



News Release

V&A's Europe 1600-1815 galleries open to the public

www.vam.ac.uk/europegalleries

The installation of nearly 1,100 objects has completed as the V&A opens its new suite of galleries dedicated to the arts of living in Europe between 1600 and 1815. Seven galleries transformed for the redisplay of the Museum's unrivalled collection of 17th- and 18th-century European art and design will be open to the public from 9 December 2015. A major part of the V&A's ongoing redevelopment programme known as *FuturePlan*, the £12.5m project has been made possible thanks to lead support of £4.75 million from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) and the generosity of a number of donors, private individuals and trusts.

In its prominent position next to the V&A's grand entrance, Europe 1600-1815 continues the story of art and design that begins in the award-winning Medieval & Renaissance galleries (opened 2009) and completes the restoration of the entire front wing of the Museum. Four large galleries introduce the story in chronological sequence, alternating with three smaller galleries that focus on specific activities: collecting in the Cabinet; enlightened debate in the Salon (which includes a contemporary installation from artist collective Los Carpinteros); entertainment and glamour in the Masquerade. Three historical interiors invite visitors to imagine life in the personal spaces of the time: a 17th-century French bedchamber; a Parisian cabinet from the reign of Louis XVI and a mirrored room from 18th-century Italy.

The collection comprises some of the most magnificent works held by the V&A, including spectacular examples of ceramics and glass, furniture and metalwork, painting and sculpture, prints and books, textiles and fashion. Many objects were made in Europe by its finest artists and craftsmen for the period's most discerning leaders of taste such as Louis XIV, Marie Antoinette, and Napoleon.

The displays demonstrate how France succeeded Italy as the undisputed leader of

fashionable art and design in Europe in the second half of the 17th century. They also show how – for the first time ever – Europeans systematically explored, exploited and collected resources from Africa, Asia and the Americas.

Martin Roth, V&A Director, said: *“These new galleries are a major development in our ambitious programme to renew the architecture of the V&A for the 21st century and, at the same time, re-examine and re-present our collection for our visitors. At a time when roles and relationships within Europe and the world are under scrutiny, it is interesting to explore the objects, makers and patrons of a period that was so influential upon the habits and lifestyle of Europe today.”*

Sir Peter Luff, Chair of HLF, said: *“The opening of the Europe 1600-1815 Galleries is witness to the V&A’s vision and commitment to redeveloping its South Kensington site. The seven galleries are of international importance meriting a dramatic refresh and a complementary programme of activities to attract and inspire a new generation of museum visitors. It’s thanks to National Lottery players that we have been able to support this key piece of the wider FuturePlan jigsaw.”*

Preparation for the reopening has included a full reinterpretation of the collection and many important objects have undergone conservation: several large tapestries have been cleaned at De Wit Royal Manufacturers of Tapestries in Mechelen, Belgium, including the Gobelins tapestry after the Poussin painting *The infant Moses tramples on Pharaoh's crown* manufactured in Paris in the 1680s.

The V&A’s own world-renowned studios have conserved many objects in different materials and techniques, and of differing scale. A Meissen porcelain table fountain has been meticulously researched and rebuilt for the first time since its acquisition in 1870. A large, highly ornate Rococo writing cabinet made for Augustus III and acquired in 1977 from the celebrated sale of Mentmore Towers, Buckinghamshire glistens now after the conservation and cleaning of its gilded mounts and mother-of-pearl inlay. Another newly conserved highlight on display is a grand 18th-century bed from the Parisian workshop of George Jacob. A supplier to royal courts across Europe, Jacob survived the French Revolution and later made furniture for Napoleon.

The V&A collection includes several outstanding bequests, notably that of John Jones, a military tailor who left his exceptional collection of French decorative arts to the Museum

in 1882 and who is the subject of a dedicated display within the galleries. A number of significant new acquisitions are being exhibited for the first time at the Museum, including a 17th-century Venetian table with a top by Lucio de Lucci, acquired after a temporary export ban in 2012. The magnificent oil painting *The Château de Juvisy*, by Pierre-Denis Martin, a rare depiction of the architecture and bustling life of an estate near Paris in the 17th century, is the centrepiece of the gallery exploring the rise of French cultural dominance during the period. The work was secured for the nation in 2014 thanks to a major public appeal and support from the Friends of the V&A, the Art Fund and others.

The V&A has worked with architectural practice ZMMA on the redesign of the galleries. The project has seen the complete removal of the interior cladding added in the 1970s and reclaimed back of house storage space. The combined effect enlarges the galleries by almost a third to 1,550 square metres. Natural light has been returned to the spaces with previously obscured windows uncovered. Environmental controls have been upgraded to provide sustainable and stable conditions for the collection and new state-of-the-art cases that meet modern environmental and security requirements have been installed.

Adam Zombory-Moldovan, design Director at ZMMA said: *"Inspired by the Baroque, Rococo and Neoclassical objects in the V&A's collection, we have created richly engaging galleries with modern interventions poised elegantly in the restored Aston Webb architecture. Our architectural settings for the displays are detailed in beautiful materials like bronze, walnut, dark stone and leather, making the displays accessible and atmospheric."*

Europe 1600-1815 has been made possible thanks to the generosity of the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF), the children of Her Highness Sheikha Amna Bint Mohammed Al Thani, the Friends of the V&A, The Selz Foundation, Würth Group, The Wolfson Foundation, Dr Genevieve Davies, William Loschert, the J Paul Getty Jr Charitable Trust and many other private individuals and trusts.

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NOTES TO EDITORS

- Lesley Miller is lead curator and Joanna Norman is project curator of Europe 1600-1815.
- The galleries open to the public on Wednesday 9 December 2015. Entry is free.
- To mark the opening of the new galleries the V&A has published *The Arts of Living: Europe 1600–1815*, edited by Elizabeth Miller and Hilary Young (£25, Hardback).
- Pierre-Denis Martin's *The Château de Juvisy* was purchased with the support of the Friends of the V&A, a gift in memory of Melvin R. Seiden, the Art Fund (with a contribution from The Wolfson Foundation), the John Webb Trust Fund, the Coral Samuel Charitable Trust, and many other generous donors. The Venetian table with a top by Lucio de Lucci was acquired with support from The Friends of the V&A, The Art Fund (with a contribution from the Wolfson Foundation), and The Horn Bequest.
- Thanks to National Lottery players, the **Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF)** invests money to help people across the UK explore, enjoy and protect the heritage they care about - from the archaeology under our feet to the historic parks and buildings we love, from precious memories and collections to rare wildlife. www.hlf.org.uk
- **ZMMA** are the architects and exhibition designers for Europe 1600-1815; a practice with special expertise in galleries, museums and exhibition design. A focus of its work is the innovative transformation of significant historic buildings and sites. ZMMA recently completed the multiple award-winning revival of the historic Watts Gallery, Surrey. Other completed projects include galleries for diverse collections ranging from Constable and Rothko, through Tibetan, Islamic and South-East Asian artefacts to medieval stained glass and sculpture. Current projects include a new museum building for the work of William Heath Robinson; new gallery buildings at Gainsborough's House, Suffolk and another at Manchester Museum; remodelling of the Fry Art Gallery and the transformation of GF Watts' studio building. Ongoing exhibition design includes work at the National Railway Museum, York; Orleans House Gallery and the Royal Observatory, Greenwich. www.zmma.com