

## V&A Museum of Childhood renamed Young V&A as construction begins on £13m transformation

- New acquisitions for display include **Olympian Sky Brown's skateboard**, garments from **Bethany Williams' Spring / Summer 2021 'All Our Children' collection** in collaboration with **The Magpie Project** and a **3D printed prosthetic Hero Arm** by **Open Bionics**
- New renders unveiled today reveal progress on the design scheme
- Programme of activity kicks off ahead of 150th celebrations in 2022 and reopening in 2023



Construction has begun on the £13m redevelopment of the V&A Museum of Childhood, the iconic Grade II\* listed site in Bethnal Green, marking a critical milestone in the most ambitious transformation of the museum in its history. A place to play, create, debate and design for tomorrow, this beloved institution is being reimagined into the UK's premier national museum entirely dedicated to children. Designed with and for 0–14-year-olds, a new name for the museum – **Young V&A** – is unveiled today, reflecting its new mission to inspire young people with the creative ingenuity of design, to empower educators and to act as a leader in child-centred museum practice.

**Director of the V&A, Tristram Hunt, said:** *“Young people’s lives have been dramatically altered by the pandemic, yet they have adapted and enriched the soul of the nation in extraordinary ways – from a rainbow campaign honouring the NHS to Sky Brown’s skateboarding achievements for Team GB. A world-class museum that nurtures curiosity, experimentation and celebrates play, Young V&A will be a global champion for children’s creativity in all its forms. This vital investment – working to counter the ongoing effects of Covid-19 on young people’s access to creative education, collaborative play, and artistic inspiration – is more urgent than ever. I am delighted we are one step closer to reopening the museum’s doors in 2023.”*

New renders revealed today illustrate the latest designs by AOC Architecture for an entirely new visitor experience. The plans include three new galleries *Play, Imagine* and *Design*, interactive collection displays drawing on the full scope of the V&A collections, a suite of dedicated workshops for learning, an in-gallery design studio for visitors, and a redesigned visitor experience including a new café and shop.

A host of new acquisitions announced today demonstrate the power of creativity to shape and improve lives, foregrounding Young V&A's engagement with the social and environmental issues facing young generations, and its inclusive and child-centred approach to programming. Highlights include:

- **A skateboard owned by Tokyo 2020 medallist Sky Brown.** At 13 years old, Sky is the youngest professional skateboarder in the world and Britain's youngest-ever Olympics athlete.

- **A selection of garments by sustainable fashion designer, humanitarian and artist, Bethany Williams** from her Spring / Summer 2021 'All Our Children' collection (2020), featuring illustrations that shine a light on families from the Magpie Project – an east London-based grassroots organisation that supports women and children who are homeless or at risk of homelessness – and silhouettes inspired by the V&A's National Childhood Collection.
- **The world's most affordable multi-grip prosthetic arm – The Hero Arm.** Designed for children and adults, The Hero Arm challenges traditional notions of prosthetics, presenting disabilities as superpowers with an empowering, multi-functional and affordable design.
- **A selection of linocut 'Woodism' prints,** a moving project between father and son – Sonny and eight-year-old Woody who is autistic. Sonny turns Woody's unique phrases and way of viewing the world into linocut prints. The creative process gives both a chance to connect as they work together on designs and has given Woody a newfound confidence.

**Sky Brown said:** *"When kids skate, they forget about what they might be struggling through, and just think about happiness. I hope that when people see me, the smallest girl, doing the highest trick, that they think they can do anything, too. I'm so excited that my skateboard will go on show at Young V&A and love the idea of a museum that only exists to inspire young people and help them discover their superpowers. The sky is the limit!"*

### **A new home for the National Childhood Collection**

Work completed earlier this year on cataloguing, conserving and packing objects from the National Childhood Collection, previously stored below ground at the museum, and will now move to V&A East Storehouse, which opens in the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park in 2024. The collection comprises over 33,000 objects from miniature dolls house furniture to a four-metre-high sixteenth century Italian Marionette theatre. Its relocation enables almost half of Young V&A's back-of-house space to be repurposed into the new learning workshops and new spaces for conservation and exhibition preparation.

### **Architectural Update**

De Matos Ryan architects were appointed in early 2018 to develop full base build design, including structural changes, heritage restoration, lighting and acoustic upgrades and delivery of a new suite of new workshop spaces. Construction is now underway with handover of the site to Quinn London contractors in August 2021. In parallel, AOC Architecture – the design team responsible for the fit-out – are completing final detailed drawings for construction tender in early autumn.

Creative education spaces for hands-on making and performance will play a key role in Young V&A's new galleries, from an amphitheatre-style stage in *Imagine*, to a free-play construction area within *Play*, and a working Open Studio in *Design*, inviting young visitors to develop their creative skills through performance, play and design. Alongside this, three workshop spaces dedicated to learning, and a reading room in the lower ground floor, will support a year-round programme from parenting courses and sessions for early years, curriculum-based provision for school learners in Key Stages 1, 2 and 3 and after school and holiday activity for families and young people.

Sustainability and environmental responsibility have been fundamental to the development including reuse of materials across the project from demolition rubble to repurposed elements of past V&A exhibitions. Free-standing display cases that could not be reused have been donated to museums and galleries across the country including the National Motor Museum and Poldark Tin Mine Heritage site, with the remainder to be reused within the new scheme, with all other display cases fully recycled.

### **Working in partnership with young people**

Local schools and organisations in Tower Hamlets have worked closely with the Young V&A team since the project's inception, with over 40 co-design workshops and two Kids Takeover Days organised to-date. Continuing this work, each gallery will house one co-creation project, bringing the voices of children and young people into the exhibits to explore ideas around community, sustainable fashion and family play.

A newly launched **Young V&A Collective** brings together groups of 11-14 year olds to build skills as they develop creative responses to the themes and collections of the new museum, supported by artist-mentors who will co-create new artworks with them. This autumn, artist Dan Mayfield of School of Noise is working with the Collective to make audio tracks and interpret the new exhibits.

During construction, the Young Collective is taking place in partnership with Poplar's youth space, Spotlight, with termly opportunities for new groups of 11-14s to join. In-person activity resumed this summer as part of the museum's 'Summer of Play' – taking Young V&A's learning practitioners out across East London from Tower Hamlets to Walthamstow to reconnect with audiences and create shared spaces for play.

In the lead-up to reopening, and to celebrate the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the V&A in Bethnal Green in 2022, the Young V&A team will be engaging every school in Tower Hamlets – offering creative assemblies, running workshops with students, teacher forums, and developing new activities for families with grassroots local organisations. These sessions will be designed to give young people the opportunity to generate hundreds of ideas inspired by the themes within the new galleries, particularly addressing challenges and opportunities for their generation, demonstrating the creative prowess of 'Gen Alpha' to harness their imaginations to make their world a better place for all.

Further information about the museum's pre-opening programme and how to get involved will be published [here](#).

The museum is also building its offer for creative professionals and will establish a **Young V&A Designer in Residence in 2022**. The resident designer will use the Young V&A collections and gallery themes to inspire their practice and to undertake research into child-centred, inclusive design processes, informing the museum's thinking and future programmes. The call out for the Residency will go live on 6 October 2021.

**Dr Helen Charman, V&A Director of Learning, National Programmes and Young V&A, said:**  
*“Reinvention is woven into the fabric of this incredible building, from the iconic ironwork structure, part of the original Great Exhibition in 1851 to its rebranding in 1974, in recognition of the museum's popularity with local schools and families – and it has rightly won over a special*

*place in the hearts of many east Londoners, many of whom have visited as children, then as parents and grandchildren. Today, we mark a momentous milestone in the evolution of its identity and underscore its core purpose – to champion, nurture, and inspire the innovators of tomorrow and build creative confidence in the young. We can't wait to reopen the doors.”*

– ENDS –

**Notes to editors:**

**For further PRESS information about V&A East please contact Laura Mitchell on [l.mitchell@vam.ac.uk](mailto: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](http://pressimages.vam.ac.uk)**

Twitter: @young\_vam

Instagram: @young.vam

Facebook: Young V&A/Youngvam

Website: [vam.ac.uk/info/young](http://vam.ac.uk/info/young)

- The museum closed its doors in March 2020 as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, pivoting to reach audiences digitally. Key initiatives included a pilot with the Bartlett Centre for Advanced Spatial Analysis at UCL, exploring approaches to engaging young people in digital co-curation.
- In May 2020, the museum launched a national call-out for children's rainbows, to document young people's creativity during the pandemic. Receiving over 1000 submissions, the V&A opened *All Will Be Well: Children's Rainbows from Lockdown* in December 2020 featuring 300 artworks and acquired a significant number for the collection to commemorate this unique moment in our nation's history.
- The Young V&A capital project will cost £13 million. The V&A is working to raise the full amount from private philanthropists, trusts and companies. We are very grateful to those who have supported the project to date.