

V&A East: 'A book that would always be open, and never shut'

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Abstract

Enabling public access to 'hidden' collections is a constant conundrum for most museums worldwide. Like many institutions, the V&A is routinely criticised for 'hoarding treasures' despite major efforts over recent decades to improve and increase collections on permanent display or accessible through the provision of dedicated study facilities.

When the Victoria and Albert Museum was created in 1857, its founding director Henry Cole famously described it as 'a book that would be always open and never shut.' The V&A is now in a position to realise Cole's vision. The 2012 Olympic Games catalysed an ambitious legacy development plan for east London and the V&A is the lead museum partner for a new cultural and academic quarter planned for the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park. Our new satellite institution, tentatively called V&A East, is due to open in 2022. During the early stages of planning V&A East, the British government announced the future sale of Blythe House, the former headquarters of the Post Office Savings Bank in West Kensington, which has served as a home for the reserve collections of the V&A, the British Museum and the Science Museum since the eighties.

A new, purpose-built facility in east London combined with the urgent need to move our reserve collections provides a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for the V&A to create a truly 21st century institution by radically rethinking the ways in which we house, display, research, and provide open access to our collections and expertise. This statement will address how will this change the way curators and visitors access the collections; which collections will be selected for this new location and what this means for our collections stored at South Kensington; and the discussions currently underway with collection curators across the whole museum.

About Catherine Ince

Catherine Ince is a Senior Curator at the Victoria and Albert Museum where she is developing the curatorial program of V&A East, a new institution planned for the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park, London. Until November 2015 she was a Curator at the Barbican Centre and produced major survey exhibitions and publications including *The World of Charles and Ray Eames* (2015), *Bauhaus: Art as Life* (2012), and *Future Beauty: 30 Years of Japanese Fashion* (2011). Prior to joining the Barbican Catherine was Co-Director of the British Council's Architecture, Design and Fashion department where she organized international touring exhibitions and collaborative projects about contemporary design and architecture, and commissioned the British Pavilion at the Venice Biennale of Architecture. Catherine is currently an international juror for the Swiss Design Prize, organized by the Swiss Federal Office of Culture, and is a member of the advisory board for the Stanley Picker Gallery and Dorich House Museum at Kingston University. She is a regular contributor to a range of print and online publications, and has lectured widely in the UK and internationally.