

News Release



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V&A East Museum opens on 18 April 2026

WEDS 5 NOVEMBER 2025

- **V&A East Museum** celebrates making and creativity's power to bring change
- Two free permanent **Why We Make Galleries** spotlight global culture through the **V&A's collection**, platforming **stories and voices of creatives** from a range of **countries, cultures and times** and themes from **representation and identity to wellbeing, social justice and environmental action**
- Works by **Leigh Bowery, Claude Cahun, Ladi Kwali, Yasmeen Lari and the Heritage Foundation of Pakistan, Althea McNish, Jo Spence and Maud Sulter** go on display alongside historic pieces from **Italian Renaissance paintings** and **16th century scent cases**, to an **18th century Spitalfields silk dress** and **19th century coral jewellery from India and Tibet**
- New acquisitions go on show by creative **Yinka Ilori**, ceramic artist **Bisila Noha**, architecture collective **Himalayan Institute of Alternatives Ladakh**, fashion designers, **VIN + OMI** and **Molly Goddard**, plus items from **King Owusu x Lazy Oaf's** recent fashion collaboration and zines by east London-based **One of My Kind** and **Rabbits Road Press**
- A monumental new work by **Thomas J Price** will welcome visitors into V&A East Museum
- New six-monthly commissions programme to launch across both V&A East Museum and Storehouse sites, presenting eight new works by **Tania Bruguera, Lawrence Lek**, Turner Prize-nominated artist, **Rene Matić**, and **Carrie Mae Weems**
- First landmark exhibition ***The Music is Black: A British Story*** includes **Joan Armatrading's childhood guitar**, fashion worn by **Little Simz** and newly acquired photographs by **Jennie Baptiste, Dennis Morris, Eddie Otchere** and **Sam White** plus a partnership with **BBC Music** and **East Bank**

Today, the V&A announces that **V&A East Museum**, designed by architects O'Donnell + Tuomey, opens on East Bank in Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park on **Saturday 18 April 2026**. Co-created with young people, creatives, and those living, working and studying in east London, V&A East Museum celebrates making and **creativity's power to bring change** around the world. V&A East Museum includes **galleries** exploring **why we make exhibitions, creative commissions** and **events** spotlighting the **people, ideas**



and **creativity shaping global culture right now**, plus a café by **Jikoni**, an exciting collaboration with the restaurant group known for ‘cooking without borders’.

Fuelled by the creativity of east London, V&A East Museum brings together the worlds of art, design, fashion, music, and performance, in a brand-new five-storey space right next to East Bank Partners **London College of Fashion, UAL**, the **BBC**, **Sadler’s Wells East** and **UCL East**. Supported by the Mayor of London, V&A East Museum is sister site to the critically acclaimed [V&A East Storehouse](#), which opened in May 2025.

Gus Casely-Hayford, V&A East Director, said: *“In today’s world where we’re facing down challenges from the climate crisis to increasing polarisation, museums and the creative industries have a vital role in bringing people together, celebrating communities, sparking conversations and spotlighting the many ways that global artists, designers and makers are using their creativity to change the world for the better. We have created V&A East Museum with and for our audiences, as a welcoming space for all, embedded in east London and with a global outlook, that reflects the multiculturalism of this incredible place that has been the beating heart of creativity for centuries. V&A East Museum is for you – my hope is you’ll find joy, something of yourself and a sense of belonging the moment you walk through the door.”*

Jen McLachlan, V&A East Project Director, said: *“We’re proud to see V&A East Museum take its place within the dynamic landscape of East Bank in Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park. Our design is driven by the idea of openness – a building that welcomes its community, celebrates creativity, and frames the exchange between art, people, and place. It’s not just a museum, but a civic space for dialogue, discovery, and shared experience.”*

Justine Simons OBE, Deputy Mayor for Culture and the Creative Industries, said: *“The opening of V&A East Museum is another huge milestone for East Bank – our brilliant new culture and education district at Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park. Following the success of the V&A East’s Storehouse, Sadler’s Wells East, London College of Fashion and UCL East this new museum will open up an incredible collection for Londoners and visitors alike. It is set to become a major magnet for tourism and creativity. The Mayor and I couldn’t be prouder to support East Bank, which will welcome 1.5 million visitors a year and generate £1.5 billion for the economy, helping us build a better London for everyone.”*

New creative commissions

On V&A East Museum’s opening, V&A East will debut a new six-monthly rotating creative commissions programme. Eight new artworks by **Tania Bruguera**, **Es Devlin**, **Lawrence Lek**, Turner Prize-nominated artist, **Rene Matić**, **Shahed Saleem**, **Justinien Tribillon**, **Carrie Mae Weems**, and **Laura Wilson** will be unveiled across V&A East’s two sites – V&A East Museum and Storehouse, each responding to the history and future of east London’s creativity. A monumental new work by **Thomas J Price**, *A Place Beyond*, will welcome visitors into V&A East Museum on opening.



First exhibition - *The Music Is Black: A British Story*

On 18 April 2026, V&A East Museum will open with its first landmark exhibition, ***The Music Is Black: A British Story***, with a sound experience by Sennheiser. The exhibition spanning 1900 to the present day reveals how Black British music has shaped British culture – and its global impact – to tell a long-overdue story of Black excellence, struggle, resilience, and joy. **Joan Armatrading's childhood guitar** goes on display for the first time, alongside fashion worn by **Little Simz** and newly acquired photographs by artists including **Jennie Baptiste, Beezer, Dennis Morris, Eddie Otchere, Sam White** and more.

To coincide, **V&A East** will launch a major partnership with **BBC Music**, including complimentary programming inspired by the exhibition. V&A East will also collaborate with East Bank partners, London College of Fashion, UAL, the BBC, Sadler's Wells East and UCL East, on a new annual festival celebrating creativity, collaboration and community. The first edition, launching spring 2026, is ***The Music is Black Festival***, from East Bank on the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park.

Why We Make Galleries

Across two floors, and 10 key themes, **over 500 objects from the V&A's collections spanning art, architecture, design, performance, and fashion** go on display in new **Why We Make** galleries designed by **JA Projects**. With a design inspired by east London and in collaboration with the **V&A East Youth Collective**, the galleries offer a fresh look at contemporary culture through the V&A's collections, with guiding quotes from global makers throughout. Objects are brought together in constellations across different times, cultures and countries, and addressing topical issues important to our audiences – from representation, identity and wellbeing to social justice and environmental action.

Displays spotlight a series of recent acquisitions, from the humanitarian design work of **Yasmeen Lari and the Heritage Foundation of Pakistan** to architectural models by **Assemble** and the **Himalayan Institute of Alternatives, Ladakh**, and from **Jamie Hawkesworth's Preston Bus Station** photographs and **Bisila Noha's** sculptural ceramics to one of **Yinka Ilori's** early works, his 'Captain Hook' armchair (2015), inspired by a school friend and Yoruba parable about destiny and not judging others. Others include an ensemble by east London-based Irish artist **Richard Malone**, and an outfit from **Lazy Oaf's** recent fashion collaboration with creative **King Owusu**, whose playful illustrations explore the therapeutic nature of gardening, as well as garments by radical design studio and campaigners for planet conscious fashion, **VIN + OMI**, including eco-textiles made from stinging nettles.

From east London, displays also highlight local making communities and initiatives, with zines by collaborative publishing collective **One of My Kind**, who founded **Rabbits Road Press** in Old Manor Park Library, and a 2023 **Walthamstow F.C.** shirt developed by Wood Street Walls, with Admiral and William Morris Gallery, using a print by William Morris' first apprentice, John Henry Dearle. The galleries showcase a series of co-produced projects created with east London-based residents, artists and creatives, drawing on the V&A's collection, including displays by artist and designer, **Sahra Hersi**,



and by Hackney-based photographer, **Tom Hunter** in collaboration with the V&A East Youth Collective.

Highlights include:

‘Our Place in the World’ explores how we make our place in the world by visualising ourselves in it, from fashion to portraiture, photography and beyond. Works in conversation include:

- **Maud Sulter’s** photographic print, ‘Urania (portrait of Lubaina Himid)’, from the series *Zabat*, 1988, created to challenge exclusions and colonial representations of Black women in European art histories.
- Images of **Claude Cahun’s** photomontage illustrations from their autobiographical essay and manifesto on queer love, *Aveux non Avenus (Disavowed Confessions)*, 1930.
- A copy of a self-portrait of Italian painter **Sofonisba Anguissola** (1530–1620), who used self-portraits to assert her identity as a woman artist in a profession then dominated by men.
- **A robe worn by a Daoist priest**, 1800–1900, rooted in ancient Chinese philosophy of the universe. The yin-yang symbol represents the belief that all natural phenomena, from the seasons to day and night, are governed by a balance of opposing but interconnected forces.
- **Molly Goddard’s** recently acquired *Daria* dress, 2020. Created to challenge preconceptions of femininity and enable different forms of self-expression, Beyoncé wore a *Daria* dress in her 2020 film *Black is King*.

‘Breaking Boundaries’ reveals how making can challenge norms and the trailblazing creatives that have pushed their disciplines in new directions – often drawing from their personal backgrounds – to help break down barriers of gender, race and class.

Works in conversation include:

- **A 17th century gown** by textile designer Anna Maria Garthwaite who moved to east London in 1730 to establish herself in the Spitalfields’ silk-weaving district. Self-taught, Garthwaite was one of few women designers to become commercially successful in an industry led by men.
- **Althea McNish’s** *Golden Harvest* furnishing fabric, 1959. Created in her Tottenham studio, McNish drew on her African Caribbean heritage and signature vibrant use of colour and pattern for the print which became Hull Traders Ltd’s bestselling design.
- **Derek Jarman’s** set model for *Don Giovanni* at Sadler’s Wells Opera, 1968, pushing boundaries of contemporary scenography with bold abstract, geometric shapes, shocking critics at the time.
- **Leigh Bowery and Mr Pearl’s** ballet costumes for Michael Clark Company’s *Because We Must*, 1987. Artist and activist Bowery designed these provocative ensembles echoing fetish and kink outfits for the Scottish choreographer’s revolutionary ballet.
- **Vivienne Westwood’s** *Cut, Slash & Pull* ensemble, Autumn Winter 1990. Westwood mixed tradition and provocation with this ensemble riffing on historic English tailoring, pushing details like slashes and fraying to the extreme.



‘Caring for Ourselves’ explores how making and care are deeply connected, from the therapeutic to the protective, the design and ritual use of objects can empower the mind and body. Works in conversation include:

- Two photographs from **Jo Spence’s** *Narratives of Dis-ease* series, 1989. Through her series, in collaboration with Dr Tim Sheard, Spence used phototherapy to process the trauma she experienced through breast cancer.
- **Wearable protection** including **16th century European ornamental pomanders** (scent cases) thought to ward off disease and **18th century coral necklaces and amulet cases from Tibet and Northern India** to repel evil, are displayed alongside contemporary wearables from the e-Rosary, to the first **Fitbit** design.
- **Early 19th century print of east London’s Victoria Park** – London’s first public park – created following a popular public campaign by William Carr to create a green space offering fresh air, respite and leisure for all in the capital city.
- **A rare sampler from 1830 by 17-year-old Elizabeth Parker**. The hand-stitched letters give a detailed account of her difficult experiences working as a servant, using the act of stitching her own message to help process these.
- **Alvar Aalto’s Paimio armchair**, 1932–35, created for Paimio Sanatorium in Finland, a centre for patients recovering from tuberculosis, which he designed with his wife, Aino.

Further gallery themes include **‘Crafting Stories’**, **‘Building Creative Communities’**, **‘Revealing a World in Flux’**, **‘Empowering through Design’**, **‘Rethinking Systems’**, **‘Reimagining Traditions’** and **‘Voicing Dissent’**.

Supporters

V&A East Museum completes the V&A East project – one of the UK’s biggest new museum projects of the decade – as the sister site to V&A East Storehouse, which opened in May 2025. Both sites are part of the Mayor of London’s London 2012 Olympic legacy and overseen by V&A Deputy Director and COO, and East Bank Chair, Tim Reeve, with artistic vision led by V&A East Director, Gus Casely-Hayford.

The Music Is Black: A British Story at V&A East Museum is supported by the Ford Foundation with further support from the Huo Family Foundation and GRoW @ Annenberg. Sound Experience by Sennheiser.

-ENDS-

For further PRESS information about V&A East, please contact Laura Mitchell, l.mitchell@vam.ac.uk / press.office@vam.ac.uk / 020 7942 2502 (not for publication).

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



Notes to Editors

- V&A East Museum is **FREE** to all and **opens on Saturday 18 April 2026**. Opening hours are 10:00-18:00, seven-days-a-week, with late night openings to 22:00 every Thursday and Saturday.
- Tickets for V&A East Museum's first paid for exhibition, *The Music is Black: A British Story*, will be available to purchase in early 2026.
- **O'Donnell + Tuomey** are the building architects. **JA_Projects** in collaboration with **A Practice for Everyday Life** and **Larry Achiampong** are designers for the *Why We Make* Galleries. **Studio Mutt** are designers for the retail spaces. **Sadeysa Greenaway-Bailey** is the exhibition designer for *The Music is Black: A British Story*. Wayfinding is designed by **Fieldwork Facility**.

About V&A East

V&A East is dedicated to creative opportunity and its power to bring change. V&A East Storehouse (opened 31 May 2025) and V&A East Museum (opening 18 April 2026) are two free cultural destinations that are part of East Bank, on Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park. Both have been created in partnership with young people and inspired by east London's creative heritage. Working directly with the voices that are shaping global contemporary culture, V&A East brings the V&A collection and archive to life in new ways, celebrating making in all its forms and opening up new possibilities and discoveries for everyone.

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About East Bank

- East Bank is the UK's newest cultural quarter at the heart of Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park. The place where everything happens – entertainment, inspiration and discovery – and open to everyone who visits, lives and works in east London.
- East Bank represents the biggest ever cultural investment by the Mayor of London, with support from HM Government and the four Olympic boroughs.
- East Bank is made up of BBC Music Studios; London College of Fashion, UAL; Sadler's Wells East; UCL (University College London); V&A East Museum & Storehouse.
- London College of Fashion, UAL, and UCL East (University College London) opened the doors of their new campuses in Autumn 2023 and Sadler's Wells East opened in February 2025. V&A East Storehouse opened on 31 May 2025, V&A East Museum opens 18 April 2026, and BBC Music Studios in late 2026/early 2027.
- A powerhouse for innovation, creativity and learning in Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park, East Bank is rooted in the diverse communities of east London and is a reflection of the creative spirit and the legacy of the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games.

