

News Release

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The V&A stages largest-ever exhibition on photographer Tim Walker with over 150 new works inspired by its collection

Tim Walker: Wonderful Things

Galleries 38a and 38

21 September 2019 – 8 March 2020

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In September 2019, a new V&A exhibition invites visitors to experience the fantastical imagination of Tim Walker, one of the world's most inventive photographers. *Tim Walker: Wonderful Things* is the largest exhibition of Walker's pictures to date. It celebrates his extraordinary contribution to image-making over the last 25 years and the inspirational role that the V&A's collection plays in his creative process.

At the heart of the exhibition are 10 major new photographic projects, directly influenced by treasures in the V&A's vast collection. In preparation for the exhibition, Walker visited object stores and conservation studios, meeting many of the museum's curators, conservators and technicians. He scoured the V&A's 145 public galleries, scaled the roof of the 12-acre South Kensington site, and explored the labyrinth of Victorian passages below ground level. Along the way, he encountered luminous stained-glass windows, vivid Indian miniature paintings, jewelled snuffboxes, erotic illustrations, golden shoes, and a 50-metre-long photograph of the Bayeux Tapestry, the largest photograph in the museum's collection. These and many other rare artefacts have inspired Walker's monumental new photographs, and feature in the exhibition designed by leading British creative, Shona Heath.

Tim Walker said: *"To me, the V&A has always been a palace of dreams – it's the most inspiring place in the world. The museum's collection is so wide and eclectic, and I think that's why it resonates with me so much. Many of the objects that I saw during my research at the museum made my heart swell and I wanted to try to create a photograph that would relate not only to the physical presence and beauty of that object, but also to my emotional reaction to it. Each new shoot is a love letter to an object from the V&A collection, and an attempt to capture my encounter with the sublime. For me, beauty is everything. I'm interested in breaking down the boundaries that society has created, to enable more varied types of beauty and the wonderful diversity of humanity to be celebrated. Preparing for this exhibition over the past three years has pushed me into new territories, which is very exciting, and I'm at a stage in my life where I feel brave enough to do that."*

Susanna Brown, Curator of Photographs at the V&A, said: *“We started discussing this project back in 2015 and it’s been a marvellous journey. Tim embarked on a sustained exploration of the museum and many V&A colleagues helped to spark his imagination by unlocking our collection stores and sharing the fascinating stories behind the objects with him. Tim has a wildly inquisitive mind and a boundless energy, he never stops innovating and these new pictures are some of the most spectacular he has ever made. Tim’s photographs and Shona’s exhibition design combine to create a show that I think our visitors will adore. The book which accompanies the exhibition reveals more about his complex process and includes fascinating interviews with Tim and twenty of his closest collaborators.”*

About the exhibition

Designed by leading creative director and Walker’s long-term collaborator Shona Heath, the exhibition showcases over 300 items, encompassing photographs and the V&A objects that inspired them, short films, photographic sets and props, scrapbooks and sketches. Heath’s spectacular design guides visitors on a journey through Walker’s enchanted world. Text written by Walker adds personal insight and celebrates the talents of the many collaborators who help bring his ideas to life, including stylists and creatives Katy England, Amanda Harlech and Jerry Stafford, and hair and make-up artists Malcolm Edwards, Julien d’Ys, isshehungry and Sam Bryant, among others.

The exhibition begins with 100 pictures from Walker’s previous projects and extracts from his Super 8 films, displayed in a sleek, white space. Walker first came to prominence in the 1990s with his unique approach to visual storytelling, blurring fantasy and reality to create pictures that can be surreal, lavish, humorous and touching. These images are populated by some of the biggest names in fashion: models including Edie Campbell, Lily Cole, Karen Elson and Stella Tennant and designers including Alexander McQueen, Balenciaga, Comme des Garçons and Rick Owens. Walker’s reference points are disparate, ranging from fairy tales to The Beatles’ lyrics, yet his photographs share a sensibility that is unmistakably his own. He avoids Photoshop and other virtual tools in favour of beautifully crafted physical sets and awe-inspiring locations, from Myanmar to Japan and Mexico.

The first room of the exhibition displays these inventive fashion stories alongside portraits of luminaries such as Sir David Attenborough, Peter Blake and David Hockney, and a constellation of performers including Riz Ahmed, Cate Blanchett, Björk, Timothée Chalamet, Beth Ditto, Daniel Day-Lewis, Claire Foy, Saoirse Ronan and Solange Knowles. One wall is devoted to the photographer’s muses, including performers Tilda Swinton and Lindsay Kemp, models Kristen McMenamy and Kate Moss, and the artist Grayson Perry. The first part of the exhibition concludes with five projects devoted to the nude.

The main exhibition space contrasts with the brightness of the first gallery to reveal a darker environment, rich with texture, colour and sound. Ten evocative room sets display Walker’s new series of photographs inspired by the V&A. Each set includes a group of V&A objects selected by Walker, displayed alongside the photographs they inspired. Heath makes use of the cavernous exhibition gallery to display elements of the photoshoots’ sets and props at great height.

The first of these rooms is *Illuminations*, which evokes the interior of a burned-out cathedral. On display are sixteenth-century stained glass panels and an exquisite illuminated manuscript

made in the 1470s for the Duchess of Brittany. These Renaissance treasures inspired Walker's pictures, which hang as large-scale framed prints close-by.

Another room, *Pen & Ink*, takes the whiplash graphic lines of Aubrey Beardsley's provocative illustrations from the 1890s as a starting point. A green velvet-clad room displays some of Beardsley's best-known works, leading into a stark white photographic studio, filled with 10 photographs capturing Walker's witty take on Beardsley's masterpieces.

A further room, *Handle with Care*, takes inspiration from the work of the V&A's textile conservators who care for the museum's world-leading fashion and textiles collection. Here, Walker's pictures of Karen Elson, James Crewe and Sgàire Wood are displayed alongside a dress from Alexander McQueen's 2009 *The Horn of Plenty* collection, partially wrapped in protective fabric. The scene reimagines Walker's first encounter with the dress when he visited The Clothworkers' Centre for the Study and Conservation of Textiles and Fashion.

Towards the end of the exhibition, visitors enter a pastel-hued room reminiscent of a grand country house. A film projection flickers within a vast fireplace and the walls are hung with multiple portraits inspired by Edith Sitwell's clothing and jewellery in the V&A's collection. This shoot with Tilda Swinton, herself a distant relative of Sitwell, took place at the family's manor house, Renishaw Hall. As well as recognisable faces such as Swinton and Karen Elson, Walker's new pictures are populated by a diverse cast of up-and-coming performers and models, celebrating beauty in all its forms.

Beyond the exhibition, several of Walker's film installations appear throughout the museum's permanent galleries, including the Tapestries Gallery and Norfolk House Music Room. The Modern Media Gallery in the V&A's Photography Centre will screen his newest film, *The Steadfast Tin Soldier*, a ballet performed by dancers from the Michael Clark Company in costumes inspired by paper dolls in the V&A Museum of Childhood. Walker rewrote the original Hans Christian Andersen tale to create a moving gay love story, narrated by actress Gwendoline Christie.

Tim Walker: Wonderful Things is the latest in the museum's ambitious series of projects working in collaboration with contemporary practitioners. The exhibition opens just under a year after the launch of Phase One of the V&A Photography Centre, a new space to showcase the museum's world-class photographic holdings.

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Notes to Editors

- The exhibition *Tim Walker: Wonderful Things* is curated by the V&A's Susanna Brown and runs from 21 September 2019 to 8 March 2020.
- Tickets will go on sale on 13 June 2019.
- The exhibition designer is Shona Heath.
- The exhibition is accompanied by a new V&A publication edited by Tim Walker and Susanna Brown and designed by Melanie Mues. The book features contributions from 20 of Walker's collaborators.
- *Tim Walker: Wonderful Things* is the latest in the V&A's series of major photography exhibitions, including *Paul Strand: Photography and Film for the 20th Century* (2016), *Julia Margaret Cameron* (2015), and *Horst: Photographer of Style* (2014).
- The V&A holds the National Collection of the Art of Photography, one of the largest and most important photographic collections in the world. It encompasses approximately 800,000 works by leading historic and contemporary photographers. The museum has collected photographs since its foundation in 1852 and continues to collect today, with many acquisitions funded through the generous support of the V&A Photographs Acquisition Group.
- In September 2019, Thames & Hudson will publish *Shoot for the Moon*, a new monograph that delves deep into the art and mind of Tim Walker. In images that demand to be read as art as much as fashion, his latest works explore the mysteries of imagination and inspiration, and the essence of where ideas come from: a rich and fertile darkness. *Shoot for the Moon* includes photographs featuring some of the biggest names in fashion and contemporary culture, and texts and commentary by a collection of noteworthy contributors as well as Walker himself.

Social Media

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Twitter: @V_and_A

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For further PRESS information about *Tim Walker: Wonderful Things* please contact Laura Mitchell on l.mitchell@vam.ac.uk / +44 (0)20 3949 4509 (not for publication). A selection of press images is available to download free of charge from pressimages.vam.ac.uk

Biographies

About Tim Walker

Extravagant staging and romantic motifs characterise Tim Walker's unmistakable style. Born in England in 1970, his interest in photography began at the Condé Nast library in London, where he worked with the Cecil Beaton archive for a year in the late 1980s. After a BA Honours degree in Photography at Exeter College of Art, Walker worked as a freelance photographic assistant in London. He then moved to New York City as a full-time assistant to the renowned American photographer Richard Avedon.

When Walker returned to England, he initially concentrated on portrait and documentary commissions for newspapers and, aged only 25, he shot his first fashion story for *Vogue*. He

has photographed for the British, Italian, and American editions of *Vogue* ever since, as well as for leading fashion and style titles such as *W*, *i-D*, *AnOther* and *LOVE* Magazine.

In recent years, Walker has embraced moving film. His first short film, *The Lost Explorer*, was premiered at Locarno Film Festival in Switzerland and went on to win Best Short Film at the Chicago United Film Festival in 2011. Walker's acclaimed publications include *Pictures* (2008), *Story Teller* (2012), *The Granny Alphabet* (2013, in collaboration with Lawrence Mynott and Kit Hesketh-Harvey), and *The Garden of Earthly Delights* (2017). He received the Isabella Blow Award for Fashion Creator from The British Fashion Council in 2008 and the Infinity Award from The International Center of Photography in 2009. In 2012, Walker received an Honorary Fellowship from the Royal Photographic Society.

About Shona Heath

One of Britain's leading set designers and creative directors, Shona Heath is behind some of the most inventive sets crafted for magazine editorials, advertising campaigns and fashion shows. Her creative collaboration with Tim Walker spans almost 20 years. Since graduating from Fashion Design at Brighton University in 1997, her portfolio has progressed beyond the traditional definitions of set design, to encompass costume design, film making, installations and exhibition design.

Heath works with many contemporary photographers including Craig McDean, Inez and Vinoodh, Paolo Roversi and Jackie Nickerson and has collaborated with luxury fashion houses including Dior, Hermès, Jo Malone, Marni, Prada, and Valentino. Her artistic, editorial and commercial credits include *Vogue*, *AnOther Magazine*, *Dazed & Confused*, *Pop* and *Modern Matter*.

Shona has also lent her unique vision to create stunning installations and window displays around the world including Tim Walker's *The Garden of Earthly Delights* at the Noordbrabants Museum in 2017.

About Susanna Brown

Susanna Brown joined the V&A as Curator of Photographs in 2008. She is part of a team of specialists that cares for one of the world's most important photographic collections. Brown has produced numerous international touring exhibitions and accompanying publications, including *Horst: Photographer of Style* (2014), *Selling Dreams: One Hundred Years of Fashion Photography* (2012), and *Queen Elizabeth II by Cecil Beaton* (2012). Susanna also curates collection displays for the museum's permanent galleries, and collaborated with colleagues and architects to devise the V&A Photography Centre, which opened in October 2018.

Before joining the V&A, Brown worked in the Photographs Collection at the National Portrait Gallery, London. She studied at Wimbledon School of Art and Bristol University, and completed an MA in the History and Theory of the Art Museum at the Courtauld Institute in 2005. Her research interests are diverse, and she has contributed to recent publications on historic and contemporary subjects ranging from Vivien Leigh to Alexander McQueen and Mary Quant. She lectures internationally and has been an invited juror for prestigious awards including the Hyères International Festival of Fashion and Photography and the Hasselblad Foundation International Award in Photography.