The Weston Cast Court

V&A opens newly refurbished Italian Cast Court

Opening 29 November 2014

The V&A will open the newly refurbished Italian Cast Court this November as the first phase in the renovation of the Museum’s vast, day-lit courts. 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. Featuring some of the V&A’s largest objects, the two galleries 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 19th-century 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 Italian Cast Court, renamed the Weston Cast Court in recognition of The Garfield Weston Foundation’s longstanding and generous support of the V&A, 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 electrotype 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).

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 redisplay of its collections.

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Notes to Editors

• Italian Cast Court, 46B is FREE
• 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 charitable grant-making foundation which supports a wide range of causes across the UK, donating over £50 million in the last year. The Foundation was established in 1958 by Willard Garfield Weston, and since it was founded has donated over £780 million to charitable causes across the UK, becoming one of the largest and most respected charitable institutions in the UK. Further information can be found at: www.garfieldweston.org
• 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/articles/f/futureplan-renovation-cast-courts/ and a film about the temporary move of the plaster cast of Michelangelo’s David: 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.

For further PRESS information please contact the V&A Press Office on 0207 942 2500/2508 or email press.office@vam.ac.uk / a.evans@vam.ac.uk

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