

The Weston Cast Court

V&A opens newly refurbished Italian Cast Court



On Saturday 29 November 2014, the V&A will open the newly refurbished Italian Cast Court as the first phase in the renovation of the Museum's vast, day-lit courts is completed. First opened in 1873, the Cast Courts were purpose built to house one of the most comprehensive collections of casts of post-classical European sculpture. 24 metres in height, the two galleries house some of the V&A's largest objects and are among the most popular in the Museum.

Collecting plaster cast reproductions and electrotypes reached the height of popularity in the mid to late 19th-century when few people could afford to travel abroad. The South Kensington Museum (as the V&A was then known) was at the forefront of this enthusiasm, enabling visitors to admire and study faithful reproductions of important European monuments and works of art.

The V&A's cast collection is now an exceptional example of this phenomenon and serves as a valuable and unique record of the finished sculptures and carvings from which they were made, as many of the originals may now have been lost, damaged or badly restored. The Cast Courts are also the only public galleries in the Museum which display the same collection of objects as when they were first opened.

The Court will feature over 60 of the V&A's finest 19th-century reproductions of important Italian Renaissance monuments. It includes the five metre high cast of Michelangelo's David (c.1856), the set of electrotypes doors cast from the Gates of Paradise at Florence Cathedral (c.1867) measuring over seven and a half meters in height, a plaster cast of a pulpit from Pisa Cathedral by Giovanni Pisano (c.1865), and the monumental cast of Jacopo della Quercia's great arch from the Basilica of San Petronio, Bologna (1886).

Upon reopening, the Italian Cast Court will be renamed the Weston Cast Court in recognition of The Garfield Weston Foundation's longstanding and generous support of the V&A. Philippa Charles, director of the Foundation said:

“The Garfield Weston Foundation is delighted to be associated with the renovation of the magnificent Italian Cast Court. It’s incredible to be able to see and study brilliant reproductions of such important historic works and we are proud that this this experience is now secure for future generations of visitors to the V&A.”

The renovation of the gallery has enabled new study and conservation of the collection which has furthered understanding of how the casts were formed and the workshops where the sculptures were made. Such in-depth examination and preservation of the collection has not taken place for over half a century and the process has aided discoveries into the techniques of casts, surface coatings, finishes and mould making. The displays will be reconfigured with new interpretation to provide a wider understanding of the history of the objects and reveal the processes behind the creation of the casts on display.

The conservation work has also included extensive research into the original decorative architectural scheme of the gallery. Research completed by Crick Smith, working with Julian Harrap and Metaphor architects, has reinstated a decorative scheme that pays tribute to the Cast Court’s original colours, architectural details and finishes. The 19th-century ceramic tiled floor will also be restored and repairs to the glazed roof, ceiling and walls will return the court to its original splendour.

Marjorie Trusted, Lead Curator of the Cast Courts, said: *“This splendid gallery displays some of the greatest sculptures of the Italian Renaissance, seen through life-size and dramatic 19th-century plaster casts, in a richly-coloured and imposing interior. The renovation will see the gallery transformed into one of the most impressive spaces in the V&A.”*

The refurbishment of the Cast Court is part of the Museum’s FuturePlan to transform the V&A through new galleries and exciting redispays of its collections.

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A selection of high-resolution images is available to download from <http://pressimages.vam.ac.uk>

Notes to Editors

- The Italian Cast Court has been named The Weston Cast Court in recognition of The Garfield Weston Foundation’s longstanding and generous support of the V&A. The project has also been supported by The Henry Moore Foundation and a number of private individuals.

- **The Garfield Weston Foundation** is a family-founded charitable grant-making foundation which supports a wide range of causes across the UK, donating over £54million in the most recent financial year. It was established in 1958 by Willard Garfield Weston and has donated over £785million, becoming one of the largest and most respected charitable institutions in the UK. Further information can be found at: www.garfieldweston.org
- Entry to the Weston Cast Court, 46B will be FREE
- A short film about the renovation of the Italian Cast Court can be viewed on the V&A website here: <http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/videos/v/video-the-v-and-a-cast-courts/> and a film about the temporary move of the plaster cast of Michelangelo's David is available here <http://vimeo.com/35893572>
- Read more about reviving the Cast Courts on the V&A blog: <http://www.vam.ac.uk/b/blog/reviving-cast-courts> and <http://www.vam.ac.uk/b/blog/conservation-blog>
- The second Cast Court (Gallery 46A) will also be restored as part of FuturePlan.
- **FuturePlan.** Over the last 13 years the V&A has completed more than 50 building projects and transformed around 40,000 square metres of the Museum. It has worked with some of the UK's most innovative architects, designers and engineers to create beautiful and contemporary new settings for the V&A's outstanding collections while renewing and restoring much of the building's original architecture and improving the visitors' experience. www.vam.ac.uk/futureplan