



News Release

The V&A adds WeChat as the first social media application in its collection

The Victoria and Albert Museum, London (V&A), today announced that it has added a version of WeChat (Weixin) to its collection, making the V&A the world's first museum to collect a social media application. WeChat is the most widely used social media application in China, connecting over 963 million monthly active users worldwide.

The WeChat app joins the V&A's Design, Architecture and Digital (DAD) collections, which aim to represent the most influential and relevant design objects of our time. Visitors to the V&A in London can now see the WeChat application showcased on a mobile phone in Gallery 76, accompanied by digital stickers and sketches. This digital acquisition stems from the V&A's ongoing work and research in Shenzhen, one of the most important design centers in China, as part of our curatorial work in China leading up to the opening of the V&A Gallery at Design Society, a major new design hub opening in December 2017.

Tim Reeve, Deputy Director of the V&A said "This acquisition represents a snapshot of a globally consumed social media platform. It is a fantastically important addition to our collection of digital design, reflecting the ever-changing way we communicate and consume information. This technology reflects the cutting edge research and valuable relationships we are developing in Shenzhen, one of the main centers for design in China and a leader in the wider manufacturing and creative industries in the Pearl River Delta."

The new addition to the collection captures both a virtual and physical snapshot of WeChat at a particular moment in time for the V&A's collections, allowing the Museum to collect, and also conserve and display this important social media platform for our visitors. The acquisition features a demo version of the Android Package Kit (APK) from 2017, which was specially made for the Museum by the developer of WeChat, Tencent Technology (Shenzhen) Company Limited. This means that the software can be run without accessing the server, thereby ensuring functionality and engagement for visitors and researchers today and in the future. In addition, the V&A is acquiring a full set of Bubble Pup GIFs used in the app, and design sketches of Bubble Pup by the WeChat design team as examples of the digital design process.

WeChat, developed by Zhang Xiaolong in the Guangzhou Research Center of Tencent in late 2010 and launched in early 2011, is one of the most popular social media platforms today. The V&A has obtained the application from its developer Tencent Technology (Shenzhen) Company Limited, which was founded in 1998 in Shenzhen, China. Part of the app's success is that it provides 'apps within apps', setting it apart from other social media platforms. In 2011, soon after WeChat launched, it introduced voice messaging, allowing people to send short audio notes. This was quickly adopted in China, as voice messaging was quicker and more intuitive. Other messaging apps added this feature years later.

The V&A has a long-standing relationship with China and the new acquisition joins one of the most comprehensive collections of Chinese art and design outside East Asia, with over 18,000 pieces dating from 3000 BC to the present. Driven by the ideas to promote an understanding of each other's

cultures, the V&A draws on a long history of working with partners in China, including the ‘China Design Now’ exhibition in 2008 to coincide the Beijing Olympic Games, ‘Imperial Chinese Robes from the Forbidden City’ exhibition in 2010 where the museum staged an unprecedented exhibition of treasures from the Palace Museum in Beijing, ‘Passion for Porcelain’ exhibition at the National Museum in 2012 featuring the remarkable story of porcelain trade between China and Europe, as well as the ‘Masterpieces of Chinese Painting 700 – 1900’ exhibition in 2013, which was the first time that many of these masterpieces on loan from China had been seen in Europe. The V&A’s collaboration with China Merchants Shekou Holdings (CMSK) to establish Design Society in Shekou builds on this important cultural relationship.

Luisa Elena Mengoni, Head of the V&A Gallery, Shekou at Design Society and Brendan Cormier, Lead Curator of the V&A Gallery at Design Society, who led the acquisition process in China said: “Working in Shenzhen on the new V&A Gallery, we’ve witnessed first-hand the incredible impact WeChat has had on daily life and working habits in China. As a social media platform designed to quickly respond to users’ needs and lifestyles, WeChat has arguably had more impact on Chinese society than any digital design in recent history. It thus became fundamentally important for us to find a way for it to be captured at this moment in time and preserved for the future.”

The WeChat Team added “WeChat is a lifestyle, bringing new and innovative ways to connect in modern Chinese society. It has always been a goal of the WeChat team to advance society forward by blending both the real and the virtual worlds, online and offline. It’s an honor for us to bear witness and help play our part in furthering this form of advancement.”

Ole Bouman, Director of Design Society said “Design Society is proud to provide the institutional and curatorial context in which these exciting new acquisitions of the V&A can take place. The combination of critical research and innovation that Design Society fosters, translates into many forms and it’s a great honor that it also informs the development of the V&A collection itself.”

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Notes to Editors

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

About V&A

The Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A) in London is the world’s leading museum of art, design and performance with collections unrivalled in their scope and diversity. It was established to make works of art available to all and to inspire British designers and manufacturers. Today, the V&A’s collections, which span over 5,000 years of human creativity in virtually every medium and from many parts of the world, continue to intrigue, inspire and inform.

V&A’s Design, Architecture and Digital Department builds upon the V&A’s industrial design heritage dating back to 1851. It is dedicated to enhancing the V&A’s reputation as the UK’s leading public resource for the study of design

The V&A is the founding partner of the not-for-profit Design Society Foundation. This pioneering collaboration between CMSK and the V&A is the first of its kind between a Chinese partner and a UK museum. The collaboration comprises the provision of professional advice and training; the concept, development and design of a V&A Gallery devoted to international design that will open in December 2017 with the site specific exhibition, *Values of Design*; and in addition the presentation of two major touring V&A exhibitions.

The WeChat acquisition was made possible by research undertaken by the V&A in Shenzhen, an important center for design in China, as part of the curatorial development of the V&A Gallery at

Design Society, a new design hub opening in December. Design Society is a result of a pioneering international partnership between the V&A and leading state-owned company China Merchants Shekou Holdings (CMSK), with the V&A a founding partner of Design Society Foundation. Other objects acquired as part of the V&A's ongoing research and engagement in Shenzhen include a DJI drone, a Seeeduino microcontroller, a 'shanzhai' mobile phone, and the WeChat-enabled toy Mon Mon.

www.vam.ac.uk

About WeChat

WeChat was originally designed to provide a smartphone-centric way for people to connect and communicate. First launched on January, 2011 by Tencent, China's largest technology company, WeChat has grown to include over 963 million MAU (2017) and now offers an entire world of intelligent mobile lifestyle services including media, payments, and other essential services. Since its launch in 2011, WeChat has grown from a simple "chat app" to encompass an entire mobile-centric intelligent lifestyle and aims to connect its nearly one billion users to the people, businesses, and services that they care about.

About Design Society

Design Society is a new cultural platform that generates a diverse public programme with the mission to activate design as a social catalyst. Design Society adheres to the pioneering spirit of Shekou and Shenzhen in creating a unique cultural experience and in programming a public space dedicated to design. It shows and tells the power of design through major exhibitions about the past, present and future of design, through curated galleries, shopping experiences and multi-faceted events. Entrepreneurial activities support and leverage the not-for-profit programme in order to build an innovative and sustainable new institution. Design Society is an open and collaborative platform, fostering synergies, connecting China and the world, and empowering the inter-connectivity between design and society, design and everyday life, and design and industry. Design Society will test new ideas, incubate new talents and explore new opportunities for creative industries. The encouragement of creative dialogue and collaborations aims to design a better society. Design Society and the Sea World Culture and Arts Center welcome collaborations openly.

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