



From David Hockney and Virgil Abloh to Mary Poppins and Pikachu – 2,000 objects from V&A’s world-class collections to go on display at reimagined V&A Museum of Childhood

- **V&A unveils highlight exhibits and galleries for radical £13m reimagination of V&A Museum of Childhood dedicated to empowering children through creativity**
- **Concept designs by AOC Architecture reveal vision for a transformed museum filled with natural light, vibrant colour, and playful, multi-sensory environments**
- **Ambitious two-year programme of free activities for families including hub at Whitechapel’s award-winning library whilst building closes for transformation**

From Beatrix Potter’s idyllic illustrations of the world of Peter Rabbit, to the life-size West End War Horse puppet Joey, to designs by contemporary superstars Virgil Abloh and Olafur Eliasson, star exhibits and concepts are today revealed for a radical £13m reimagination of the V&A Museum of Childhood. A transformed free-to-access collection set within interactive and playful galleries, will see the beloved Bethnal Green museum reopen in 2022 as a world-leading centre of creativity for children.

A three-day free *RE-INVENT* festival over the first May bank holiday, featuring live performances, a specially commissioned artist installation and drop-in events, will signal the new vision and celebrate the current museum’s final weekend before the doors close on 11 May 2020 to enable construction.

An unforgettable first museum experience for children awaits in 2022. From objects displayed at a toddlers’ height, to dressing up boxes next to couture fashion, and huge new variety of spaces for hands-on making, three new galleries *PLAY*, *IMAGINE* and *DESIGN* will be shaped in entirety around the way in which children aged 0 – 14 explore and learn.

For the first time, iconic works from the V&A’s extraordinary collections of art, design and performance will be joined by acquisitions from around the world. Hollywood props and costumes including the original Superman costume and Frankenstein’s Monster, and Mary Poppins’ magical umbrella will be set within theatrical displays to inspire the next generation of screenwriters, authors and story-tellers. Works by leading creatives such as Issey Miyake and Yves Behar will explore how objects are made next to ‘open studio’ areas, introducing young innovators of the future to inspirational design.

Tristram Hunt, Director of the V&A, said: *“We want to empower children to realise that every act of creativity is wondrous, whether it’s self-expression through their clothes, building a world on Minecraft, or launching a school climate strike. By bringing together the V&A’s world-class collections with immersive displays anchored in children’s every-day lives, we will offer an outstanding day out for families, for free. Beloved by the local community, but in need of modernisation, this ambitious transformation will enable the V&A Museum of Childhood to unlock its huge potential to nurture the potential of future generations and become a global champion of children’s creativity.”*

AOC's colourful, child-centred designs for three new galleries and a reimagination of the visitor experience throughout the museum fosters curiosity and a spirit of collaboration, through spaces for inter-generational play and creative experimentation. The main hall will be reimagined into *The Town Square* – a more inviting and social central space for the museum. A key feature will be the addition of a 125-person-capacity performance space *The Stage*. Forming the new centrepiece for the museum's popular daily programme of family activities, it will also present a platform for children to perform their own shows.

IMAGINE will trace the myths, fables and inspirations behind some of the world's most famous characters such as Paddington Bear, Pikachu and the Loch Ness Monster. Visitors will piece stories together of their own on an adventure into fantasy worlds through Alice-in-Wonderland inspired rooms and optical illusions that celebrate the surreal and subversive. A 'model town' of miniature worlds bringing together the museum's National Collection of dolls houses, a model of Sulkin House in Bethnal Green, to a Star Wars spaceship, will inspire new thinking about concepts of home.

A large-scale alphabet display will run the length of **PLAY**, offering families an imaginative way to learn letters together using V&A collections. Alongside, a series of interactive displays and sandpits will nurture children's motor-skills, and a new special area dedicated to pre-walkers will offer textured displays for sensory exploration. From the unusual to the universally loved, including chess, the crowdfunded card game Exploding Kittens and acclaimed mobile app Monument Valley, the gallery will also shine a light on stories behind some of the most enthralling and timeless games from around the world.

DESIGN will feature *The Designer's House*; the new home for a relaunched artist-in-residency programme. With a design inspired by the museum's historic 'Brompton boilers' ironwork structure – which once formed part of the V&A in South Kensington, *The Designer's House* will provide a space for artists and schoolchildren to work together to offer young people a glimpse into the life of a creative practitioner. With displays featuring examples of innovative international contemporary design, including Olafur Eliasson's Little Sun and the Micro Scooter, placed next to spaces for hands-on making, young people will be encouraged to experiment and dream up their own design ideas.

An ambitious programme of activity will see the beloved museum more embedded in its local community and across London than ever whilst building works are on-going, including:

- A major two-year partnership with Idea Store Whitechapel– east London's award-winning library – will launch May 2020, providing a free programme of activities for local families.
- A museum-first Learning residency at two local schools, with the ambition to reach every school in Tower Hamlets ahead of reopening.
- A host of special events and commissions will run throughout construction, building up to a series of major opening events in 2022.

Planning permission and Listed Building Consent was achieved for the base-build scheme in August 2019. Developed by architecture practice De Matos Ryan, the design will create more public space, better circulation including a new 'Kaleidoscopic' staircase, improved facilities and essential renovation of the museum's infrastructure, as well as a new suite of Learning studios on the south-side of the building. The proposals have been refined through over 40 co-design sessions with local schoolchildren, teachers, SEND and community groups and families. A new room for reading, shop and soft seating, designed by AOC, will refresh the welcome areas.

The V&A Museum of Childhood's transformation is the V&A's flagship project for children and young people, underpinning the V&A's renewed founding mission to be 'a schoolroom for everyone'. Driven by a new vision and purpose to champion creativity and equip children and young people with 21st century design skills, the new museum will also reopen in 2022 as a leading centre for creative curriculum design to support teachers and educators nationally.

Rushanara Ali, Member of Parliament for Bethnal Green and Bow, said: *"London owes its international recognition as one of the world's most creative capitals thanks to the hundreds of creative businesses that have established themselves in and around my constituency. I'm delighted to see that the V&A Museum of Childhood is harnessing this huge potential for forging new partnerships across the borough by embedding themselves in the local community whilst their building is closed for construction."*

Olafur Eliasson, said: *"My best childhood memories of museums are of places that made me felt seen and heard, where I was taken seriously, and my views respected. The revitalised V&A Museum of Childhood is one such institution, as its programme centres around design and creativity for children. Young people understand very well what is happening to our planet. They see that the best way to shape the future, to re-imagine our world, is through design and creativity. I am proud that my Little Sun solar lamp will feature in the new exhibit. I hope it can inspire young visitors to engage with sustainable energy solutions and come up with their own ideas for how to improve access to energy."*

Cressida Cowell, Waterstone's Children's Laureate and author of How to Train Your Dragon: *"I'm so pleased to see that the V&A is launching a new museum dedicated to inspiring the next generation. We need spaces for children that are designed to spark their imaginations and own creative ideas. Point 8 on my Waterstones Children's Laureate Charter is 'every child has the right to be creative for 15 minutes a week', and it's heartening to see the V&A emphasising the importance of creativity in a joyful and interactive way. The UK needs creative kids; it also needs future creative adults in every single industry."*

ENDS.

For further press information or images please contact Catherine Poust, V&A Communications Manager, on 0207 942 2683 or email c.poust@vam.ac.uk (not for circulation).

Notes to editors:

1. The V&A Museum of Childhood has enjoyed a long tradition of evolution and reinvention since its founding in 1872 as the Bethnal Green Museum of Science and Arts. It was most recently renamed the V&A Museum of Childhood in 1974.
2. In June 2019 the V&A and AOC converted an entire gallery into a working design studio and 'test lab'. Until the museum closes for the decant of objects and building works, *Open Studio* is experimenting with new ways of displaying and activating objects, as well as hosting workshops and special events for children and families.
3. Creativity is widely recognised as a crucial skill for future, most recently by the Durham Commission – a collaboration between Arts Council England and Durham University to look at the role creativity and creative thinking should play in young people's education.
4. With two new sites planned for the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park, including a museum on Stratford Waterfront and Collections and Research Centre, this is an unprecedented and defining moment for the V&A in East London.