

Photographs
Acquisition
Group



V&A



Join Us in Building an Incredible Collection

Photography has always been at the heart of the V&A. The South Kensington Museum (as the V&A was then called) was the first museum to collect photography, beginning in 1852. A few years later, it was the first museum to stage a photography exhibition, pictured below. Since then, collectors, philanthropists and, from 2010, the Photographs Acquisition Group, have helped curators to expand the collection with outstanding objects for everyone to enjoy.

Although the V&A's collections are large, there are significant gaps and it is always important to acquire contemporary photography. The Photographs Acquisition Group looks out for the latest, most innovative work; it drives dialogue with artists and encourages audience engagement; it helps curators to think in a contemporary way about the past. As the photography market continues to expand, the V&A relies on philanthropic support to fund important acquisitions. This support allows the museum to enhance its collections for future generations.



'Exhibition of the Photographic Society of London and the Société Française de Photographie at the South Kensington Museum', by Charles Thurston Thompson, 1858, Museum no. 2715-1913, Given by Alan S. Cole
Inside cover: Photograph of Coventry Cathedral from the series 'The English Cathedral', by Peter Marlow. Museum No. E.1159:11-2019. Purchase funded by the Photographs Acquisition Group. © Victoria and Albert Museum, London



The Photographs Acquisition Group

You can help the V&A purchase new works for the collection by joining the Photographs Acquisition Group. Each supporter donates at least £10,000 annually, all of which goes towards building a vital purchase fund for acquiring contemporary photography. Donors are closely involved with the acquisition process. They meet with the curators twice a year to discuss which photographs the museum will buy in accordance with its collecting strategy. They also join the curators on studio visits, private tours of exhibitions, and international trips to photography festivals.

Over the last decade, the Photographs Acquisition Group has raised over £1 million to acquire photographs for the V&A. Through this generous support, over sixty-four bodies of work, totalling more than 600 prints, have been purchased for the collection. By joining the group, you can support contemporary photographers, extend public access, and help build one of the greatest photography collections in the world.



Previous page: 'Untitled #15', from the series 'Speak the Wind', by Hoda Afshar, 2020, Museum No. PH.1223-2022.
Above: '#2', from the series 'Centralia', by Poulomi Basu, 2010. Museum number PH.2012-2022

Photography at the V&A

The V&A's photography collection is one of the largest and most comprehensive in the world. The core collection comprises over 800,000 photographs, covering a broad range of forms and techniques, from fashion to photojournalism, from documentary to conceptual art, and from daguerreotypes to digital practice.

The collection contains some of the oldest objects in the history of photography, including photographs by William Henry Fox Talbot, Anna Atkins, and Nicéphore Niépce. Nineteenth-century holdings are some of the richest in the world, among them large bodies of work by Julia Margaret Cameron, Lady Clementina Hawarden, and Roger Fenton. The museum also has a significant collection of twentieth-century objects, including photographs by Paul Strand, Dorothea Lange, Henri Cartier-Bresson, and Bill Brandt.

Since 2017, the Royal Photographic Society collection has formed a major part of the V&A's holdings. Comprising over 270,000 photographs, it illuminates a varied history of photography from the 1820s to the 2000s. It also contains a mile-long collection of books about photography, over 6,000 pieces of camera equipment, and an important archive of documents and letters. The museum continues to attract significant collections, such as the John and Judith Hillelson collection of photojournalism, and the Colin Axon collection of early colour photography.

The Photographs Acquisition Group builds on this extraordinary legacy, concentrating on mid-career artists and major names missing from the collection. Recent contemporary acquisitions include photographs by Richard Learoyd, Vera Lutter, Susan Derges, Sammy Balaji, and Sunil Gupta, as well as important works by lesser-known artists.



'Radio Telescope, Effelsberg XV: September 12, 2013', by Vera Lutter, 2013. Museum no. PH.430-2021.
Purchase funded by the Photographs Acquisition Group. © Victoria and Albert Museum, London

The Photography Centre

Photographs purchased with the support of the Photographs Acquisition Group are regularly displayed in the V&A's Photography Centre, a suite of galleries housing the permanent collection and showing the development of photography from the 1830s to the present day. The Centre opened to critical acclaim in 2018 and more than doubled the amount of display room available for photography. A second phase of the Photography Centre is due to be completed in spring 2023, creating over 1000m² of exhibition space as one of the largest floorplans for a permanent collection anywhere in the world.

The second phase of the Photography Centre includes a gallery for cutting-edge digital projections, two spectacular rooms devoted to contemporary photography, a room focusing on photography and the book, housing the Royal Photographic Society Library, and a gallery devoted to the camera, including a walk-in camera obscura. Upon completion, the Photography Centre will be an international destination for the exhibition, collection, conservation and research of photography. Free to access, it will offer visitors the opportunity to experience photography in new ways and to explore its impact on their lives.

The support of the Photographs Acquisition Group is crucial to this project, enabling a lively rotating display of contemporary photography. Group supporters will gain intimate insight to the development of the Centre and will have the opportunity to join the opening celebrations in 2023.





'Diary of a Victorian Dandy: 14.00 hours', by Yinka Shonibare, 2012. Museum no. E.236-2013. Purchased with the support of The National Lottery Heritage Fund and the Photographs Acquisition Group. © Victoria and Albert Museum, London

Support Acquisitions for Publications and Exhibitions

The Photographs Acquisition Group acquires photographs that contribute to museum publications and exhibitions. Our headline shows often feature photographs acquired through the group, including most recently in the *Paul Strand: Photography and Film for the 20th Century* and *Africa Fashion* exhibitions.

Acquisitions also feature in our critically-acclaimed publications, including *Shadow Catchers: Camera-less Photography*, *Autofocus: The Car in Photography*, and *Making it Up: Photographic Fictions*.



Photograph by James Barnor, Accra, 1971. Museum no. PH.387-2021.
Purchase funded by the Photographs Acquisition Group. © Victoria and Albert Museum, London / James Barnor



'The Unseen', by Tereza Zelenkova, 2015. Museum no. E.218-2018. Purchase funded by the Photographs Acquisition Group
© Victoria and Albert Museum, London / Tereza Zelenková

Support Object-Based Learning

The V&A champions object-based learning, using the collection, including photographs purchased with donors' support, to tell the story of photography to visitors of all ages. Workshops, study days, and courses utilise the collection so curious minds can gain hands-on experience of photography and learn new skills. Led by makers and curators, participants enjoy topics such as fashion photography, early photographic techniques, and digital practices of all kinds.

Researchers can also request to view photographs from the collection in the V&A Prints and Drawings Study Room, including recent acquisitions supported by the group. Since 2010, this free service has received over 45,000 visitors, making the V&A's collection one of the most publicly accessible in the world.



This page: Friday Late event, curator talk in the Photography Centre © Hydar Dewachi; Facing page: Friday Late event, photography discussion in Europe 1600 – 1815, Room 4, The Globe © Hydar Dewachi





Support Contemporary Photographers

For photographers, having their work added to the V&A collection enhances their reputation and encourages the sale of further work. The engagement with curators, visitors and donors sparks new ideas and fosters creativity. Many photographers value having their work exhibited and accessible to public and specialists alike, safe in the knowledge that it will be retained for future generations.

Valérie Belin

“It is very important for artists like me that their work becomes part of a collection such as the V&A’s, as it represents an official recognition by institutions, professionals and donors and enhances their reputation. The project which the V&A commissioned me to create, funded by the Photographs Acquisition Group, has also been a great source of inspiration. It allowed me to discover works in the V&A collection that I was previously unaware of, which has reinvigorated my own work.”

Thomas Ruff

“It is a great honour to have my work added to one of the most stunning photography collections in the world. During the project commissioned by the V&A, I was able to survey and work with a unique archive of 19th-century photography, which has been particularly beneficial to my recent work. I had been hoping to research works by the photographer Linnaeus Tripe for many years and it was amazing not only to see his original negatives at the V&A, but also to use them to create new work and develop a new artistic perspective. I am deeply grateful to have had this opportunity, funded and supported by the Photographs Acquisition Group.”

Get Closer to Photography at the V&A

By partnering with the V&A to build the collection you will enjoy special access to many of our activities in photography:

- Meet the curators, view potential acquisitions, and discuss which works are to be acquired for the collection
- Visit leading photographers to learn about their practice
- Gain an in-depth understanding of the museum's engagement with photography
- Enjoy curators' tours and attend two opening night parties per year of V&A exhibitions
- See behind the scenes at international festivals, private collections and other museums, including on the group's annual overseas trip*
- Receive free entry to all V&A exhibitions, the award-winning Members' Room, and a free subscription to the V&A Magazine
- Be invited to join *Travel with the V&A*, a global programme of cultural tours designed and led by V&A curators

*Supporters of the group pay to participate on some external events to help cover the costs.



To donate and join the Photographs Acquisition Group, or for more information, please contact:

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Front Cover: 'Teatro Bonci, Cesena', by Guido Guidi, 1984. Museum no. PH.1211-2022.
Back Cover: 'Ronta, 1986', by Guido Guidi, 1986. Museum no. PH.1212-2022.
Purchase funded by the Photographs Acquisition Group © Victoria and Albert Museum, London

