



Press Release
22 May 2023

V&A Photography Centre opens the largest suite of galleries in the UK dedicated to a permanent photography collection

Completed Photography Centre features 600 works across 7 galleries including new acquisitions and commissions on public display for the first time

The complete Photography Centre
Open 25 May 2023
vam.ac.uk | [@V_and_A](https://twitter.com/V_and_A) | [#VamPhotography](https://www.instagram.com/VamPhotography)

The V&A's Photography Centre is the most extensive suite of galleries in the UK dedicated to a permanent photography collection. Spanning global contemporary photography and cutting-edge commissions, to interactive displays and themed galleries showcasing the rich breadth and history of the collection, the seven galleries of the completed Photography Centre – four of which are new additions – enable visitors to experience photography and its diverse histories in new ways.

Photography is embedded in the history of the V&A. The museum has collected and exhibited photography since its foundation in the 1850s, and today the collection is one of the largest and most varied in the world.

Highlights of the opening displays comprise recent acquisitions exhibited at the museum for the first time, including works by celebrated contemporary photographers **Liz Johnson Artur**, **Sammy Baloji**, **Vera Lutter**, **Paul Mpagi Sepuya**, **Tarrah Krajnak** and **Vasantha Yoganathan**, as well as a monumental photographic sculpture by **Noémie Goudal**. Two major new commissions supported by the Manitou Fund have been unveiled: a photographic series by leading Indian photographer **Gauri Gill**, and a digital commission by British media artist **Jake Elwes**, who has explored the use of deepfake technology and Artificial Intelligence (AI) with drag cabaret performance. The Manitou Fund has committed to funding six commissions for the Photography Centre, which will see a new print and digital commission in 2023, 2025 and 2027. The breadth of subject matter explored by these international artists includes identity, race, sexuality, and climate change, together with a wide range of technical approaches and practices.

Other new spaces include a room dedicated to Photography and the Book, housing the Royal Photographic Society (RPS) Library, spectacularly installed on floor-to-ceiling shelves. The small display within this room, *How Not to Photograph a Bulldog*, is a light-hearted foray into one of

the many topics covered by the photographic manuals in the RPS Library. Additionally, an interactive gallery about the history and use of the camera features a walk-in camera obscura.

The Photography Centre also presents new, themed displays beginning with *Energy: Sparks from the Collection*. This display examines the many kinds of energy in photography, both the hidden processes intrinsic to creating a picture, and the subjects in front of the camera. Featuring around 200 works from the 1840s through to the present day, the display demonstrates how power in all its diverse forms has sparked the imaginations of photographers. Highlights include some of the earliest photographs by **William Henry Fox Talbot**, as well as works by **Richard Avedon**, **Brassaï**, **Henri Cartier Bresson**, **Joana Choumali**, **Naoya Hatakeyama**, **Dorothea Lange**, **Man Ray** and **Jo Spence**.

Marta Weiss, V&A Senior Curator of Photography and Lead Curator of Phase Two of the Photography Centre, said: *“Photography lies at the heart of the V&A. The museum has collected photography since 1852 and continues to acquire the best of contemporary practice. As photography plays an ever-increasing role in all our lives, the expanded Photography Centre will be more relevant than ever. We look forward to welcoming visitors to explore the medium’s diverse histories and enjoy our world-leading collection.”*

About the Photography Centre:

Room 95

Inside the Camera

Room 95 is an interactive gallery exploring how cameras work and how they are used, from the Victorian view camera to the first iPhone. The highlight is a walk-in camera obscura, demonstrating the optical phenomenon that is the basis of how all cameras work. A timeline of cameras show their evolution, with accompanying animations explaining the inner workings of these iconic devices.

Room 96

Room 97, The Parasol Foundation Gallery

Photography Now

Two new galleries are dedicated to showcasing recent acquisitions of global contemporary photography, including special commissions. Highlights in the inaugural display include works by **Liz Johnson Artur**, **Sammy Baloji**, **Vera Lutter**, **Paul Mpagi Sepuya**, and **Vasanthi Yoganathan**, all acquired with the support of the V&A Photographs Acquisition Group. A series of self-portraits by **Tarrah Krajnak**, acquired with the support of The Parasol Foundation Trust, also feature. A spectacular anamorphic sculpture by **Noémie Goudal** brings photography off the wall to explore both geological time and the nature of perception.

A new commission, supported by the Manitou Fund, from leading Indian photographer **Gauri Gill** presents a new body of work depicting temporary architecture on the outskirts of Delhi, ingeniously constructed by farmers from repurposed materials. The makeshift dwellings housed farmers bringing their concerns from the village to the capital in response to new laws that threatened their economic security.

Room 98, The Kusuma Gallery

Photography and the Book

A flexible space dedicated to Photography and the Book reflects how books have been a fundamental way of presenting photography since the 1840s. The Kusuma Gallery, which has been funded by The Kusuma Trust, visibly houses the extensive Royal Photographic Society (RPS) Library, following the transfer of the RPS Collection to the V&A in 2017. The RPS Library contains journals, books, pamphlets and manuals from all over the world, spanning topics from aerial photography to X-rays. More than 20,000 books, published over nearly 200 years, are available to visitors by request, with a selection of browsing books on open shelves.

The Kusuma Gallery also features changing displays of photographic books, periodicals and archival material. The first display, *How Not to Photograph a Bulldog*, is a light-hearted foray into one of the many topics covered by the photographic manuals in the RPS Library.

Films about the RPS Library and photographic processes are shown on digital terminals for visitors to enjoy. This multipurpose room will also be used for teaching and other programming.

Room 99, The Meta Media Gallery

Digital Gallery

One of the three galleries that opened in 2018, The Meta Media Gallery continues to be dedicated to digital media, challenging definitions of what photography is and generating questions around the use of photography today. The gallery showcases a new digital commission by Jake Elwes, supported by the Manitou Fund, exploring the use of deepfake technology and Artificial Intelligence (AI) with drag cabaret performance.

Room 100, The Bern and Ronny Schwartz Gallery

Room 101, The Sir Elton John and David Furnish Gallery

Photography 1840s-Now

Opened in 2018, these galleries have been entirely rehung for the 2023 opening of the Photography Centre. A new display, *Energy: Sparks from the Collection*, explores the many kinds of energy in photography, both the hidden processes intrinsic to creating a picture, and the subjects the camera depicts. Featuring works from the 1840s through to the present day, it demonstrates how power in all its diverse forms has sparked the imaginations of photographers.

Situated in the V&A's Northeast Quarter, the Photography Centre reclaims the beauty of seven original 19th-century picture galleries, restoring them to their original glory and purpose. Planned in two phases, the Centre is part of the V&A's FuturePlan development programme to revitalise the museum's public spaces through contemporary design and the restoration of original features. Phase One of the museum's Photography Centre opened in 2018, with three galleries designed by David Kohn. May 2023 sees the completion of the second and final phase of the Photography Centre with an additional four galleries, with base-build designed by Purcell, and fit-out designed by Gibson Thornley Architects.

Beyond the physical gallery spaces, a key focus for photography at the V&A is research and the development of new sector-leading initiatives. A major strand is The Parasol Foundation Women in Photography Project, established in 2021 to support women in photography. Led by the inaugural Parasol Foundation Curator of Women in Photography, Fiona Rogers, and funded by Ms. Ruth Monicka Parasol and The Parasol Foundation Trust, the Project encompasses a curatorial post alongside acquisitions, research, education and public displays. The Project's first acquisition by Tarrah Krajnak is included in the opening display of the Photography Centre. Also in May 2023, five winners of the inaugural V&A Parasol Foundation Prize for Women in Photography were exhibited at Peckham 24, south London's vibrant three-day contemporary photography festival. The prize is dedicated to supporting and championing the work of women in contemporary photography and will run for three years.

The V&A has received additional support from The Bern Schwartz Family Foundation. Alongside significant funding of Phase Two of the second and final phase of the Photography Centre, the Foundation has generously extended their commitment to a series of two-year Fellowships in photography for early-career curators until 2028. The V&A is pleased to announce the appointment of Mary Phan as the second Curatorial Fellow in Photography, supported by The Bern Schwartz Family Foundation, who will be in post until 2024.

The Photography Centre was made possible by Sir Elton John and David Furnish, The Kusuma Trust, The Bern Schwartz Family Foundation, Ms. Ruth Monicka Parasol and The Parasol Foundation Trust, Meta Media, Shao Zhong Art Foundation and many other generous supporters.

- ENDS -

For further PRESS information about the V&A Photography Centre, please contact Shannon Nash on s.nash@vam.ac.uk / +44 (0)20 3949 2502 (not for publication). A selection of press images is available to download free of charge from pressimages.vam.ac.uk.

Notes to Editors

- The V&A's complete Photography Centre re-opens 25 May 2023.
- The redevelopment of the V&A Photography Centre is curated by Duncan Forbes, Head of Photography, Marta Weiss, Senior Curator of Photography, and Hana Kaluznick, Assistant Curator of Photography, with Fiona Rogers, Parasol Foundation Curator of Women in Photography and Catherine Troiano, Curator of Photography.
- *Energy: Sparks from the Collection* is curated by Duncan Forbes, Head of Photography; Martin Barnes, Senior Curator of Photography; and Lydia Caston, Exhibition Project Curator, with Phoebe Evans, Assistant Curator of Photography
- The design team include Purcell as the base-build architect and Gibson Thornley as the fit-out architect.
- For more information about the V&A Parasol Foundation Prize for Women in Photography please visit [here](#).

Social Media

Twitter: @V_and_A

Instagram: @vamuseum

Facebook: @victoriaandalbertmuseum

Tiktok: @vamuseum

About the V&A Photography Collection

The V&A has collected photographs since its foundation in 1852 and continues to collect today, with new acquisitions supported by the V&A Photographs Acquisition Group and other generous donors.

The Royal Photographic Society (RPS) Collection was transferred to the V&A by the Science Museum Group in 2017 and was acquired with the generous assistance of the National Lottery Heritage Fund and Art Fund. The consolidation of these world-class collections was the catalyst for the museum's Photography Centre, Phase One of which opened in October 2018, with Phase Two opening in May 2023. The V&A's collection encompasses the work of leading historic and contemporary photographers as well as publications, cameras and related equipment. When not on display, photographs from the collection can be viewed in the Prints & Drawings Study Room. vam.ac.uk/collections/photographs.