



Press Release

V&A to open two new photography displays, showcasing work by Maurice Broomfield, and contemporary acquisitions

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This November, the V&A Photography Centre will be entirely rehung with two new photography displays. *Maurice Broomfield: Industrial Sublime* will present the late photographer's dramatic photographs of mid-century British and foreign industry, and *Known and Strange: Photographs from the Collection* will highlight photography's power to transform the familiar into the unfamiliar, and the ordinary into the extraordinary.

The displays – both running for a year from 6 November 2021 – are a precursor to the 2023 opening of Phase Two of the V&A Photography Centre, which will add a further four new gallery spaces to showcase the V&A's world-leading photography collection.

Maurice Broomfield: Industrial Sublime

V&A Photography Centre, Room 100, The Bern and Ronny Schwartz Gallery

6 November 2021 – 6 November 2022



Maurice Broomfield: Industrial Sublime will showcase the late photographer's dramatic photographs of mid-century British and foreign industry, capturing factories and their workers in an era of rapid transition.

Born to a working-class family near Derby, Maurice Broomfield (1916-2010) worked at the city's Rolls Royce factory after leaving school at the age of fifteen. He attended Derby Art College in the evenings, then worked in advertising before earning a position as Britain's premier industrial photographer throughout the 1950s and 60s.

This display will feature over 40 original exhibition prints, drawn from Broomfield's extensive archive housed at the V&A. These will be shown alongside a selection of Broomfield's cameras – lent from the private collection of his son, the renowned documentary film maker Nick Broomfield – as well as other contextual items which have never been exhibited before, including historic film footage, audio recordings, press cuttings, contact prints, negatives, trade

publications and pages from works order books, shining a light onto the photographer's working processes.

Most of Broomfield's photographs were originally commissioned for publication in company reports, but he also selected and printed some of them at large scale for inclusion in photography exhibitions. From shipyards to papermills, textiles to food production, and atomic power stations to car manufacture, Broomfield emphasised the dramatic, romantic, sublime and sometimes surreal qualities of industry. Today, many of the factories he photographed – and the communities of workers and skills that supported them – have either vanished or been subsumed into global corporations.

His archive, containing over 30,000 images, comprising negatives, contact prints, exhibition prints, press cuttings, business records, and promotional materials, survives as a valuable record of this history, while his images can be appreciated for their artistry. Highlights include his spectacular image of a half million-volt charge on ceramic insulators for Royal Doulton potteries; a surreal scene of a woman inspecting the assembly of a generator for the English Electric Company; blast furnaces and fitters at the Ford car factory at Dagenham; and the high-tech lighting laboratory at Phillips in the Netherlands. Broomfield's photographs remain relevant today, prompting questions about digital technologies replacing manual labour, the UK entering an uncertain economic future in relation to the rest of the world, and the toxic social and environmental legacy of industry.

To accompany the display, the V&A will publish a new book on Maurice Broomfield, written by V&A Senior Curator Martin Barnes and with a foreword by Nick Broomfield. Barnes discusses the life and work of Maurice, whom he came to know well as he worked to transfer his archive from his Hampshire home to the museum.

Known and Strange: Photographs from the Collection

V&A Photography Centre, Room 101, The Sir Elton John and David Furnish Gallery

6 November 2021 – 6 November 2022



Opening November 2021, *Known and Strange: Photographs from the Collection* will highlight photography's power to transform the familiar into the unfamiliar, and the ordinary into the extraordinary.

Since its invention, photography has changed the way we see the world by inviting us to interpret reality in our own way. *Known and Strange* will focus on photography's creative capacity to blur fact with fiction. The display will showcase over 50 recent contemporary acquisitions for the V&A permanent collection – created by established and emerging photographers across the globe – including Paul Graham, Susan Meiselas, Andy Sewell, Tereza Zelenková, Dafna Talmor, Zanele Muholi, Rinko Kawauchi, and Mitch Epstein. Each has expanded the ever-changing field of photography, both in terms

of stylistic experimentation and intellectual inquiry, and their work represents some of today's most compelling achievements in contemporary photography.

The display title *Known and Strange*, originally from a line from the poem 'Postscript' by Seamus Heaney, is borrowed from a series of photographs by Andy Sewell and captures the sentiment of the works that will be presented in the display. Sewell's series was taken on both sides of the Atlantic, taking as its visual and conceptual departure point places where internet cables are routed from the land to cross the seabed. The series – which will be presented in the display – explores the idea that the internet and the ocean, human communication and its related technologies, are both vast and unknowably strange.

Known and Strange will also feature diverse and innovative works within this broader theme, from Rinke Kawauchi's focus on simple moments of illumination in everyday life and Mitch Epstein's search for trees in New York City, to Zanele Muholi's powerful series that exposes the persistent violence and discrimination faced by the South African Black LGBTQIA+ community. Tereza Zelenková – known for her imaginative explorations of mysticism – peels back the layers of myth that build up over time, whilst Dafna Talmor transforms her own photographs of landscapes by cutting them up and recombining them to create new hybrid compositions. In addition, the display will include over 20 photobooks by contemporary photographers, drawn from the collection of the National Art Library, further highlighting the innovation present in photography today.

The display will highlight the diversity of a medium that, through its malleability, allows for many different perspectives to be captured. As viewers, we can challenge everyday assumptions, be reminded of the world's wonder, and perhaps poignantly, become aware that we might not be able to witness everything we want to during our own comparatively fleeting lives.

For more information on highlights of the *Known and Strange* display, please see [here](#).

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For further PRESS information please contact Sophie Steel on s.steel@vam.ac.uk / +44 (0)20 3949 2502 (not for publication).

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

Social Media

Twitter: [@V_and_A](#)

Instagram: [@vamuseum](#)

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Notes to Editors

- The displays [Maurice Broomfield: Industrial Sublime](#) and [Known and Strange: Photographs from the Collection](#) run from 6 November 2021 – 6 November 2022.
- The display *Maurice Broomfield: Industrial Sublime* will be accompanied by a new V&A publication by Martin Barnes, with a foreword by Nick Broomfield. RRP £25.

About the V&A photography collection

The V&A holds the National Collection of the Art of Photography. The museum has collected photographs since its foundation in 1852 and continues to collect today, with new acquisitions supported by the V&A Photographs Acquisition Group and other generous donors. The Royal Photographic Society (RPS) collection was transferred to the V&A by the Science Museum Group in 2017 and was acquired with the generous assistance of the Heritage Lottery Fund and Art Fund. The consolidation of these world-class collections is the catalyst for the museum's new Photography Centre, phase one of which opened in October 2018, with phase two scheduled to open in 2023. The V&A's collection encompasses the work of leading historic and contemporary photographers as well as publications, cameras and related equipment. When not on display, photographs from the collection can be viewed in the Prints & Drawings Study Room. vam.ac.uk/collections/photographs

Image credits:

Maurice Broomfield, *Tapping a Furnace, Ford, Dagenham, Essex*, 1954. Digital C-type print, printed 2006. Copyright Estate of Maurice Broomfield

Andy Sewell, *Untitled* from the series *Known and Strange Things Pass*, 2020. Pigment print. Purchase funded by Cecil Beaton Fund © Andy Sewell