



Media Statement: Update on Proposed Changes to the National Art Library

14:00 17 March 2021

The financial impact of Covid-19 on the cultural sector has been devastating, and as a result, the V&A is forced to find £10 million sustainable savings per annum. On 26 February 2021, we announced that the V&A would be entering into a period of collective consultation with our curatorial departments - the final phase of a 6-month, V&A-wide programme to help us find the savings that, sadly, are so necessary to safeguard our future as the world's leading museum of art, design and performance.

A comprehensive consultation process with those V&A staff across the Collections Division impacted by the proposed changes is currently underway, and one of the areas included in the consultation is the National Art Library (NAL). The NAL's exceptional collections and iconic space remain fundamental to the V&A's mission and purpose, and we are proud of its status as one of the finest libraries dedicated to art in the world.

Within the context of the structural changes and savings that need to take place across the museum, change is also needed at the NAL. Our proposal is that the NAL, together with the V&A Registry and Archives, would be merged under the V&A Research Institute to create a centralized, integrated research and information directorate that would also manage access to reading rooms and study rooms across all V&A sites. We will shortly be appointing a senior librarian consultant (fixed term post) to undertake a comprehensive review of the NAL services and the visitor experience we offer, to help realise our ambition to broaden access to the NAL and archival collections and to bolster our research portfolio, including the support we offer staff, students, academics, sector professionals and research bodies.

Acknowledging the vital role the NAL plays, we will be conducting the review over six months rather than a year in order to keep the closure period to an absolute minimum. Sadly, our financial position dictates that a period of closure will still be necessary as we move into a new and uncertain financial year, not least in terms of visitor numbers. The V&A will hopefully reopen to the public in late May, and we will aim to open the NAL at the end of the review, by December 2021. A digital library service for academics and researchers will be available throughout May – December 2021, with in person appointments to view collections facilitated on a case-by-case basis.

Since the consultation launched, the government has subsequently announced the extension of the furlough scheme. Thanks to this additional support, we have brought an improved proposal to staff and TU colleagues – to keep all 30 National Art Library and Theatre &

Performance archive staff on board, utilising the furlough scheme while the review is taking place. New proposals for the structure of the NAL and combined archive team will follow once the review has concluded.

We'd like to thank everyone for all their feedback and support. 2020 has been devastating for the whole cultural sector, and at a time when our doors remain closed and recovery appears far from reach, the swell of public backing for national collections and cultural spaces like the National Art Library speaks volumes. Thank you for all your support during this challenging time.

Yours,
Dr Tristram Hunt
Director of the V&A

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