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BRAND NEW V&A EAST MUSEUM UNVEILED AHEAD OF OPENING SATURDAY 18 APRIL

WEDNESDAY 15 APRIL 2026

- Brand new **V&A East Museum** opens in the heart of **Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park**. Co-created with young people, creatives, and east Londoners, it celebrates making and creativity's power to bring change
- First major exhibition ***The Music is Black: A British Story***, reveals how Black British music has shaped British culture over the last 125 years – and its impact around the world
- Exhibition highlights include **Stormzy's** iconic 2019 Glastonbury vest designed by **Banksy**, **Joan Armatrading's** childhood guitar, fashion worn by **Seal**, **Sade + Skin**, plus **Fabio & Grooverider's DJ equipment** and Grooverider's first turntable, newly acquired photographs by **Eddie Otchere**, **Jennie Baptiste** and **Laura 'Hyperfrank' Brosnan**, and a specially commissioned painting by **Sir Frank Bowling**
- Two free permanent ***Why We Make* galleries** spotlight global culture with a topical lens with over 500 objects from the V&A's collection
- Highlights include **new acquisitions** by designer **Yinka Ilori**, fashion designer **Molly Goddard**, photographer **Jamie Hawkesworth** and ceramicist **Bisila Noha**, alongside a range of objects from **Renaissance portraits** and **historic scent cases** to photographs by **Maud Sulter** and **Shadi Ghadirian**, a **Pussyhat** worn on protest marches, **Keith Khan's** carnival costumes, ballet costumes by **Leigh Bowery**, and fashion by **Alexander McQueen** and **Vivienne Westwood**
- New artworks by artists including Turner Prize-nominated **Rene Matić**, **Carrie Mae Weems** and **Tania Bruguera** and more revealed as part of V&A East's inaugural *New Work* commissions

V&A East Museum opens its doors for the first time this Saturday 18 April as part of East Bank, the new cultural quarter in the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park, supported by the Mayor of London. 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.

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Set across a bright, spacious five-storey building designed by architects **O'Donnell + Tuomey**, V&A East Museum is a showcase of creativity and a celebration of east London, UK and global makers.

Behind its doors – in front of which stands **Thomas J Price's** 18ft sculpture, *A Place Beyond* – V&A East Museum opens its first landmark multisensory exhibition, ***The Music is Black: A British Story*** – the largest ever exhibition on the impact of Black British music on the UK and around the world. Featuring over **200 objects** from the V&A's collection and important loans, at its heart it celebrates the emergence of eight distinct Black British genres from **2 tone** to **lovers rock**, **Brit funk**, **jungle**, **drum & bass**, **trip hop**, **UK garage** and **grime**.

Tracing 125 years of Black British music, the exhibition brings together hidden stories of early legends and contemporary artists through objects from groundbreaking musician **Winifred Atwell's** piano to **Stormzy's** iconic 2019 Glastonbury vest designed by **Banksy**, originally conceived on the back of a napkin. Other highlights include **Joan Armatrading's** childhood guitar, equipment belonging to **Fabio & Grooverider**, including **Grooverider's** first turntable, the Super Nintendo **Jme** used for his early music experiments, alongside fashion worn by **Little Simz**, **Seal**, **Dame Shirley Bassey**, **Sade** and **Skin**. Also on show are artworks revealing the joy, resilience and importance of Black British artistry and the way in which music moves us, by **Dame Sonia Boyce**, **Zak Ové**, **Sokari Douglas Camp CBE**, **Denzil Forrester**, and specially commissioned new works by **Sir Frank Bowling** and **LR Vandy**.

Committed to researching the impact of Black British music both globally and in the UK, the V&A has acquired **over 50 photographs from the 1960s to the 2010s** to its collection – many on display in the exhibition for the first time. Works include **Dennis Morris's** early photographs of **Bob Marley**, **Eddie Otchere's** evocative diptych of drum & bass pioneers **DJ Kemistry** and **DJ Storm**, **Soulla Petrou's** portrait of UK garage and R&B trio, **Mis-Teeq** and **Laura 'Hyperfrank' Brosnan's** print capturing **Skepta's** family celebrating his 2016 Mercury Prize win.

The BBC have partnered with V&A East on *The Music Is Black: A British Story*, providing access to archival materials, and releasing a season of content across its channels and platforms inspired by the exhibition.

The content is curated at bbc.co.uk/themusicisblack and includes a new audio-visual mixtape from Shortee Blitz and Beat A Maxx. The exhibition also inspires The Music is Black Festival, a series of programming, displays and performances in collaboration with East Bank partners across Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park and beyond in summer 2026.

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V&A East Ambassador, Cat Burns, said: *“Being part of the first **The Music is Black: A British Story** exhibition at V&A East Museum is such an exciting moment for me. V&A East Museum’s focus on creativity for change really speaks to how music and culture can inspire, challenge, and create opportunity. I’m looking forward to sharing this space and experience with everyone. It’s about celebrating art, identity, and stories that matter.”*

V&A East Museum’s new free permanent **Why We Make** galleries offer a fresh look at contemporary culture through the V&A’s collections. Designed by **JA_Projects** in collaboration with **A Practice for Everyday Life, Larry Achiampong** and the **V&A East Youth Collective**, the galleries hold **over 500 objects from the V&A’s collection spanning art, architecture, design, performance, and fashion**. Objects are brought together across different times, cultures and countries, with a design inspired by east London, to address topical issues important to our audiences – from representation, identity and wellbeing to social justice and environmental action.

Photographic works by **Claude Cahun, Maud Sulter** and **Shadi Ghadirian** are shown alongside a Renaissance self-portrait of Italian painter **Sofonisba Anguissola** and **Molly Goddard’s** feminist fashion to uncover how we find our place in the world by visualising ourselves in it. Furniture by **Yinka Ilori**, fashion by **Alexander McQueen**, carnival costumes by **Keith Khan**, ceramics by **Bisila Noha** and dance by **Akram Khan**, come together to explore how creatives push their practice to tell powerful personal stories. Work by trailblazers, including fashion designers **Vivienne Westwood, Rei Kawakubo** founder of **Comme des Garçons**, and 18th-century Spitalfields dressmaker **Anna Maria Garthwaite**, join radical ballet costumes by **Leigh Bowery**, and fabric prints by **Althea McNish**, to uncover how each creative broke ground in their industries.

The galleries also 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 Hackney-based photographer, **Tom Hunter**, created in collaboration with the V&A East Youth Collective.

V&A East Museum also opens with *New Work*, a new twice yearly rotating programme of creative commissions. The inaugural edition unveils newly commissioned works by **Tania Bruguera, Rene Matić, Justinien Tribillon, Carrie Mae Weems, and Laura Wilson**, each responding to the theme ‘**Making East London**’, an exploration of the area’s histories, communities and possible futures. Further *New Work* commissions by **Es Devlin, Lawrence Lek** and **Shahed Saleem** are revealed at V&A East Storehouse, extending the programme across both V&A East sites.

A new temporary display, **Dispersal** opens, with photographs by Marion Davies and Debra Rapp, who documented the people and workplaces of east London-based labour businesses at threat of closure or relocation due to the development of the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games. Also on show across V&A East Museum are a

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series of objects from the V&A's collection by creatives including **Ron Arad's *Concrete Stereo*** (1982), **Theaster Gates's** stoneware vessel, ***Voukos #1*** (2021), made as part of 'The Question of Clay' research project when Gates was an Emeritus Fellow at the V&A, and **Mawuena Kattah's *Aunty, Mum and Me Talking About My Fabric Collection*** (2016) tile painting.

V&A East Museum's opening programme of free live events includes a take-over by **DJ Nia Archives**, as well as artist-led workshops, conversations and live performances. Visitors can also enjoy **Café Jikoni**, an exciting partnership with the restaurant group known for 'cooking across borders'.

The Mayor of London has spearheaded and funded the creation of East Bank and V&A East Museum. The UK's newest culture and education quarter is the single biggest investment in London's cultural landscape since the Great Exhibition of 1851 and is expected to welcome over 1.5 million visitors a year and generate £1.5 billion for London's economy.

Gus Casely-Hayford, V&A East Director, said: *"Over 10 years in the making, we're delighted to open V&A East Museum, a space created with and for our audiences, including young people and east Londoners, in Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park. Sister site to V&A East Storehouse, it's part of East Bank and the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic legacy. Everyone is welcome at V&A East Museum. From *The Music is Black: A British Story* to our *Why We Make* galleries, *New Work* commissions and live events and activities, we hope you see yourself, your stories, and experiences represented here."*

The Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, said: *"Eight years ago, I set out a vision to create a new culture and education powerhouse in Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park, and with more than £600 million investment from City Hall, I'm delighted to see East Bank roaring into life. The opening of V&A East Museum is a major milestone in the growing success of East Bank. It will play a big part in our capital's world-leading cultural scene, celebrating creativity, creating opportunities and showing the power the arts can have. The inaugural exhibition, *Music is Black: A British Story*, fittingly celebrates the role of Black British music and the impact it has had across the globe. Following on from the successful opening of V&A East Storehouse, V&A East Museum is boosting East Bank's cultural offering even further, helping to build a better London for everyone."*

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 East Bank partnership, rooted in the diverse communities of east London and a reflection of the creative spirit and the legacy of the London 2012 Games. East Bank brings together some of the country's

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biggest institutions to shape cultural life in the capital and has been made possible by over £600m of investment from the Mayor of London.

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

-ENDS-

For further PRESS information about V&A East Museum, please contact Laura Mitchell, Shannon Nash, and Michaila Otoo through the V&A Press Office / 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 10pm-6pm, seven-days-a-week, with late night openings to 10pm every Thursday and Saturday.
- Tickets are now on sale for V&A East Museum's first paid for exhibition, *The Music is Black: A British Story* vam.ac.uk/exhibitions/the-music-is-black-a-british-story
- **O'Donnell + Tuomey** are the building architects for V&A East Museum. **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. Wayfinding is designed by **Fieldwork Facility**. **Sadeysa Greenaway-Bailey** is the lead exhibition designer for *The Music is Black: A British Story*.
- Co-creation is at the heart of V&A East. From the design of V&A East Museum's *Why We Make* galleries and co-created displays, to the campaigns that bring the museum to new, young and diverse audiences. The museum's multi-media launch campaign is developed in collaboration with over 40 Makers, including photographer and multimedia artist **Juno Calypso**, designer **Shivas Howard Brown**, architect **Shawn Adams**, and culinary artist **Nil Mutluer**, and features a centrepiece film directed by Hackney-born **Zeinab Batchelor**.

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



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contemporary culture, V&A East brings the V&A collection and archive to life in new ways, celebrating making in all its forms, 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.

BBC The Music is Black

Across TV, radio, iPlayer, Sounds and online, the BBC will reflect and celebrate some of the key genres, personalities, scenes and music that define the last 125 years of Black Music in the UK through a variety of bespoke content and programmes. The project has been shaped in collaboration with the V&A East Museum's inaugural exhibition and celebrates the important contributions of Black British music to the UK's cultural landscape. This special season of programming is available on BBC iPlayer and BBC Sounds and from the dedicated webpage, www.bbc.co.uk/themusicisblack, which contains archive pieces as well as all the latest content.

About Sennheiser

We live and breathe audio. We are driven by the passion to create audio solutions that make a difference. This passion has taken us from the world's greatest stages to the quietest listening rooms – and made Sennheiser the name behind audio that doesn't just sound good: It feels true. Since 1945, we stand for building the future of audio and bringing remarkable sound experiences to our customers.

