museum, and even a "Third Class" restaurant of their own. But while the V&A installed electric lighting with alacrity, and though what became the Henry Cole Wing had originally been home to the School of Naval Architecture and then the Royal College of Science and the mathematics department of Imperial College, the divorce between science and art and engineering and architecture became all the more prevalent when the museum built its grand new frontage from the end of the century.

South front entrance of the South Kensington Museum (the "Brompton Boilers"), 1862



By the 1930s the V&A appears to have lost interest in modern design. And as for manufacturing, well, that was far too common for curators and directors to busy their refined minds with. The tide began to change, slowly. The museum's first truly modern exhibition in decades, 'Finlandia', a 1961–1962 show of the latest Finnish design displayed by Timo Sarpaneva, led eventually to Roy Strong's gallery of 20th-century British Art and Design; then, in 1981, Terence Conran's Boilerhouse Project (the precursor to the Design Museum), devoted to global modern design, opened in one of the museum's vast undercrofts.

One of the V&A's best known curators of the time, Clive Wainwright, a leading expert in nineteenth-century design and manufacturing, had come from the plastics division of ICI, while in the mid-1990s the radical engineer and mathematician Cecil Balmond, then working for engineering firm Arup, teamed up with the iconoclastic architect Daniel Libeskind to conjure the Spiral, a startling if ill-fated new gallery for modern design that would have leant out across Exhibition Road from behind the museum's grandiloquent walls. The Spiral had been championed by V&A direc-



Front cover of the
'Finlandia: Modern Finnish
Design' V&A exhibition
catalogue, 1961

tor Alan Borg, who, appropriately, had been the first director of the Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts at the University of East Anglia, its home a gleaming new hi-tech design, celebrating lightweight engineering structures, designed by Foster+Partners.

It was from then on that architecture, the arts and engineering became reconciled anew, and a line of thought and museological action might be traced from the Sainsbury Centre, a modern and very superior "Brompton Boiler" opened in 1978, to this year's V&A Engineering Season.

Zofia Trafas White, who, alongside Maria Nicanor, was one of the season's curators, considers the V&A's recent engineering shows a homecoming of sorts: "You can see the partnership of science and art, engineering and architecture coded into our buildings. You can find representations of Newton and Michelangelo facing one an-

other. At the Great Exhibition, looms and tapestries were exhibited side-by-side. The V&A is all about designing and making, and so we're more than happy to see a robot at work on an imaginative pavilion." The V&A is a complex organisation with disparate collections, yet this summer the spirits of Paxton, Cole and Fowke among other practical Victorian visionaries, for whom engineering was as sacred as art, seemed very much alive.

The V&A Engineering Season was supported by Volkswagen Group, with further support from Tideway.

'Engineering the World: Ove Arup and the Philosophy of Total Design' was made possible with the co-operation of Arup.

The future starts here...

H U G H P E A R M A N



Rendering of the new Exhibition Road
Sackler Courtyard at night © AL_A



The Victoria and Albert Museum covers more than twelve acres, has seven miles of galleries, and is thus best thought of as a small town rather than a building. Updating its various wings, courts and displays is as much an exercise in urbanism as of architecture and design. This is a never-ending task. But the V&A is approaching a significant stage in its history: the completion of the second phase of its FuturePlan programme of ongoing building and renovation, which began at the turn of the millennium with the reconfigured British Galleries 1500–1900 and has continued with short pauses ever since.

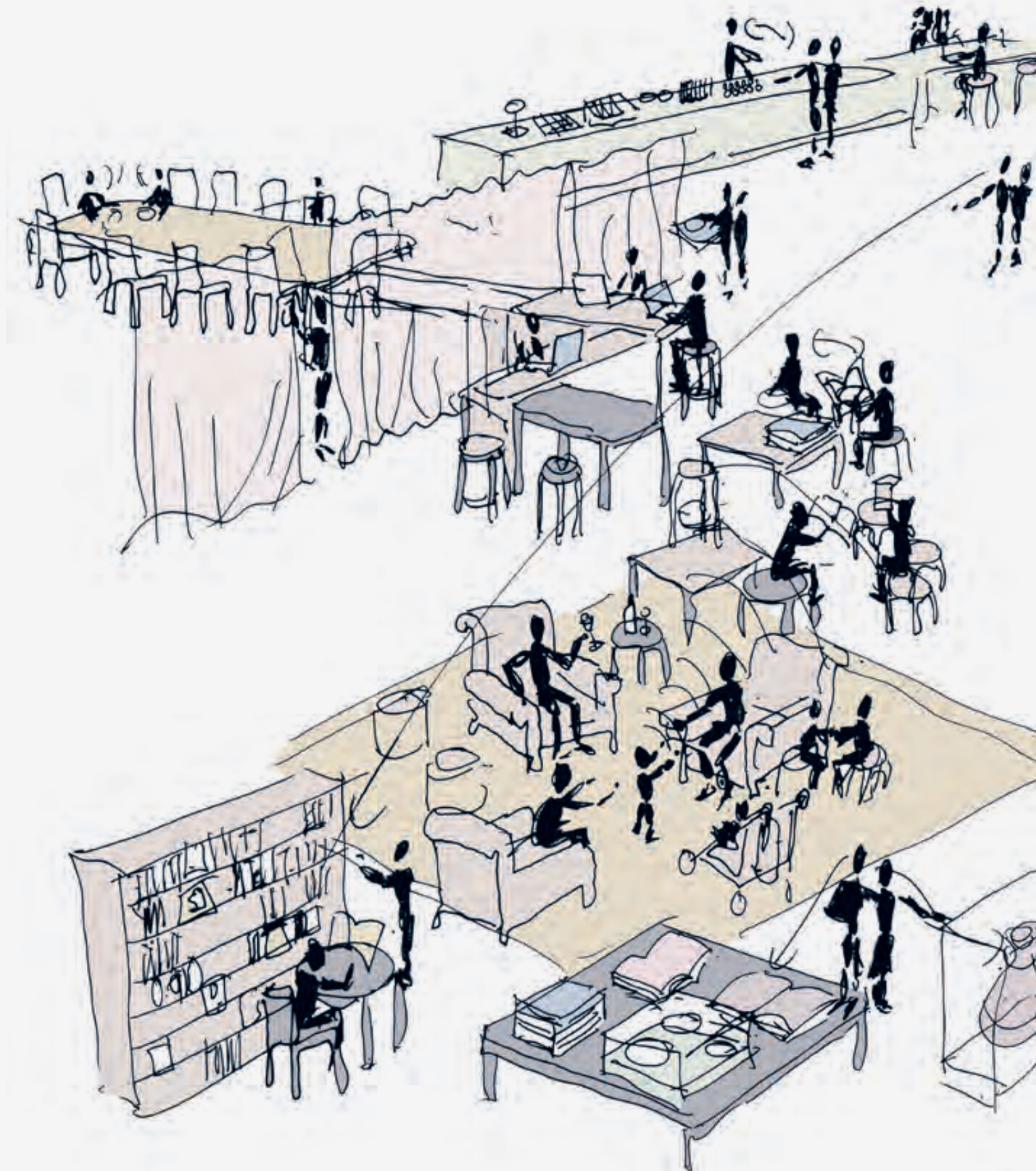
Far from fading out as the many stages of work are gradually completed, FuturePlan will be marked by an important moment: the opening in 2017 of the new Exhibition Road project with its porcelain Sackler Courtyard (a world first), the Blavatnik Hall and the new subterranean Sainsbury Gallery, excavated up to twenty metres below ground level. This remarkable £50m new section of the museum with its own café and shop is designed by Amanda Levete Architects (AL_A). In a radical shift for the V&A, it will transform our entire experience of the institution and the way it relates to the other South Kensington museums.

The Exhibition Road expansion is stimulating fresh thinking across the rest of the institution. This is partly because the open-

ing of its new column-free exhibition space will provide the opportunity to restore and re-present the galleries for temporary shows, and to consider a new breed of quicker, more responsive exhibitions. But it is also to do with the fact that – with an estimated half of visitors entering from the west side of the building from 2017 – patterns of circulation round the V&A will, as planned, change anyway. That will mean up to two million visitors arriving through what is at present the main south entrance, and another two million via the Exhibition Road entrance, the Blavatnik Hall. The knock-on effects are considerable. FuturePlan's third phase is, accordingly, in the making.

The great architectural historian Sir Nikolaus Pevsner observed of the V&A's Aston Webb-designed frontage, completed in 1909: "It has an almost naughty looseness." His remark could apply equally well to the whole complex. The South Kensington Museum, as it was originally called, emerged piecemeal from the 1850s onwards, at first in the prefabricated iron-and-glass galleries known as the "Brompton Boilers" dating from just after the Great Exhibition of 1851 in nearby Hyde Park. Eventually, these were dismantled and taken east to make what is now the Museum of Childhood in Bethnal Green. The V&A is, of course, again looking east – more on that later.

Sketch showing overlapping activities in the new Members' Room designed by Carmody Groarke.
Courtesy Carmody Groarke





V&A Medieval & Renaissance, Room 64b,
The Simon Sainsbury Gallery © V&A Images,
courtesy alanwilliamsphotography.com

Back in South Kensington, the effect of the transplant was what Pevsner called a “confusing mass of older buildings” designed by many hands, at first anticipating a northern entrance that never materialised as the area was built up. Ever wondered, for instance, why the Lydia and Manfred Gorvy Lecture Theatre and the Morris rooms seem to be tucked away within the museum? It was not meant to be like that, nor need it be, says architect David Bickle, the V&A’s director of design, exhibitions and FuturePlan. He is eyeing up the Science Gate, the imposing and most northerly access point into the museum further up Exhibition Road. That is part of the monumental Henry Cole Wing, which was originally designed as a training school for naval architects. It later became a

School of Science, which then became part of Imperial College. It only transferred to the V&A in 1978. Used at present as a service entrance, the Science Gate could, says Bickle, work as a potential public entrance to offer access to after-hours events. Relatively small changes such as that can be fiendishly difficult – and can make a big difference.

Bickle, previously a senior partner at the highly regarded architecture firm Hawkins\Brown, took on the job in August 2015. Since then, he says, his feet have hardly touched the ground. “The energy within the museum right now is remarkable. I have encouraged my colleagues to look at the whole estate, and to see it as a great city plan. How do we begin to open up the institute to the public in new ways?”

By the last quarter of the twentieth century, surprisingly large sections of the museum were routinely closed off. There always seemed to be space to spare. As former director Sir Roy Strong put it, the place was “a very capacious handbag”. The achievement of FuturePlan from its inception onwards was to get a firm grip on the place, phasing the improvements, the restoration and the new developments. This has amounted to some 40 projects, ranging in scale from façade cleaning and new women’s loos to completely reorganised and in some cases rebuilt galleries. Highlights are the Europe 1600–1815 Galleries by architects ZMMA (2015), the Medieval & Renaissance Galleries by architects MUMA (2009), the Jameel Gallery of the Islamic Middle East (by Softroom, 2006) and the renovation and redisplay of The Weston Cast Court (2014) and its companion court, with designers Metaphor. The year 2008 saw the arrival of the Sackler Centre for arts education, designed by Softroom, and that plan has included a variety of museum-wide improvements including the entrance gallery, new signage and the reopened link to the Exhibition Road pedestrian tunnel. The reach of FuturePlan is formidable.

How long does such work last? It now seems a very long time since the L-shaped run of the British Galleries 1500–1900 was comprehensively redone (between 1998 and 2001) by architects and designers Casson Mann. At the time that was the largest project the museum had undertaken for half a century, costing some £32m and amounting to ten per cent of the entire display space of the museum. Consider the changes in the technology we all use since those galleries reopened. We are in a rapid-response world. A good museum today with an unparalleled collection such as the V&A’s must operate at various speeds, from the eternal and contemplative to

the immediate. Equally, heavy capital investment has to pay off over time, so one has to be judicious in revisiting previously improved parts of the building. As Bickle remarks, although relatively few visitors were digitally savvy at the time the British Galleries 1500–1900 were completed, he's not yet considering ripping everything out and starting again. Light updates are OK.

There are certain “musts”. As with all great museums, members are hugely important and growing steadily in number, and a new, bigger and better Members' Room is in hand, designed by architects Carmody Groarke, who have considerable experience in cultural institutions. “They get us,” says Bickle, meaning they understand and support the ethos of the V&A, a prerequisite for all the architects and designers that the museum commissions. Previously tucked away in the furthest reaches of the building, the new Members' Room will from late 2017 be above the Dorothy and Michael Hintze Galleries, enjoying spectacular views down into the new Exhibition Road Sackler Courtyard. The day-lit space, originally a gallery, is at present part of the back-of-house area for the National Art Library.

Then there is the museum's main shop. There has been one since 1863 – in this, as with having a restaurant, the V&A was a pioneer – and the current incarnation was last redesigned by Eva Jiricna in 2006. It forms the main thoroughfare from the south entrance to the John Madejski Garden. But if we're talking about a museum operating at various speeds, that is equally true of the lifespan of interior fit-outs. A retail interior does not last as long as a “permanent” gallery set-up (although those need refreshing at intervals too). And now, with the circulation patterns about to change radically, so must the shop. Architects Friend and Company, RA Projects and design collective Millimetre are working on the £1m overhaul. Key to their concept is that the shop will connect with the designer-maker ethos of the museum and the surrounding galleries, and so will not only be finely crafted itself, but will include a workshop.

The increased footfall in the museum is part of what drives this – there will possibly be a sharp rise in visitor numbers when the new Exhibition Road extension opens – but, as Bickle says, it is also about a change of attitude. “What does it mean to us culturally? It's about our material world. Things are made to be consumed. So the new space will be culturally locked into the museum. Rather than being a highway, it will have pavilions and will be able to hold demonstrations of making and product launches.”



Masterplan rendering of the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park by Allies and Morrison. Courtesy Allies and Morrison

It is such a capacious handbag, the V&A, that there is no shortage of exhibition space, but the question is: what kind of exhibition? Not everything has to be a blockbuster show, successful though those are. Smaller shows, responding rapidly to world events and technological innovations, rougher round the edges perhaps, might make for a livelier and more engaged environment.

Part of the energy that Bickle mentions comes from curators who want to work more in this way. An example of what the future could hold would be the V&A's exhibition at the 2016 Venice Architecture Biennale, ‘A World of Fragile Parts’, supported by Volkswagen Group, which examined the fascinating issue of copying, across genres, and how that can apply to endangered or destroyed world heritage sites. This very successful exercise showed that a more biennale-like speedy assembly of exhibitions need hold no terrors, and yields positive benefits.

So we might be seeing a rethinking of temporary exhibition spaces and programmes once the opening of the Exhibition Road



V&A Museum of Design, Dundee, rendering by Kengo Kuma Associates. Courtesy Kengo Kuma Associates

project frees up space. And there are glorious yet peeling polychrome Victorian interiors lurking behind the blackout of the present temporary exhibition galleries, for instance, waiting to re-emerge in some form.

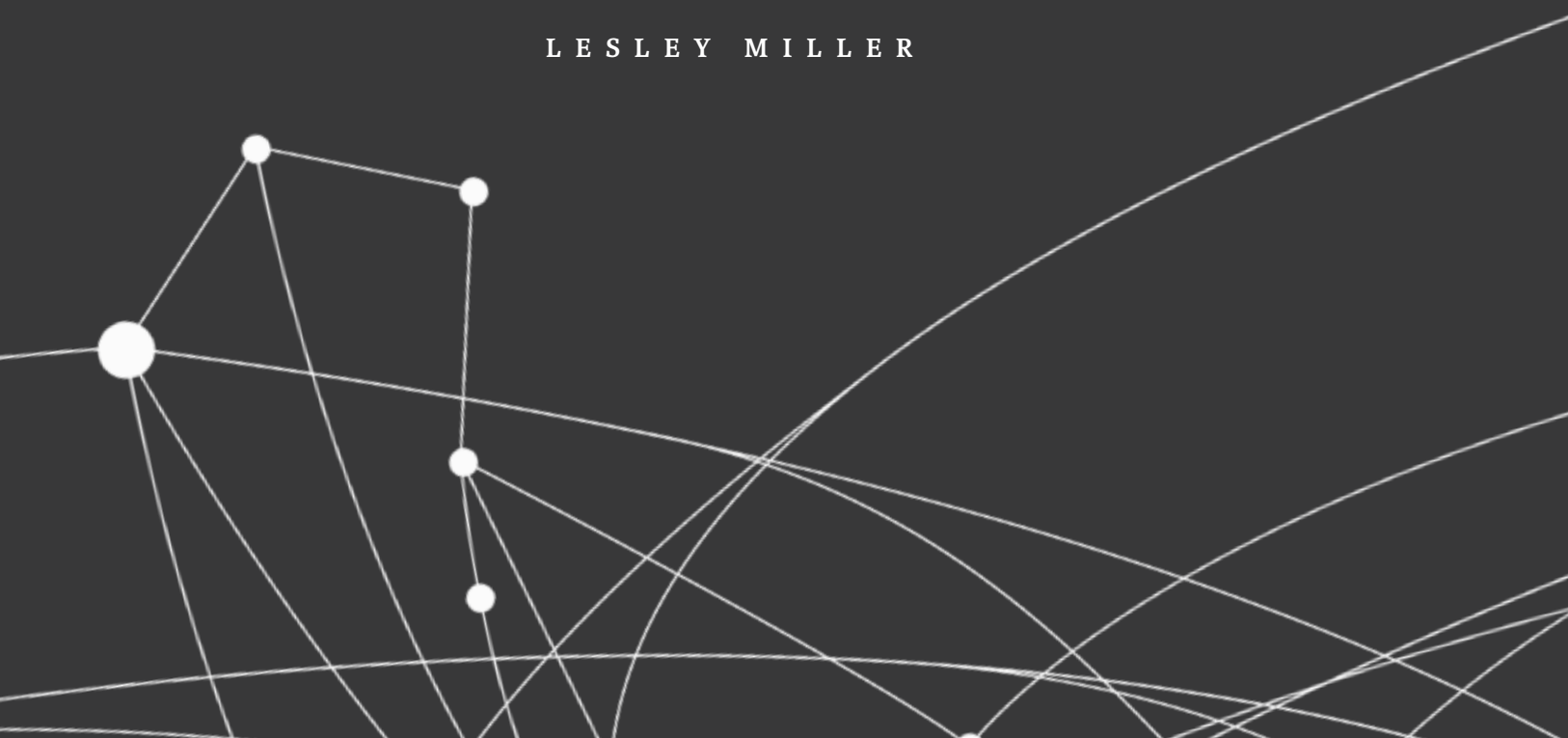
Meanwhile – echoing the original east London outstation of the V&A in Bethnal Green in 1872 – plans for the new V&A East in Stratford’s Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park are steadily evolving in the hands of architects O’Donnell + Tuomey and Allies and Morrison, as London’s centre of gravity continues to shift east, especially in the cultural industries. It is hoped that V&A East will open in late 2021. “If we had something that was rougher, more warehouse-like, what could we do with that, and how would we present our objects?” muses Bickle.

And finally, the V&A Museum of Design, Dundee, on the waterfront, designed by Kengo Kuma, is taking shape, with a projected opening in 2018. Built in a collaboration with Dundee City Council, this will tell the story of Scottish design and host touring V&A shows. It is aimed at reviving the city, and one inevitably thinks of the Bilbao Guggenheim effect – but the principle is pretty much what happened in South Kensington after the 1851 Great Exhibition. Albertopolis has a long reach.

In pursuit of humour amid gilt and grandeur

The making of the Europe 1600–1815 Galleries

LESLEY MILLER



Enter the Europe 1600–1815 Galleries from the V&A's main entrance and be awed by the dramatic, monumental sculpture of Neptune and Triton by Gian Lorenzo Bernini (1598–1680). Originally made as the centrepiece for a system of fountains, cascades and pools at the gardens of Cardinal Montalto's villa in Rome in 1622–1623, it towers above visitors, forcefully asserting its status as one of the finest examples of Italian baroque sculpture by one of its greatest exponents. Enter the same galleries from the museum's tunnel entrance and be dazzled by glistening neoclassical silverware by the Portuguese court artist Domingos Sequeira (1768–1837), mounted in a four-metre-high installation. Delivered to the Duke of Wellington between 1813 and 1816 in gratitude for his military aid during the Peninsular Wars, the dishes and cutlery would have been laid out horizontally on a long banqueting table for grand dinners and then afterwards displayed or stored in a buffet or sideboard. Here, they are set vertically, trophy-like, between displays of magnificent French decorative arts that reveal Napoleon's promotion of a new style for his ill-fated and short-lived empire.

Both statements intimate the grandeur and glamour of the contents of the seven galleries they bookend. They also intimate, in their very different ways, the museum's ambition to engage and enthuse twenty-first-century audiences' varying degrees of knowledge of European history, and to some of whom many of the particularly grand objects may be quite alien in their gilded and ornamented splendour. The treatment of the Wellington service is perhaps, as one French journalist suggested at the opening in December 2015, evidence of a quirky sense of humour, and certainly the arts of living encapsulated in the galleries embrace different extremes of human experience and expression: celebrations of life and death, war and peace, work and play, solemnity and merriment.

Observe how humour has engaged our new visitors, some already passionate about objects of this period and others much less familiar with them, including families with young children. According to that great eighteenth-century French instrument of erudition and classification, Diderot and d'Alembert's *Encyclopédie* (two volumes of which are on display), the British were surprisingly

good at humour. The author of the relevant article in that work began his entry on humour thus: "The English [sic] use this word to describe original, surprising and unusual wit. Among this nation's authors, none has as much humour, or this original form of comic expression, as [Jonathan] Swift, *who, by the form he gave to his jokes, sometimes produced effects on his compatriots that you would not expect from reading serious and closely reasoned works...*" The article went on to provide examples from Swift's writing, relating them to some French predecessors – Rabelais, Cyrano de Bergerac and the Comte de Gramont – and finished with the observation: "We could even say that generally this form of comedy is more a property of the light and merry spirit of the French than the serious and rational turn of mind of the English." (Vol 8, 1765.) While the intention behind the refurbishment and reinterpretation of the Europe 1600–1815 Galleries was both "serious and closely reasoned", the curators and educators fashioning the display content also sought out the "light and merry spirit" of the period.

Indeed, the spirit as well as the products of France are very evident, one of the main narratives being that France took over from Italy as leader of fashionable taste in art and design from the 1660s onwards. More than a third of the objects on display were made in France – the result of the enterprise and skills of many merchants and craftsmen and the patronage of wealthy consumers such as that doyenne of the arts and leader of fashion, Madame de Pompadour, mistress of Louis XV, who famously wrote: "My pleasure is not to contemplate the gold in my coffers but to spend it." And spend it she did, often on gilded *objets d'art*. Many more objects in the galleries were made in French taste, as rulers from William of Orange to Catherine the Great bought or copied that country's luxury goods. This appreciation of French taste continued into the nineteenth century, the very presence of these objects in the museum being ample evidence of the avid collecting of John Jones, the former military tailor who bequeathed his collection of 1,034 objects to the V&A in 1882. His preferences echoed those of many wealthy collectors of the period.

One twentieth-century inspiration for the redisplay is also attributable to France, as a long day trudging the streets of Paris



The Strong Smell, c.1770–June 1781,
by Franz Xaver Messerschmidt



Table clock, 1742–1745, possibly by
sculptors Philippe or Jacques Caffieri

brought two weary curators and an educator to the Musée de la Chasse et de la Nature (Museum of Hunting and Nature) in the seventeenth-century heart of the city. This institution opened in 1967 in an historic mansion and extended in 2007 into another, its mission being to show “the relationship between humans and animals through the ages”. It does so through a sequence of rooms that showcases high-quality craftsmanship, past and present, provides surprises round every corner – some rather amusing – and supplies the seating needed to enjoy them. Every room has its own particular atmosphere.

Accompany us into the Europe 1600–1815 Galleries and experience a similar notion of pacing in a very different environment, in which modern display cases are filled with exceptional objects, plenty of surprises, and representations of both animals and people. Passing through ‘Europe and the World, 1600–1720’, ‘The Cabinet’ and ‘The Rise of France, 1660–1720’, visitors marvel at precious metal and gilded wood, rock crystal and amber, ivory and ebony, fine lace and impressive tapestries. Here, they encounter Europeans systematically exploring, exploiting and collecting resources from Africa, Asia and the Americas: importing designs, goods and ideas; adopting and adapting them to their own purposes. The animals and peoples they also brought to Europe, the latter often in servitude, are also present – particularly in sculpture, paintings and engravings, but there is also a playful gilt bronze clock carried triumphantly on the back of a cast bronze elephant and topped with the recumbent figure of a monkey in vaguely Chinese attire carrying a parasol. It dates to about 1760, the case signed by Jacques Caffieri, who was active in Paris.

Rest and reflect awhile in the brighter light of ‘The Salon’, seated in *The Globe*, a contemporary installation by artist collective Los Carpinteros, communing with the busts of eminent eighteenth-century figures below the wrinkled upturned nose of Franz Xaver Messerschmidt’s lead sculpture of *The Strong Smell* (1770–1781). Here, aspects of the European Enlightenment are evoked, the debate and discussion of the French *philosophes* and their correspondents across Europe, their fascination with every kind of human activity, behaviour and thought, and their desire to classify them. Sometimes events in this space pay tribute to the salon as a place for the exchange of ideas.

Now sally forth into ‘City and Commerce, 1720–80’, ‘The Masquerade’, and thus into ‘Luxury, Liberty and Power, 1760–1815’. Here, the burgeoning market for furniture and furnishings as well



The Europe 1600–1815 Galleries, Room 7, The Sheikhha Amna Bint Mohammed Al Thani Gallery

as small luxuries is evident in a proliferation of teacups and snuff boxes, fans and handkerchiefs, regional and metropolitan goods, many now within the financial means of an increasingly wide range of consumers. The activities and accessories remind us that some aspects of present-day living have their roots in this period: the widespread consumption of hot drinks, fashionable dress and accessories, satisfied by the provision of earthenware and porcelain vessels, handkerchiefs, fans and prints.

Enjoy the different atmosphere of each gallery, in which various “modern styles” of interior decoration and fine art, from baroque through rococo to neoclassicism, are captured using evocative and sympathetic modern colours and materials – papal purple, regal blue, pistachio green and stone grey, soft brown leather and fluted plasterwork, bronze, walnut and marble. The starring objects range from the monumental to the miniature, selected both for their aesthetic merit and technical virtuosity, and for what they reveal about the arts of living.

Behind the scenes, the museum’s conservators and technicians have aided the narrative, their problem-solving and skilled craftsmanship invisible to the naked eye in the ingenious methods of supporting safely and to best advantage everything from massive, heavy marble pier tables on gilded stands to fragile pieces of jewellery. There is fun to be found in large and little things, not only through their method of presentation but also through the interpretative devices that tell their stories. Witness visitors’ responses. Eyebrows have been raised at the high, massed display of weapons – guns and cross-

bows – that aim at the painting of a stag's carcass by Frans Snyders (1579–1657), an animal long since out of reach of any hunting party. Wry smiles have attended the audio relaying Casanova's description of his encounter with a lover dressed in men's dress in a mirrored cabinet, possibly not unlike the small gilded and mirrored interior installed close to our rendering of the antics enjoyed by tourists to his native city. Amused grins have resulted from the discovery of interesting juxtapositions of vignettes of everyday life on a large woollen bedcover made in Prague in 1793, a tiny balloon hovering in the air, above a woman getting dressed, above a man with a telescope pointed upwards. Outright laughter has emanated from the area devoted to 'The Masquerade' in Venice. Described as "sneakily hidden in a dark corner" by Mark Hudson in the *Telegraph*, this life-size interactive film was perhaps the most ambitious piece of interpretation devised for the galleries, with the intention of bringing beauty, pleasure and movement to otherwise static displays. It invites visitors to follow the actions of a cheeky Harlequin who introduces them to a world of eighteenth-century revelry, first through a scene of a ball in Venice, then in a gaming house or *ridotto*, and finally in a *piazza* where a commedia dell'arte performance is taking place. Here, the young at heart have been caught in the act of participating in the adventures of the protagonist of the film, a young British girl discovering Venice for the first time, happy to flout convention by escaping her mother with a mysterious masked Venetian. "Clearly aimed at children," Hudson wrote, "it might sound gimmicky, but it is actually quite magical and does nothing to diminish the sense that the new V&A will not be unlike the old V&A: perhaps even a little better."

Most importantly and innovatively, fun was had in the making of this film, with volunteers from several different community theatre groups rehearsing at the V&A on five consecutive Wednesday evenings under the direction of the theatre company Slung Low, learning to dance the minuet, wear masks and act certain character roles. Fitted with eighteenth-century costumes from many different sources by the designer from Clay Interactive, they all descended on a studio one cold February weekend to be filmed in front of a green screen so that the background locations could be digitally painted during editing. Sociability was high on the agenda, a shared enjoyment that is articulated in *The Making of the Masquerade*, a film on our website recording the experience of our keen participants.

Not all touches of humour or invitations to interact with the collections are quite so obvious (or overwhelming). The family labels encourage young children to answer questions by looking at 35 ob-



Still Life with a Dead Stag,
1640s, by Frans Snyders

jects throughout the galleries and relating them to their own experiences. They not only bear a rather sweet little parrot, but are also short and written in an informal language suitable to their anticipated audience. The riddle cards on the activity table in 'The Cabinet' are similarly conceived, while the tactile and design qualities of the table itself have revealed the appetite for more traditional forms of interaction. Linocut artist Alexis Snell took inspiration from a painting of the *Garden of Eden* (about 1600) by Jan Brueghel the Elder (1568–1625) in the gallery to create an attractive area for activities from brass rubbing to playing snakes and ladders, from considering the difference between a reproduction of a seventeenth-century globe and our current map of the world to examining through a magnifying glass the cabinet of curiosities engraved in the publication *Museum Wormianum*



Europe 1600–1815 Galleries, Gallery 1, Luxury,
Liberty and Power, 1760–1820

in 1655. The wonderful panorama of animals and vegetation and the “live-cast” bronze lizard are most enticing. Indeed, so popular did the bronze-rubbing activity prove that, by the end of the first week after opening, gallery attendants could not keep up with the sharpening of the pencils provided for family use, and conservation-friendly wax crayons had to be sought.

Leave the Europe 1600–1815 Galleries by circumnavigating Bernini or Wellington, or perhaps by taking the lift next to the ‘Balloonmania’ display and its naughty quilt, or by returning to the staircase beside ‘The Masquerade’. But take with you a desire to return and to explore further the galleries on our website, and take, too, the online game Design a Wig, which Jonathan Jones in the *Guardian* has described as “a great portal to [the]... magnificent new Europe 1600–1815 Galleries – and to a world where culture is rightly taken to mean both Bernini and his barber”. This activity, conceived independently of any particular display, but taking inspiration from the extravagant hairstyles in some of the late eighteenth-century engravings and paintings, has caught the popular imagination.

In line with the V&A’s commitment to inspiring creativity, it provides the tools for anyone with a computer to make his or her own extraordinary concoction – pomade and powder, pompoms and plumes. Within two days of its launch, 92,000 users proved the true fascination of “big hair”, building and sharing hilarious fabrications to such an extent that the museum website crashed. The success of this portal suggests the power of the transient and of humour. It undoubtedly brought the Europe 1600–1815 Galleries into public consciousness with a bang rather than a whimper.

The Europe 1600–1815 Galleries have been made possible thanks to the generosity of the Heritage Lottery Fund, the children of Her Highness Sheikhha Amna Bint Mohammed Al Thani, the Friends of the V&A, The Selz Foundation, Würth Group, The Wolfson Foundation, Dr Genevieve Davies, William Loschert, the J Paul Getty Jr Charitable Trust and many other private individuals and trusts.

Lesley Miller was lead curator, Europe 1600–1815 Galleries (2010–2015), and is currently acting keeper of furniture, textiles and fashion at the V&A and professor of dress and textile history at the University of Glasgow





For our eyes only

Members of staff choose their favourite spaces and objects in the V&A

Amy Mechowski

Head of the V&A Learning Academy

Though this nineteenth-century *carte de visite* appears to picture a woman sculptor at work, modelling clay, it actually represents an actress posing as a sculptor. It emphasises how highly staged this type of photography was, but also speaks to the history of women sculptors. Traditional sculptural materials had long been regarded as involving a level of exertion and danger that was inappropriate for women. With the recognition of modelling as a direct means of expression, new claims could be made by women artists working in clay and wax.

Stefanie Agar

Membership Events manager

I had been coming to the V&A as a Member for more than thirteen years (six of those as a volunteer) before I joined the Membership Department, so I thought I knew the museum pretty well. One hot summer day, looking for a shady spot in the John Madejski Garden, I spied the plaques dedicated to Henry Cole's faithful terriers, Tycho and Jim. These pieces from the past are a regular reminder that there's something to find hidden around every corner here at the V&A.

Peter Timms

Senior safety advisor

Since its refurbishment in 1994, with the inclusion of the mezzanine and the Danny Lane staircase, Glass Room 131 has been a favourite collection and space for me. The bright elegance of the room and the beauty of the objects, drawing you along its length towards its mirrored conclusion, allow you to dip in and out of the various cases, especially the one containing the splendid opalescent glass centrepiece.

From top: sepia photograph of Mrs Scott-Siddons, nineteenth century; plaques commemorating Henry Cole's dogs Jim and Tycho; Gallery 131, Glass Galleries



Harriet Curnow

Programme manager, Families

My favourite place in the museum is Room 64b – the Simon Sainsbury Gallery in the Medieval & Renaissance Galleries. It is a peaceful space that uses a sensitive mix of natural and artificial light. The glass beams in the roof mean that when the sun comes out from behind a cloud, patterns dance across the walls. There are clues – such as the drain-pipes, inscribed “V&A 1905” – which show us that what is now an inside space used to be outside.

Lucien Smith

Assistant to head of Exhibitions and Loans

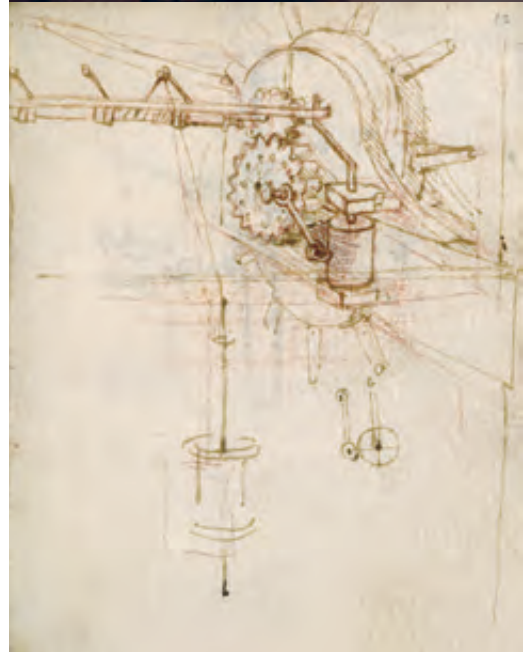
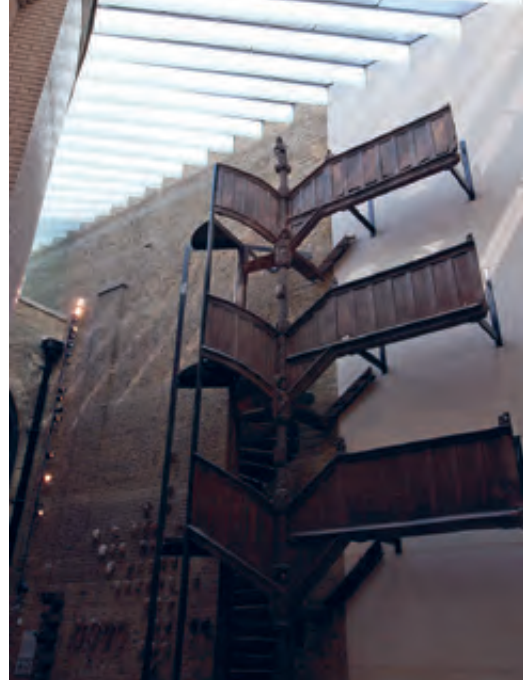
Perhaps more than any other object the *Forster Codices*, three bound volumes of Leonardo da Vinci's notebooks, continue to amaze me. Volume II, in which Leonardo theorises on everything from pulley systems to crossbows and perpetual motion, is currently on display in Medieval & Renaissance, Room 64, the Wolfson Gallery. You could almost walk past it, its solitary showcase set against a vast, anonymous grey wall, but something about this tiny scuffed notebook demands attention. To then realise upon inspection the preciousness of what lies before you, sheer genius captured in a few pages, is deeply moving.

Janet Browne

Programme manager, African Heritage and Culture

I have the privilege of unearthing hidden narratives, missing chapters of African lives and contributions to world history. *Bust of a Black Youth* epitomises my work and role, especially as little is known about him. He is “Afropean”, made in Venice, realistically modelled as a servant in an Ottoman-styled tunic. He is young and strong with defiance written into his features. It is this defiance that keeps me focused, reminding me that I have so much more to learn about my own history and heritage.

From top: Medieval & Renaissance, Room 64b, the Simon Sainsbury Gallery; page 12 recto from Volume II of the *Forster Codices* by Leonardo da Vinci, late fifteenth to early sixteenth century; *Bust of a Black Youth*, Italian, first half of eighteenth century



Acquisitions

The year 2015–16 saw remarkable growth in the V&A's collections, and, in purely financial terms, objects valued at £4.9 million came into our stewardship. Those donated, either directly or via the Acceptance in Lieu scheme, were valued at £2.8m, while items purchased totalled £2.1m.

The museum continues to save key heritage objects for the nation and this year raised funds jointly with the National Galleries of Scotland to safeguard the place of *The Campbell Sisters Dancing a Waltz*, a marble sculpture by Lorenzo Bartolini (c.1822), within national collections. The Art Fund, the National Heritage Memorial Fund and support

from private trusts and individuals helped in this endeavour, while also enabling the acquisition of an impressive range of examples of art and design.

The V&A's first acquisition under the Cultural Gifts Scheme means that the world's largest collection of paper peepshows (a cheap form of optical toy popular in the nineteenth century), formed over 30 years by Jacqueline and Jonathan Gestetner, is now accessible via the National Art Library.

The museum's collections now number more than 2.32 million objects. In the coming years we plan to explore innovative approaches to access

and interpretation through the V&A Research Institute (VARI). We also intend to put more objects on display in the future V&A East and a purpose-built open-access storage facility.

Looking forward to the year ahead, we are enhancing our facilities for the storage, study and display of photography in anticipation of the transfer of the Royal Photographic Society collection from the Science Museum Group, due 2017.

[The following pages illustrate 24 of the 42,084 acquisitions made in 2015–16.](#)



Table cabinet

1625–1675, Vice-royalty of Peru (Colombia), tropical hardwood, decorated in Barniz de Pasto lacquer
Given by Dr Robert MacLeod Coupe and Heather Coupe in memory of their brother, Philip MacLeod Coupe



Banquet 3

Jiang Yanze, 2013, Nanjing, China, bone china decorated with blue enamels

Tracksuit by Sibling (Cozette McCreery, Sid Bryan and Joe Bates) with print (by Bates) depicting the 2011 east London riots

2012, London, white knitted viscose, nylon and elastane, with blue toile du Jouy style print
Gift of Charlie Porter



Table football game 'Soccer 2M'

1987–1988, USSR, aluminium with polystyrene figures
Given by Ines Koegler

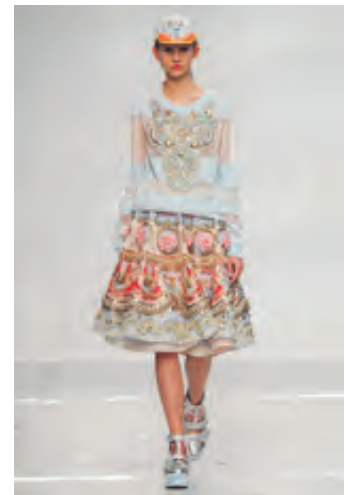


Hello Kitty Rice Cooker

2014, Japan, plastic and metal, electrical components

Embellished skirt and top

Manish Arora, 2015, Noida, Uttar Pradesh, silk with gold appliqué, iridescent strips, beads and sequins
Gift of the designer



Man's coat and waistcoat

1795–1805, England, mauve
woollen broadcloth



Hooped petticoat in the French style

1760–1780, County Sligo, Ireland,
linen, silk and cane
*Purchased with the assistance of
the Elspeth Ann Evans Bequest*



Costume worn by Ginger Rogers in the film Lady in the Dark

Edith Head, 1944,
Hollywood, USA, net
fabric with sequins,
mink, silk
*Given by the BFI
National Archive*



Prototype dining table

Marcel Breuer for Isokon, 1936,
London, moulded plywood
*Bequeathed by John Russell
Brown in memory of Gilbert and
Margaret Cousland*



Ishinomaki stool

Keiji Ashizawa, 2011 (designed)
2015 (assembled), Ishinomaki,
Japan, red cedar
Given by Rupert Faulkner



Royal mantel clock

Movement signed Clay for Charles
Clay, supplied by Peter Dutens, 1736
(assembled), London, gilt-brass, cast,
chased, pierced, enamelled
*Acquired with support from the
Art Fund, the Gilbert Public Arts
Foundation, the Gilbert Trust for the
Arts, the Hugh Phillips Bequest and the
Friends of the V&A*



Portrait of Charles Bedford as an Infant

Francis Hayman, 1744–1745,
England, oil on canvas
Purchased with Art Fund support



Florence from the South West

Attributed to Francesco Rosselli,
c.1495, Florence, tempera on
poplar panel
*Accepted by HM Government in
lieu of estate duty and allocated to
the Victoria and Albert Museum,
2015. Supported by the Art Fund
and Ida Carrara. In memory of
Herbert and Lieselotte Brier*



Brooch

Stephanie Fleck, 2011,
Germany, enamelled copper,
brass chains and beads of
glass, lapis lazuli, tiger's eye
and turquoise
*Acquisition supported by the
Friends of the V&A*



Brooch-pendant

Designed by Sir Edward
Burne-Jones, made by
Carlo Giuliano, 1885–1895,
London, enamelled gold set
with turquoise, coral, pearls
and a ruby
*Given by Geoffrey and Caroline
Munn through the Art Fund*



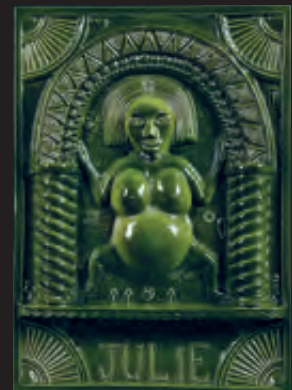
The Curling Crest of a Wave

Ute Decker, 2015, London,
fairtrade gold, hammered
and manipulated by hand
*Given by Jacqueline and
Jonathan Gestetner*



Costume design for the Riders on Horseback in the ballet Touring choreographed by Bronislava Nijinska

Alexandra Ekster, 1925, Paris,
pencil, gouache, watercolour
on paper
*Purchased from the estate of
Natalie Raetz with assistance from
the Linbury Trust and Mastercard*



Julie Tile for Grayson Perry's A House for Essex

Manufactured by Shaws of
Darwen, Lancashire, 2014,
England, glazed ceramic tile
Given by Living Architecture



Set of six 'Merry Man' plates

1727, London or Bristol, tin-glazed earthenware painted in cobalt blue
Purchased with the support of the Hugh Phillips Bequest and through the generosity of Sir Harry Djanogly CBE

Tiara

Cartier (retailer), 1913, Paris, diamonds, synthetic rubies, platinum, gold
Placed on loan by Irène, Lady Logan, daughter of Alexandra Comnène Everts, in memory of her mother, 2003. Accepted by HM Government in lieu of inheritance tax and allocated to the Victoria and Albert Museum, 2015



Set model for Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street

Anthony Ward, 2011, Great Britain, watercolour, gouache, metal, foam-board, card and wood
Given by the artist

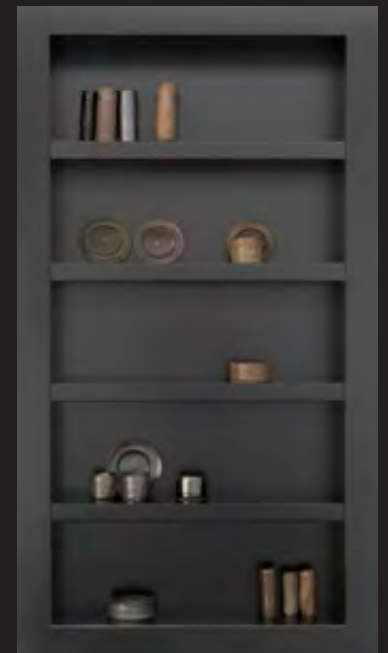
the collector (for Paul)

Edmund de Waal, 2015, London, seventeen porcelain vessels in a wood and plexiglass cabinet
Gift of the artist in honour of Sir Paul Ruddock



The Campbell Sisters Dancing a Waltz

Lorenzo Bartolini, about 1821/1822, Florence, carved marble
Purchased jointly by the National Galleries of Scotland and the Victoria and Albert Museum, with the aid of the National Heritage Memorial Fund, the Art Fund (with a contribution from the Wolfson Foundation), and a donation in memory of A.V.B. Norman, 2015



An abstract geometric design in the top right corner of the page. It features several white dots of varying sizes connected by thin white lines. Some lines are straight, while others are curved, creating a complex, web-like structure. The dots are positioned at various points, with some acting as central nodes from which multiple lines radiate outwards.

Essentials

2015–16

Exhibitions

Alexander McQueen: Savage Beauty

14 March – 2 August 2015

In partnership with Swarovski
Supported by American Express
With thanks to M•A•C Cosmetics;
Technology partner Samsung
“Spectacular. Ground-
breaking. One-of-a-kind...”
– *i (Independent)*

All of This Belongs to You

1 April – 19 July 2015

“An important, slightly
subversive show of a kind that
is rare in the consumer-led
world of contemporary design”
– *Financial Times*

What is Luxury?

25 April – 27 September 2015

A V&A and Crafts Council
Exhibition
Sponsored by Northacre
“Fun, fascinating and right
on the money about bling”
– *Evening Standard*

The Alice Look

V&A Museum of Childhood

2 May – 1 November 2015

Developed in partnership
with Queen Mary University
of London
“Beautifully designed”
– *Time Out*

On Their Own:

Britain's Child Migrants

V&A Museum of Childhood

24 October 2015 – 12 June 2016

Developed in collaboration
between the Australian
National Maritime Museum,
National Museums Liverpool
and V&A Museum of Childhood
“Shows the heartbreaking
history of British child
migration” – *Independent*

Shoes: Pleasure and Pain

13 June 2015 – 31 January 2016

Sponsored by Clarks
Supported by Agent
Provocateur
With additional thanks to
The Worshipful Company of
Cordwainers
“An Aladdin's cave of
lust and folly”
– *Evening Standard*

Captain Linnaeus Tripe: Photographer of India and Burma, 1852–1860

24 June – 11 October 2015

Organised by the National Gallery

of Art, Washington, and the
Metropolitan Museum of Art,
New York, in association with the
Victoria and Albert Museum
“A very handsome exhibition”
– *Financial Times*

The Fabric of India

3 October 2015 –

10 January 2016

Supported by Good Earth India
With thanks to Experion and
NIRAV MODI
“Spellbinding...”
– *Evening Standard*

Bejewelled Treasures: The Al Thani Collection

21 November 2015 –

10 April 2016

Sponsored by Wartski
“The dazzling Indian jewels
inspire a childlike sense of
awe” – *Sunday Times*

Julia Margaret Cameron

28 November 2015 – 21

February 2016

Supported by The Bern
Schwarz Family Foundation*
“A treat to view such fragile
works in the flesh, where
Cameron's bold virtuosity still
dazzles” – **** *Telegraph*

Botticelli Reimagined

5 March – 3 July 2016

Sponsored by Societe Generale
Exhibition organised by
the Victoria and Albert
Museum, London, and the
Gemäldegalerie – Staatliche
Museen zu Berlin
“This is a landmark event. It
shows other museums how to
reimagine Renaissance art for
21st-century audiences”
– ***** *Guardian*

Paul Strand: Photography and Film for the 20th Century

19 March – 3 July 2016

Supported by the American
Friends of the V&A
The international tour is
organised by the Philadelphia
Museum of Art in collaboration
with Fundación MAPFRE and
made possible by the Terra
Foundation for American Art
“A staggeringly beautiful
retrospective” – ***** *Time Out*

Displays

The Lost Art of Writing

24 July 2013 – 4 May 2015

Rapid Response Collecting

4 July 2014 – ongoing

It's My Party

V&A Museum of Childhood

20 September 2014 – 18 October 2015

Personal Favourites: Highlights of Gold and Silver from the Rosalinde and Arthur Gilbert Collection

1 November 2014 – 21 February 2016

Exhibition Road Project Display

26 November 2014 – 28 June 2016

In Black and White: Prints and Posters from Africa and the Diaspora

29 November 2014 – 6 July 2015

Hidden Identities Unfinished

V&A Museum of Childhood

20 December 2014 – 28 June 2015

Blue & White: British Printed Ceramics

31 January 2015 – 3 January 2016

Generously supported by The Headley Trust

Nursery Classics: Frederick Warne's Fine Art Picture Books

3 February – 11 May 2015

A History of Photography: Series and Sequences

6 February – 1 November 2015

Staying Power: Photographs of Black British Experience

16 February – 24 May 2015

The Staying Power Project is a partnership with
Black Cultural Archives and is supported by the
Heritage Lottery Fund

The Curious Neoclassical Vision of Ennemond- Alexandre Petitot (1727–1801)

23 March – 6 December 2015

Ways to be Public

1 April – 20 September 2015

A Room from Damascus

16 April – 16 December 2015

Swarovski Design Project

1 – 31 May 2015

A Stitch in Time: Home Sewing before 1900

5 May 2015 – 30 September 2016

V&A Illustration Awards 2015

18 May – 2 August 2015

Supported by the Enid Linder Foundation, with
additional thanks to the founders of the Moira
Gemmell Award

Kites from Kabul

V&A Museum of Childhood

4 July 2015 – 3 January 2016

Make/Believe, UK Design for Performance

11 July 2015 – 3 January 2016

Facing History: Contemporary Portraiture

27 July 2015 – 24 April 2016

The Art of Indian Storytelling

11 August 2015 – 24 January 2016

Barnaby Barford: The Tower of Babel

8 September – 1 November 2015

Musical Wonders of India

16 September 2015 – ongoing

Supported by The Helen Hamlyn Trust

Design Fund

18 September – 18 October 2015

Richard Learoyd: Dark Mirror

24 October 2015 – 14 February 2016

Philip Webb and 'The Forest'

7 November 2015 – 1 May 2016

Philip Webb, 1831–1915

7 November 2015 – 24 April 2016

The Tales We Tell: Indian Warli Painting

V&A Museum of Childhood

14 November 2015 – 3 July 2016

Learning activities supported by The Helen
Hamlyn Trust

The Tale of Ernest Aris and Beatrix Potter

9 December 2015 – 22 July 2016

Alison Britton: Content and Form

26 January – 4 September 2015

Curtain Up: Celebrating 40 Years of Theatre in London and New York

9 February – 31 August 2016

A History of Photography: The Body

11 March 2016 – 19 February 2017

The Clangers, Bagpuss & Co

V&A Museum of Childhood

12 March – 2 October 2016

Touring venues

Visitor figures

Overseas

- Cité de la Musique, Paris
- Australian Centre for the Moving Image, Melbourne
- Groninger Museum, Groningen
- Chester Beatty Library, Dublin
- Museum of Fine Arts, Ghent
- Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney
- Sharjah Museum of Islamic Civilization, Sharjah
- National Library of Singapore (Nanyang Technological University), Singapore
- State Library of Victoria, Melbourne
- State Library of New South Wales, Sydney
- Powerhouse Museum, Sydney
- Musée McCord, Montreal
- Nederlands Fotomuseum, Rotterdam
- Frist Center for the Visual Arts, Nashville
- National Print Museum, Dublin
- Aboa Vetus & Ars Nova (Museum of History and Contemporary Art), Turku
- The World Economic Forum, Davos
- Pera Museum, Istanbul

UK

- Woodville Arts Centre, Gravesend
- Brading Roman Villa, Isle of Wight
- Treasurer's House, York
- Hartlepool Art Gallery
- Chatham Historic Dockyard, Kent
- Herbert Museum and Art Gallery, Coventry
- The Atkinson Museum & Art Gallery, Southport
- The Civic, Barnsley
- Nottingham Castle Museum
- Wolverhampton Art Gallery

2015–16

- Total visits to V&A South Kensington, Museum of Childhood and Blythe House.....3,929,800
- Total visits to V&A touring exhibitions.....1,195,937
- Total unique web visits.....10,636,400
- Total visits by children aged 16 and under.....372,900
- Total visits by school pupils aged 18 and under.....160,100
- Total visits from BAME individuals.....316,600
- Percentage of visits by professionals, teachers and students in the creative industries.....37%
- Percentage of visitors who would recommend a visit to V&A sites.....99%

UK and international visits 2015–16

- Greater London.....1,062,500
- South-east England.....235,300
- Rest of UK.....506,400
- UK visits.....1,804,200
- Europe.....778,300
- North America.....373,100
- South and Central America.....73,400
- Asia.....232,600
- Rest of world.....198,900
- Overseas visits.....1,656,200

Financial review

			2014–15 £m	2015–16 £m
Summary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Government grant in aid of £37.2m was received in the year representing a fall of 4% against the baseline grant for 2014–15. £7.5m allocated for 2014–15 had been received in 2012–13. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Grant in Aid 	31.1	37.2
Fundraising	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In an exceptionally successful fundraising year, a total of £19.4 million was raised directly for the museum. An additional £16 million was raised on behalf of the V&A Foundation towards the V&A Endowment Fund and capital projects. Over 90% of the £15 million needed to unlock £5 million of matched funding from HLF Catalyst Endowment Fund was secured thanks to the extraordinary generosity of long-standing donors to the museum. Over £10.3 million was raised towards FuturePlan, the V&A's ongoing major capital programme. The fundraising target for the Europe 1600–1815 Galleries was achieved and significant progress was made in the Exhibition Road project campaign in advance of its opening in 2017. Corporate sponsorship for the exhibition programme reached record levels and Corporate Membership continued to grow, exceeding the previous year's performance. Spend on objects for the collection amounted to £2.1m and included the acquisitions of the Royal mantel clock and the <i>Florence from the South West</i> painting. A significant portion of the acquisitions was funded from private donations, HLF and the Art Fund. All our membership programmes demonstrated growth. The number of Friends of the V&A increased sharply, reaching 93,000, thanks to the popularity of 'Alexander McQueen: Savage Beauty'. A rich and varied programme of select events ensured that it was also a successful year for the Director's Circle patrons' programme. We are hugely grateful to all those who have supported us over the past year. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fundraising 	25.5	19.4
FuturePlan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A total of £20.8m was spent on FuturePlan projects and other fixed assets. Major work on the Exhibition Road building (due for completion mid-2017) and Europe 1600–1815 Galleries (completed in December 2015) took place, and the Toshiba Gallery of Japanese Art has undergone a major refurbishment programme. A total of £2.9m of Heritage Lottery funding was received in 2015–16 which contributed towards the Exhibition Road project and Europe 1600–1815 Galleries. Some of the funds used for these projects had been raised in previous years and designated for capital projects. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> FuturePlan and other fixed assets Lottery 	-17.3 3.8	-20.8 2.9
Acquisitions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A total of £2.1m was spent on acquisitions for the collection. Acquisitions are largely funded by private donations, sometimes supported by the Art Fund or HLF. In addition, objects worth £2.8m were donated to the museum in the year. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Acquisitions 	-7.1	-2.1
Collections & Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Across our three sites we have attracted our highest annual number of visitors, 3.9 million. We have maintained spending in core areas to ensure the collection is properly protected. Demand for our learning courses remained strong, but restrictions on capacity as a result of the Exhibition Road project continued to restrict activity in this area. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collection & Learning costs 	-37.5	-37.0
Exhibitions & Contemporary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The strong exhibition programme and the continuing success of our touring programme have supported income growth in the year. Just under 0.5 million people visited the 'Alexander McQueen: Savage Beauty' exhibition, marking the V&A's highest ever charging exhibition attendance figure. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Exhibition income Exhibition & contemporary costs 	6.4 -8.6	7.8 -11.0
Trading	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This was the best ever year for V&A Enterprises, the trading arm of the museum, supported by record visitor numbers and exhibition attendances. Highlights included <i>Tower of Babel</i>, an installation by ceramicist Barnaby Barford, resulting in net sales of £0.5m, and the development of a new publishing partnership with Thames & Hudson and Penguin Random House. The museum's venue hire business also had its most profitable year to date. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Trading profit 	3.5	8.0
Other Income	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This comprises fees charged to other organisations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Other Income 	2.9	2.8

Support

The V&A would like to pay special tribute to the following past and present major benefactors for their exceptional support

- The Al Thani Collection
- The American Friends of the V&A
- The Art Fund
- Arts and Humanities Research Council
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- Julie and Robert Breckman
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- Department for Culture, Media and Sport
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- Wartski
- Dr Susan Weber*
- The A. H. Whiteley Family
- The Wolfson Foundation
- Würth Group
- And others who wish to remain anonymous

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- The Canadian Friends of the V&A
- Cecil and Hilda Lewis Charitable Trust
- DCMS/Wolfson Museums and Galleries Improvement Fund
- The Friends of the V&A
- The Gladys Kriebel Delmas Foundation
- Lydia and Manfred Gorny*
- The Headley Trust
- The Henry Moore Foundation
- Heritage Lottery Fund
- John Lyon's Charity
- The John Armitage Charitable Trust
- William Loschert*
- The Monument Trust
- The Dr Mortimer and Theresa Sackler Foundation**

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- The Ruth Covo Family Foundation*
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- The Wolfson Foundation
- Würth Group
- And others who wish to remain anonymous

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- The Ruddock Foundation for the Arts
- The Sackler Trust
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The V&A is very grateful to those who have made a contribution to the museum's work through the Director's Circle

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- Nicholas Stanley
- Michael Warshaw
- Michael G. and C. Jane Wilson*

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- **Alexander McQueen: Savage Beauty**
14 March – 2 August 2015
In partnership with Swarovski; supported by American Express; with thanks to M•A•C Cosmetics; Technology partner Samsung
- **What is Luxury?**
25 April – 27 September 2015
A V&A and Crafts Council exhibition.
Sponsored by Northacre
- **Shoes: Pleasure and Pain**
13 June 2015 – 31 January 2016
Sponsored by Clarks; supported by Agent Provocateur; with additional thanks to The Worshipful Company of Cordwainers
- **Musical Wonders of India**
16 September 2015 – ongoing display and digital project supported by The Helen Hamlyn Trust
- **The Fabric of India**
3 October 2015 – 10 January 2016
Supported by Good Earth India; with thanks to Experion and NIRAV MODI
- **Bejewelled Treasures: The Al Thani Collection**
21 November 2015 – 10 April 2016
Sponsored by Wartski
- **Julia Margaret Cameron**
28 November 2015 – 14 February 2016
Supported by The Bern Schwartz Family Foundation

- **Botticelli Reimagined**
5 March – 3 July 2016
Sponsored by Societe Generale.
The exhibition was organised by the V&A and the Gemäldegalerie – Staatliche Museen zu Berlin
- **Paul Strand: Photography and Film for the 20th Century**
19 March – 3 July 2016
Supported by the American Friends of the V&A
- **The Jameel Prize 3 International Tour**
In partnership with Art Jameel

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Acquisitions and Conservation

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- Ms Diana Quasha (Chair)
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- Mr Thomas Quick
- Mr Leslie Schreyer
- Mr Bernard Selz
- Mr Christopher Thom
- Dr Susan Weber

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- Lawrence Frederick Baker
- John Russell Brown in memory of Gilbert and Margaret Cousland
- Ida Carrara
- Rosalind Dallas
- Isabel Mary Stoner
- Sheila M. Streek

The V&A is very grateful for the many objects which have been accepted by Her Majesty's Government in lieu of Inheritance Tax and allocated to the Victoria and Albert Museum in 2015/2016

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*Donations marked with an asterisk were made possible by the American Friends of the V&A

**These projects have been made possible with support from the Canadian Friends of the V&A

Saving endangered treasures for posterity

BRENDAN CORMIER

One thing that becomes apparent working at a museum is the fragility of things. In a collection as large as the V&A's, the sheer volume of labour that goes into maintaining objects in the best condition possible is a phenomenon seldom fully recognised by the general public. Indeed, it is thanks to an army of diligent conservators, registrars, invigilators and curators that the collection has remained relatively damage-free. Regardless, the world is unpredictable, making it hard to ensure that any collection is entirely safe from harm. This was made brutally clear last year when ISIS attacked and destroyed monuments in Syria and Iraq in a single gesture that erased significant pieces of cultural heritage from the planet. For preservationists, it is precisely these kinds of unpredictable forces – to which we can add natural disaster, climate change, mass tourism, urbanisation, neglect and accident – that is cause for concern.

How do we preserve in the face of unpredictability? This dilemma was the starting point for 'A World of Fragile Parts', the exhibition I curated with research curator Danielle Thom for the inaugural Pavilion of Applied Arts at the Venice Biennale of Architecture. This was the first product of a new collaboration between the V&A and La Biennale, which involves the annual preparation of an applied arts exhibition and summer school to accompany both the art and architecture biennales.

The collaboration is exciting in that it prompts us to explore how to frame ideas about applied arts in wider conversations about architecture and art, and to consider what a museum such as the V&A can contribute to the format of a biennale. The summer school also provides a valuable opportunity to invite participants from around the world to discuss and study the themes explored in the biennale and the exhibition, building on our strengths as a place of research, open investigation and learning.

For the 2016 Architecture Biennale, director Alejandro Aravena chose 'Reporting from the Front' as his overarching theme. He was interested in how architecture could present pragmatic solutions and approaches to urgent global issues. To complement this theme, I proposed that we look at potential solutions to the critical problem of preservation, and to draw inspiration from one specific area



Installation view of 'A World of Fragile Parts'
Photo: Andrea Avezzu, courtesy La Biennale di Venezia

of the museum that seemed to offer a radical approach to the topic: the Cast Courts.

The two vast rooms are filled with large-scale plaster cast copies of sculpture and architectural details from around Europe, mainly acquired in the latter half of the nineteenth century as part of Henry Cole's mission to bring great works of art and architecture to the British masses. For works that couldn't be moved, such as buildings and sculpture owned by other institutions, his solution was to make very good copies. Curiously, after 150 years of care and conservation, many of these have outlasted their originals. For instance, Trajan's Column in Rome has been subject to a century of pollution since its cast was made, while the V&A version is in much better condition. Our casts have thus become valuable records of how objects looked in the past. We also have copies in the collection whose originals have been destroyed by war. As part of the current works to restore and renew the Cast Courts, the Central Gallery located between the Weston Cast Court and the Northern European Cast Court will be transformed into an



V&A Italian Cast Court, Gallery 46B, December 1920

interpretation space examining these themes and the new significance of historical reproductions. The Cast Courts demonstrate how creating copies of works of art can serve as useful back-ups in case the originals are lost forever.

Drawing from this idea, we observed how powerful new digital scanning and fabrication techniques have emerged, meaning that creating a vast database of back-ups is now faster and more affordable than ever before. Open-source software and processes such as photogrammetry have enabled anyone with a smartphone to make fairly accurate 3D scans of objects, which can be uploaded on to online platforms and freely shared. There are even organisations scouring the internet trying to amass enough photographic data to re-create 3D models of the cultural heritage of Palmyra, lost in 2015 to attacks by ISIS.

'A World of Fragile Parts', supported by Volkswagen Group, aimed to demonstrate links between the nineteenth-century enthusiasm for copies as evidenced in our Cast Courts and twenty-first-century digital preservation projects. In Venice, we were able to bring together plaster casts, electrotypes and photography from our own collection and juxtapose them with displays of contemporary technology, including 3D prints, robotically carved stone, laser-etched glass and CNC-milled foam. The opportunity to use historic objects from our collection to shed light on a very contemporary conversation highlighted one of the key strengths of the V&A: the diversity and depth of our collection offers an almost unlimited set of stories to be told.

Brendan Cormier is the lead curator of twentieth and twenty-first-century design for the V&A Gallery in Shekou, China. In 2016 he curated 'A World of Fragile Parts' for the Pavilion of Applied Arts at the Venice Biennale of Architecture. The exhibition was supported by Volkswagen Group

The China connection

ANAÏS AGUERRE

“I hear and I forget. I see and I remember. I do and I understand” – Confucius

In June 2014 the V&A entered into a pioneering collaboration with China Merchants Group and China Merchants Shekou Holdings to support an ambitious project to create the first major museum platform dedicated to design in Shenzhen, south China. This will materialise next year with the opening of Design Society, which will encompass the new V&A Gallery, Shekou, and present a series of V&A touring exhibitions.

The ambition is to develop a new sustainable and meaningful model for V&A international partnerships based on sound financial and cultural principles. Through this collaboration we want to establish deep and inclusive ways to engage with creative communities in China at a moment when there is a transition from “made in China” to “created in China”. We also want to explore how this new type of international collaboration can provide fresh opportunities for V&A expertise, collections and narrative to encounter a new public.

The past year has enabled us to begin to achieve this ambition. By taking part in the formation of a new cultural institution we have been able to carry out “research in action”, engage in a productive cross-cultural dialogue, meet new audiences and grow our collection. Research on the ground and relationship-building with local communities have been central to the development of the V&A Gallery, Shekou, in ensuring that what we are bringing to this project – namely our collection and expertise – takes into account the contextual significance of Shekou, Shenzhen and China.

The exhibition ‘Unidentified Acts of Design’ was mounted at the 2015 Bi-City Biennale of Urbanism and Architecture (UABB) in Shenzhen. Curated by Luisa E. Mengoni and Brendan Cormier, two members of the V&A Shekou team, it identified a series of alternative acts of design that have occurred or are emerging outside of the conventional studio context in Shenzhen and the Pearl River Delta urban area. Challenging the notion that design

in Shenzhen is limited to reproductions with little originality, the show aimed to redefine and expand our understanding of design history in the region. This thought-provoking display received the Bronze Dragon Award at the biennale, but, more importantly, it functioned as a test site for practice-based research and experimentation with different approaches to learning and audience engagement. Discussion groups and events enabled a lively exchange about design, learning and cultural heritage in Shenzhen that will inform the development of the V&A Gallery’s interpretation plan and the learning programme strategy. As a result of this research, we were able to make new acquisitions for the V&A collection to be first shown in Shenzhen. It was also an opportunity to champion the city as a proper design centre, a positioning and identity that has been picked up by various media outlets since. The display was subsequently shown in the V&A’s T. T. Tsui Gallery of Chinese Art during London Design Festival 2016.

Additionally, we were invited to curate a small display about the collaboration, as part of broader Chinese engagement, to President Xi Jinping during his state visit to the UK in October 2015. In May 2016 we also presented the project in Shenzhen to the former Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, John Whittingdale.

The coming year will see a continuing effort to pursue the constructive cross-cultural dialogue that forms the basis of this project. We will carry on finding ways to understand each other better and reach common operational ground to ensure the successful opening of Design Society.

Anaïs Aguerre is head of international initiatives at the V&A





Research in action

EILEEN BUDD

VARI (V&A Research Institute) is an ambitious new programme of research and teaching partnerships that will enhance access to the V&A's collections and develop new approaches to research, training, display and interpretation.

As the museum develops its galleries in South Kensington and plans new storage facilities and the opening of V&A East, VARI takes the V&A's thriving research culture into a new phase, making its collections and expertise more accessible and connecting them with academic partners and art and design practitioners. The programme was launched in June 2016 with generous funding from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. The VARI team and administrative infrastructure is now in place, enabling exciting progress in its sub-projects, a brief overview of which is given below.

The Leman album

[Accessing conservation and object archeology](#)

This project involves the conservation and digital reproduction of the Leman album, an eighteenth-century volume containing Europe's earliest surviving set of silk designs. Following the completion of the condition assessment of the album's 105 examples, we are now ready to undertake analysis of the pages, testing for the presence of natural, organic colourants. To this end, an application has been submitted to MOLAB (Mobile LABoratory, the mobile facilities for in-situ measurements).

Analysis – both of the designs and of the recently acquired woven silk – is crucial for future care, storage and display, and to discover important information regarding materials, techniques and the history of these designs. If successful, we will work with schools and other cultural organisations in east London to bring James Leman's story back to the Spitalfields neighbourhood where the designer and weaver lived and worked.



Leman album illustration by Eileen Budd
© Eileen Budd

The Leman album



Residencies

Accessing people and spaces

The Artists Residencies project expands the V&A's engagement with art and design practices, building bridges between South Kensington and east London. In May 2016 we welcomed muf architecture/art as our first ever Embedded Residency, a new model where residents are not based in a studio in the museum, but become “embedded” in the organisation by other means.

Between September and November 2016 three members of Paraa, a Dhaka-based architectural studio, became our first VARI off-site residents, based at SPACE Studio's The White Building in Hackney Wick. In Bangladesh, Paraa's projects are aimed at enhancing spaces for communities through interdisciplinary practice. Their time with us is being spent exploring V&A East's local cultures, engaging and working with neighbourhoods within close proximity to the new museum.

Encounters on the shop floor

Accessing the knowledge of the maker

The Encounters project brings together practitioners in the arts, humanities, sciences and social sciences to explore making and “embodied” knowledge. It has begun building on an innovative collaboration between Imperial College London, the V&A and the Art Workers' Guild to study models of thinking and doing that emerge from exchanges between different communities of “knowledge-makers”.

Through a programme of workshops and collaborative post-graduate seminars, the project places kinesthetic learning and applied engagement at the centre of research and aims to develop this approach as well as finding new ways to export it. The first of these workshops took place at the University of Cambridge in October 2016 with the generous support of CRASSH (Centre for Research in the Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities).

Opening the cabinet of curiosities

Accessing legacies of objects

This project is a study of the afterlife of the nineteenth-century cabinet of curiosities and its potential for twenty-first-century collecting and display. The coming year will see lectures and workshops in partnership with the Delfina Foundation, the Whitechapel Gallery and the Gilbert Foundation.

The V&A is a vibrant and dynamic centre for interdisciplinary object-led research and teaching. VARI will help us to develop new ways of connecting educational institutions, the creative industries and the public with the museum's objects.

Eileen Budd is project management officer for VARI and an illustrator

A new dawn

CATHERINE INCE

Concept visual developed by Sam Jacob
Studio exploring ideas of activity, display
and the connection of V&A East to its east
London context © Sam Jacob Studio

“The planning of a city cannot overlook two key public buildings still considered an intellectual luxury: the museum and the library”

– Lina Bo Bardi, *Houses or Museums*, 1958

In a recent speech, V&A director Martin Roth emphasised that the original and continuing mission at the heart of the museum’s work is “to provide the greatest level of education and inspiration to the greatest number of people”. It might sound a rather obvious guiding principle to those who cherish cultural institutions and value their role in society, but in Britain, at a time when we are in danger of isolating ourselves from the rest of the world, rethinking the role museums can and should play in today’s society takes on a new sense of urgency.

We are grappling with these concerns as we develop the vision for a new V&A institution, tentatively called V&A East, which is due to open in the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park in 2021 and will form part of the park’s new Cultural and Education District. V&A East will be dedicated to the past, present and future of creativity and imagination, and will provide greater access to the V&A’s exceptional collections of art, design and performance. Our ambition, put simply, is to inspire our visitors to think differently about the world in which they live, and to participate in shaping its future.

Before we can establish how these guiding principles will be expressed at V&A East, we need to consider the context in which this new institution will exist. What concerns do our future visitors have about the world today, and what type of place do we need to create so that these questions can be explored and debated? What are the social and educational responsibilities of a museum operating in the age of the anthropocene, and against a backdrop of geopolitical tumult and unprecedented global connectivity? How will this vital, broader context shape the ways in which V&A East collects, displays, interprets, programmes and communicates the designed world both in its physical spaces and in the digital realm? Such questions guide our current research and are challenging us to think about the relevance and potential of our collections to inspire and inform in inventive new ways.

Our work is not carried out in isolation, however. V&A East will also be developing a new and ambitious partnership with Washington DC’s Smithsonian Institution, the world’s largest museum and research complex. We will work together to unite our collections and expertise in the arts, sciences and humanities, and meet the demand from the public for new methods of participating in the generation of knowledge, learning, making and thinking. This exciting partnership enables us to renew the founding missions of our two institutions and think together about how museums can address the challenges of today.

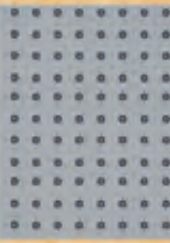
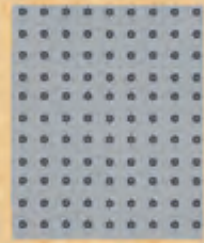
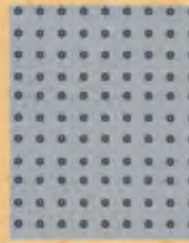
The new Cultural and Education District in the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park also presents a unique opportunity to work with some of Britain’s most pioneering and influential cultural and academic institutions, including University College London, Sadler’s Wells and the London College of Fashion (part of University of the Arts London). We hope our collaborations will extend to the many artistic, cultural and educational organisations long-established within the four Olympic boroughs, and conversations to this end are already underway.

V&A East, and the wider Cultural and Education District, is set to become an integral part of the rich and varied landscape of east London and promises a new cultural centre for the city. In the words of London Mayor Sadiq Khan, who will now lead the Olympic Park project to its realisation: “London is open.”

Catherine Ince is senior curator, V&A East



THE OLD PALACE BROMLEY- BY- BOW



A museum for everyone in the world

Outgoing V&A director Martin Roth and journalist Peter Aspden in conversation

PETER ASPDEN You spoke at the dinner held for the opening of ‘You Say You Want a Revolution? Records and Rebels 1966–1970’ and said that you felt you had accomplished your “mission”. What was your perception of that mission when you arrived here?

MARTIN ROTH To summarise, it was to make a successful museum even more successful. When I went to [Staatliche Kunstsammlungen] Dresden, fifteen or sixteen years ago, it was like kissing a sleeping beauty. Here, it was more complicated because the museum already had a great reputation and there was some reluctance to embrace change. My personal strategy was to make it more outgoing. Maybe more, in a certain way, based on society. I wanted to go back to the V&A’s founding philosophy. Prince Albert’s idea was a museum for everyone, so my question was: who is “everyone” today – not only in London but across the nation, and, in these digital times, everywhere?

PA I think one of the interesting things about the twenty-first century is that we’re all more connected with each other, but that doesn’t necessarily mean we’re talking to each other in the right way. What I liked is that you actually made the museum a physical centre for lots of things, lots of internationalist initiatives. I was reading in your Annual Report, for example, that more than 10,000 people came here to celebrate Diwali last year. So there is a virtual world, but it strikes me that you’ve also physically embodied that idea of a globalised culture.

MR Yes, and not only here, but also in Dundee and in Shenzhen. There is a strategy in going to China and other places around the world to explain who we are. It’s not enough just to send objects; we have people from the V&A there, we have Chinese colleagues here. It’s not enough to send culture around in a kind of colonial way. I think it’s much better to have these platforms.

PA Those kinds of initiatives have been called, rightly or wrongly, cultural diplomacy...

MR I’m not a fan of cultural diplomacy. Never have been.

PA You don’t like the phrase?

MR I don’t like it. I’m not a diplomat. I think that with this notion of cultural diplomacy you expect too much from culture. I don’t think

you can stop a war or make the lives of refugees much better with an art exhibition. But you can help to create understanding and you can bridge conflicts. You can do something for prevention. I remember when the German ambassador in Tehran called me and said: “Please come, because you are the only ones who *can* come.” At the time there was an embargo on businessmen and politicians travelling to Iran, and those involved with arts and culture were among the only people allowed to go there. I will never forget that phone call...

PA It’s a question of keeping *something* going – the debate...

MR We are children of the Cold War, and we remember the Cold War, so I think the most horrible thing that could happen is if you don’t talk to each other. This is culture, not diplomacy. If you call it diplomacy, then you expect too much from us.

PA It’s been a fantastic time for the V&A over the past year: attendance at almost 3.9 million, private funding raised to £19.4 million and profit from your commercial department up to £7.8 million. Of all these achievements, which are you most proud of?

MR I think what I’m really proud of is the daily job. I’m glad that we have been so successful, but in the different roles that I’ve had in the past 25 years, it’s always been about a collection. A collection works without a museum, but a museum never works without a collection. If you ask me what makes me feel really proud, it is our senior management team. I had the ambition to run a museum in a more businesslike way, and we have a super team.

PA Let’s go back in time – right back to your PhD thesis. It was on museums and cultural politics in Weimar, and the Third Reich – an extraordinary period. What did it teach you about culture and politics?

MR I was always interested in this strange German way of having a very strong regional identity and a gradient national identity. If you were to ask me if I am German, if I have a German identity, then I would say yes, sure. I’m not proud of that German identity, but I have one. If you asked me if I had a Swabian identity, then I would say absolutely, I’m really Swabian! I was interested in regional museums, small museums and national museums, and the amazing social exhibitions of the 1920s and the changing of those social exhibitions under the Third Reich. They moved very smoothly into propaganda.



Martin Roth, aged 15. Photo courtesy Martin Roth

A lot of people in the late 1920s knew that it was coming. They were somehow paralysed first of all, watching what was going on. There were a lot of smart people from the arts and culture and science thinking: “Oh, I think it will not be too bad, I hope we can cope with it.” In 1933/1934 it got more brutal. I think that’s something that I would say today – not that there are similarities, that’s not what I’m saying – but be open, be cautious, watch things and don’t trust what politicians are saying. I think we also have a responsibility to challenge what they are saying. We have to stand up to what is going on around us. I mean, look at the wave of new “nationalism” that is sweeping across Europe. If we don’t stand up to this, then who will? This is why the current exhibition ‘You Say You Want a Revolution? Records and Rebels 1966–1970’ is so important. It reminds us of all that was achieved 50 years ago with regards to tolerance, solidarity, equality and compassion, and – more importantly – that we stand on the precipice of losing this if we don’t do something and institute a moral check of our constitution.

PA The other day I was in my car and I’d just been reading about Trump, and I was kind of furious. I was thinking: “How is this going to stop?” I put my iPod on and the first thing that came up was *Subterranean Homesick Blues*, and I played it really loudly and it was so cathartic: “Don’t follow leaders, watch the parking meters...”

MR I don’t think there’s been a day in my life when I haven’t listened to Bob Dylan. He’s definitely the soundtrack to my life.

PA It takes your anger and it makes you think: “Right, that’s an expression, that’s a brilliant, poetic expression of this anger that I’m feeling.” *Born in the U.S.A.* by Bruce Springsteen, which was used by the Republican Party...

MR Absolutely. It’s another one of the reasons I was so keen to put on ‘You Say You Want a Revolution?’ – to trace things back to their origins.

PA We both remember the 1960s. You were a teenager, I was in primary school, but there are things I recall – like Paul McCartney singing *Hey Jude* on TV. It was a period during which the relationship between culture and politics was at its most interesting...

MR Do you mean the tension between culture and subculture?

PEGIDA (Patriotic Europeans against the Islamisation of the West) demonstration in Dresden © PA Images



PA Well perhaps in comparison with today, I don't feel that contemporary culture has that kind of traction with political developments.

MR First of all, quite a lot of politicians in power today are coming exactly from that time, at least in my home country. Frank-Walter Steinmeier, the foreign secretary, is a great politician because he comes exactly from that spirit. We fought for this. Freedom for everything is somehow freedom for nothing. What was it Janis Joplin sang? "Freedom's just another word for nothing left to lose." Freedom has to be engaged, freedom has to have a tendency. Freedom has to have a goal and aim and direction. If it's just freedom without responsibilities, you don't want to be engaged in anything. Steve Jobs said: "Stay hungry, stay foolish"...

PA Which comes from the *Whole Earth Catalogue*...

MR Exactly, yes, it's incredible that this was the spirit of Apple. I'm not so sure if they still think it today. It's a kind of slogan, but we needed it to understand capitalism.

Capitalism went wild and destroyed a lot of values coming out of the 1960s. A strange contradiction in itself is that we were somehow against moral values, but today we understand that we created a lot of moral values. I mean solidarity, tolerance, gay rights, gender

balance. I remember very well – it's almost difficult to talk about it – women at that time, at least in Germany but I'm sure it was the same here, were not really accepted. You know, it was all about men, and then there was this other gender called "woman". Fortunately, my father was somehow different. He helped a lot at home... I don't know why he was different, but he was. I remember when he'd say that he didn't want to go to something somewhere, to accept an invitation, because "they" were not very nice to women. I was maybe six or seven when I heard him say something like this. It was a completely different mindset.

PA What do you think you will miss about the V&A?

MR The collection and the value connected to the objects – the moral value, or the social value. It's the moral duty of a national museum director to be public and to say: "This is not what I can accept for the nation, for my collection, for my job, for myself." Our job is to be the keepers – not only of the past, but also keepers of the future.

There is this movement in Germany called PEGIDA, which is absolutely fascist, and they held a demonstration in front of the museums in Dresden. That, probably, was the moment when I first thought: "I have to do something" – when there was a photo in the press everywhere showing a gallows in front of the Old Masters Gallery. On the gallows it read: "Reserved for Angela Merkel." That was more than a shock. That was the moment I thought: "Gosh, it's time to be more outspoken," and then there was Brexit. So that's the story.

PA Coming back to Prince Albert and this idea of – and I know it's something you've talked about before – risk: the need for a museum to take risks, not just to sit on a collection...

MR When Prince Albert developed that idea with his committee for Crystal Palace, the commission recommended brick buildings, traditional buildings, but he didn't accept that. He wanted to have something futuristic, so he talked to Joseph Paxton, the architect who had designed greenhouses for the Chatsworth estate when he was head gardener there. Paxton's idea for the Crystal Palace was risk-taking: a glass building, new scale, never done before. You know Gottfried Semper?

PA Yes.

MR He helped to build barricades in Dresden in the 1848 revolution, and he was very good at it because he was an architect. He escaped to London, and Henry Cole introduced him to Prince Albert. His ideas have brought society and objects together, creating education and learning programmes. He made amazing drawings outlining potential designs for the V&A. He was a refugee, Gottfried Semper.

What I mean is we have to be open to society. I still think that Prince Albert built this museum because he loved the arts and architecture and engineering, but, at the same time, he knew that the world could fall apart; he knew about the revolutions in Germany in the 1830s; and he knew that the *Kommunistische Internationale*, the *Kommunistische Manifesto*...

PA The *Communist Manifesto*, yes...

MR The manifesto was published here in London in 1848, and the V&A was built just around that time. I think he knew that if he didn't do something for what were then called the proletariat, the country would fall apart. So it was an investment in the future of the people, and I think this is still important – but I believe we have to do it in a completely different way. It has to be done in a more digital way. We have to go to the people. That's one of the reasons I've been really keen on restarting the V&A Circulation Department, working with schools and with museums across the UK.

PA The museum's mission statement talks about the designed world, promoting research, scholarship and enjoyment of the designed world. What are the things that excite you, and that you feel optimistic about?

MR The V&A has always been a local museum for a global community and a global museum for a local community. Let's say you and your family come from Aleppo, but you grew up in London. If you want to learn more about your origins and your home town, come to the V&A – we have the objects. I want you even to bring your own objects from Aleppo, because we have the collection to house them.

I want to see people come in and make their own exhibitions, together with a curator. We have to change the job of the curator so

it's a bit more open to the public. If you are a journalist, I want you to come and research here.

A collection is a knowledge bank. If you are a professor at a university, come with your students. If you are a teacher, come with your pupils. If you are in business, come to talk to us. We always talk about the future, but why don't we go back in time and rediscover – with the knowledge of today – the making of the past? Why don't we learn more from the past? Not in a "traditional" sense, but innovations of the past that we have completely forgotten. The knowledge sits in here.

When I was in Dresden a dermatologist from Houston, Texas, wanted to meet me. I thought "that's really not my field of expertise", but he insisted on the meeting, so I couldn't say no. He came to see me and could not stop talking. There was a really brutal skin disease that was believed to be native to the North American continent, but his theory was that it had travelled from Europe with the first settlers. The only way to find evidence for that was to look at prints and drawings and portraits. He visited many archives and collections to search for evidence, and he found it in the Old Masters Gallery in Dresden. He changed the theory and the medication. It changed the way of seeing things.

So it's always about the collection. Right now, the V&A is looking for somewhere to relocate its stored collection. It's a challenge, but also a great opportunity to develop a new kind of flexible storage system that meets the multiple needs of the museum and the visitors. We have to have instant access, and the storage facility has to become active.

I try to learn from other practices and fields as much as possible. I have spent hours in the warehouses of Würth, which is essentially a global wholesaler for nuts and bolts. The company also has a great art collection, and I act as one of the advisers. When I'm there for meetings, I like to visit the warehouses and drive around with the workers. It looks like *Mad Max*. You go up ten floors and down eight floors and left and right and just pick up stuff. It made me start to think about museum storage in a completely new way. I don't know what the solution is for the V&A, but I think you have to open yourself up to thinking in a kind of utopian way.

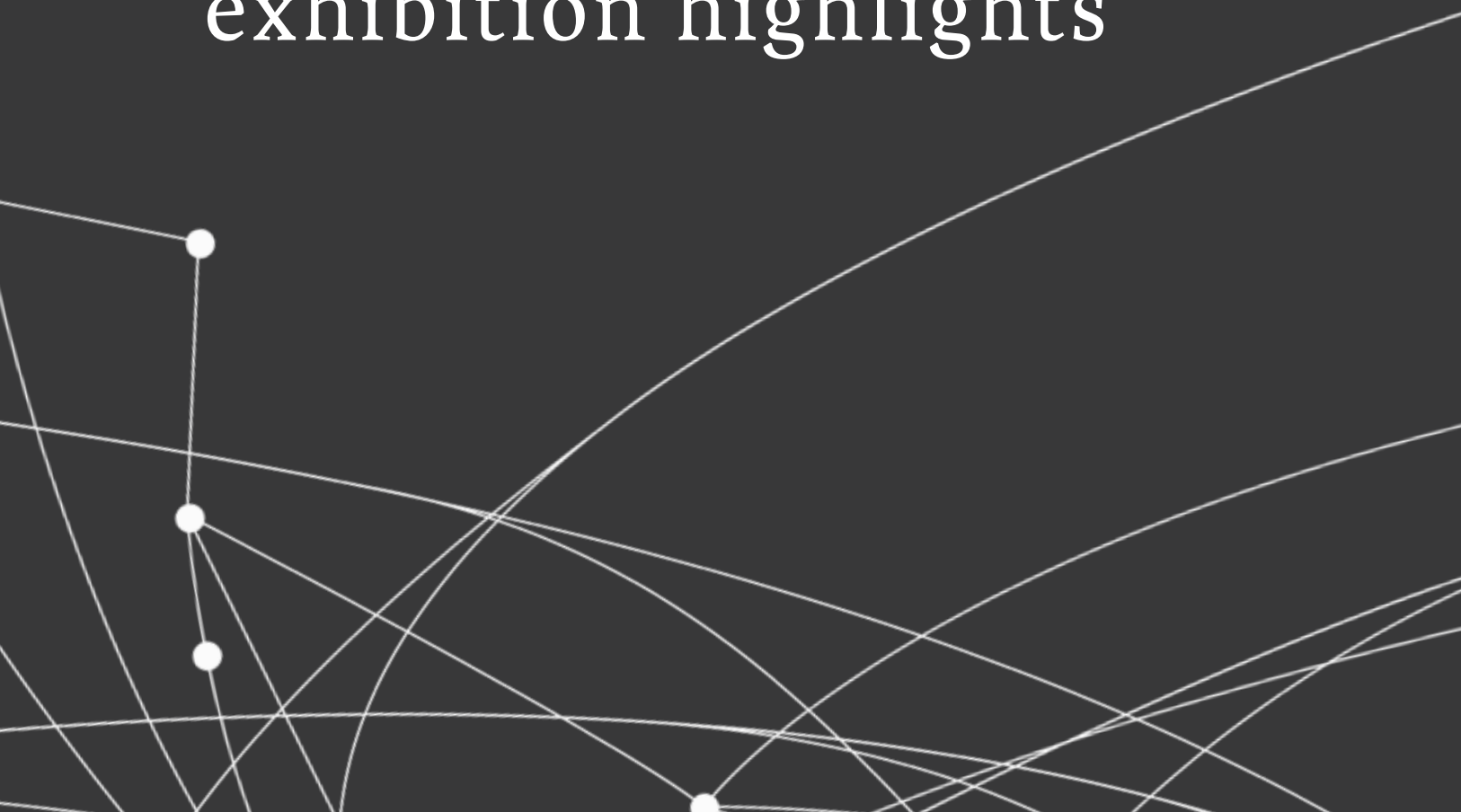




Photograph by Hugo Burnand

From left to right:
Andrew Hochhauser QC, Steve McGuckin, Emmajane Avery, Dr Paul Thompson, Mark Sebba (seated front), Nick Hoffman (standing behind), Professor Margot Finn (seated front), Heather Francis (standing behind), Sir John Sorrell (seated front), Professor Bill Sherman (standing behind), Dame Theresa Sackler DBE (seated front), Tim Reeve, Dr Martin Roth, Nicholas Coleridge CBE, Caroline Silver (seated front), Robert Click (standing behind), David Bickle (seated front), Anthony Misquitta (standing behind), Anna Jackson (seated front), Mark Damazer CBE (standing behind), Elaine Bedell (seated front), Edmund de Waal OBE, Professor Evelyn Welch MBE, Alex Stitt, Jane Lawson

Current and future exhibition highlights



Undressed: A Brief History of Underwear

Until 12 March 2017

Sponsored by Agent Provocateur and Revlon

You Say You Want a Revolution? Records and Rebels

1966–1970

Until 26 February 2017

In partnership with Levi's®

Sound experience by Sennheiser

With additional support from Grow Annenberg Foundation,
Fenwick and Sassoon

Opus Anglicanum: Masterpieces of English

Medieval Embroidery

Until 5 February 2017

Support generously provided by The Ruddock Foundation
for the Arts

Supported by Hand & Lock

Lockwood Kipling: Arts & Crafts in the Punjab and London

14 January – 2 April 2017

Supported by the Friends of the V&A

The Pink Floyd Exhibition: Their Mortal Remains

13 May – 1 October 2017

Presented by the V&A, Pink Floyd and Iconic

Entertainment Studios

Sound Experience by Sennheiser

Balenciaga: Shaping Fashion

27 May 2017 – 18 February 2018

Plywood

15 July – 12 November 2017

Supported by the American Friends of the V&A

Opera: Passion, Power and Politics

30 September 2017 – 25 February 2018

Sponsored by Societe Generale

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The London Community Foundation

Winnie-the-Pooh: Exploring a Classic

16 December 2017 – 8 April 2018

**V&A Annual Review
2015–16**

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