



PRESS RELEASE

V&A reopens the Cast Courts with new interpretation gallery and secret hideaway within Trajan's Column

V&A Cast Courts
Opening 1 December 2018
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The V&A opens the second and final phase of its redevelopment of the Cast Courts, returning these iconic galleries to their original splendour. The renovation also features a brand-new gallery exploring the history, processes and significance of casts and copies as well as looking to their contemporary relevance and future in the digital age. New exhibits include a scaled-down digital reproduction of the arch of Palmyra that was destroyed by ISIS in 2015. Following the completion of the Weston Cast Court in 2014, the opening of these two galleries concludes this major project, which began in 2011.

After extensive restoration and conservation work, the West Court – now renamed the Ruddock Family Cast Court, in recognition of the generosity of the Ruddock Foundation for the Arts – reopens to the public revealing historic features, including original 19th-century floors and wall colours. The Central Gallery has been renamed the Chitra Nirmal Sethia Gallery to acknowledge the generous support of the N. Sethia Foundation. This gallery features a new exhibition exploring the history, significance and contemporary relevance of casts, which has been kindly supported by the Henry Moore Foundation.

Collecting plaster cast reproductions and electrotypes reached the height of popularity in the mid to late 19th century when only a select few could afford to travel outside of the UK. The South Kensington Museum (as the V&A was then known) was at the forefront of this enthusiasm, bringing together casts of important European monuments and works of art for visitors to admire and study here in the UK. In addition to its rapidly expanding collections of plaster casts, the V&A was a powerful driving force in the development of the revolutionary new replicating technologies of photography and electrotyping. These technologies enabled the museum to not only create a visual encyclopaedia of world ornament but to also position itself as the arbiter of international taste.

Angus Patterson, Senior Curator of Metalwork, said: *“The Courts are the strongest embodiment of the museum’s founding mission as a place of art education for both practitioners and the public. The collection was established to train artists and designers to draw rather than to teach artisans and craftspeople to make. The museum’s aim was both to get good product design into British factories and to shape ‘public taste’ to help consumers become more discerning in their choices.”*

The Cast Courts are the only public galleries in the V&A to display the same collection of objects as when they originally opened in 1873. First known as the Architecture Courts, these are the largest galleries in the V&A and contain casts of some of the world’s most inspiring objects, from

Michelangelo's *David* to 16th-century tombs by Peter Vischer in Nuremberg and the *Pórtico de la Gloria* from the Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela. It is one of the only surviving collections of casts in the world today as many other collections were dispersed or even destroyed when this artform fell out of fashion in the mid-20th century. Today, the collection presents a rich and varied array of monumental objects from Europe and beyond, as well as an invaluable record of original sculptures, some of which have severely deteriorated over time.

The largest object in the museum at 35 metres high is the awe-inspiring cast of *Trajan's Column*, which sits at the heart of the Ruddock Family Cast Court. The cast of this famous Roman memorial was transferred to the V&A in 1873 and is displayed in two separate sections as the gallery was unable to accommodate its full height. For the first time, the base of *Trajan's Column* is permanently opened, enabling visitors to step inside, providing a new perspective on its internal construction.

Holly Trusted, Senior Curator of Sculpture, said: *"Everyone who visits the Cast Courts is overwhelmed by a sense of theatre and excitement. Suddenly we are standing next to great monumental objects projecting their own histories, whether from classical Rome, Renaissance Italy, medieval France, Romanesque Spain or 12th-century Scandinavia. You are within a museum gallery, but simultaneously transported to see terrifically famous and exceptionally beautiful works of art from thousands of miles away."*

The Chitra Nirmal Sethia Gallery is a new interpretation space exploring the importance of copies. Many of the casts now offer the only true record of important monuments, as some have deteriorated due to weathering or have been destroyed during conflict. This new gallery features reproductions as well as contextual material and provides an insight into the technology and production of the works.

Key examples include casts from the 16th-century Tuileries Palace, burned down by the Paris Commune in 1871, making the casts the surviving three-dimensional evidence of the original building. Also on show is four 1879 electrotypes of an ornate silver cup given in 1677 to the Clothworkers' Company by the diarist, Samuel Pepys, which became the focus of a copyright dispute and one of the most controversial objects reproduced as an electrotype, as well as pioneering photographs by Charles Thurston Thompson, the world's first official museum photographer.

The gallery also looks to the future. On display for the first time is a CNC-milled limestone copy of a grave slab from Kala Koraysh in Dagestan alongside a scaled-down CNC-milled reproduction of an arch from Palmyra in Syria, destroyed by ISIS in 2015, both acquired by the museum to mark the launch of the Reproduction of Art and Cultural Heritage (ReACH) Declaration in 2017. This declaration set out a blueprint for reproduction in the digital age focusing on archaeological sites at risk. Its launch marked 150 years since Henry Cole's Universal Convention for Promoting Universally Reproductions of Works of Art for the Benefit of Museums of All Countries in 1867, whose success prompted the inception of the Cast Courts.

The reopening of the Cast Courts recalls the V&A's foundation and inspires a forward-thinking approach to the future of reproductions.

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For further press information please contact Kate Morais at k.morais@vam.ac.uk (not for publication)

A selection of high-resolution images is available to download from <http://pressimages.vam.ac.uk>

Notes to Editors

- Entry to the Cast Courts is FREE.
- Over the last 16 years the V&A has completed more than 50 building projects and transformed around 40,000 square metres of the museum. It has worked with some of the UK's most innovative architects, designers and engineers to create beautiful and contemporary new settings for the V&A's outstanding collections while renewing and restoring much of the building's original architecture and improving the visitors' experience.
www.vam.ac.uk/futureplan
- The V&A would like to extend special thanks to those who have generously supported the Cast Courts redevelopment project: Garfield Weston Foundation, Ruddock Foundation for the Arts, N. Sethia Foundation, American Friends of the V&A, American Express, DCMS/Wolfson Museums and Galleries Improvement Fund, and many other supporters.
- There are three related publications, *The Cast Courts* edited by Angus Patterson and Marjorie Trusted, *Copy Culture: Sharing in the Age of Digital Reproduction* edited by Brendan Cormier, and *The Museum and The Factory* by Alistair Grant and Angus Patterson and published by Lund Humphries.

The Ruddock Foundation for the Arts

The Ruddock Foundation for the Arts supports the cultural work of museums in the UK, Europe and the USA including scholarship, research, acquisitions, gallery renovations and exhibitions. The Foundation also supports productions by independent theatre companies in the UK and several educational charities. The Foundation was founded by Sir Paul and Lady Jill Ruddock CBE and its trustees also include Sophie Ruddock, Isabella Ruddock and Mr. Michael Fullerlove.

The N Sethia Foundation

The N Sethia Foundation is a UK registered charity, founded by Mr Nirmal Sethia in 1995.

The foundation has extensively supported medical research, youth activities and disaster relief management. As well as contributing to the projects of, among others, the Prince's Trust and the Prime Minister's Fund for Tsunami Relief, it has established the Chitra Sethia Centre for Robotics and Minimal Access Surgery at University College London and The Chitra Sethia Autism Centre in Cambridge.

The foundation's advisory board is comprised of Lily, The Dowager Duchess of Marlborough; Professor The Lord Darzi of Denham; Professor Sir Malcolm Grant CBE, Sir Robert Naylor, and Mr Senthil Nathan.

Founder Mr Nirmal Sethia's goal is to identify the plight of the underprivileged and, through a network of charitable trusts, dispense funds to worthy causes in a systematic and regulated manner.

nsethiafoundation.com

Metaphor

Metaphor, one of the UK's leading museum design studios, and also the V&A FuturePlan's originator in 1998, has been working on the refurbishment and redisplay of the Cast Courts for the last eight years, working closely with the curators, conservators and in the initial stages with Conservation Architect Julian Harrap. Stephen Greenberg, Founding Director of Metaphor, says: *"The Cast Courts are the heartbeat of the museum, and this has been a long and patient renewing of the largest galleries in the V&A where every placement has been thoughtfully considered. A highlight of this final phase is to let visitors both to enter and sit inside Trajan's column."*

Design Team

Metaphor – Designer

Julian Harrap , Conservation Architect, Phase I

Lighting, DHA Design Phase 1, Sutton Vane Associates, Phase II

Graphic Design, LucyorRobert, Phase 1, Why Not Associates Phase II