



V&A gains support from The National Lottery Heritage Fund to transform its historic South Asia gallery

Rarely seen objects from the V&A collection to go on display including the newly restored Kochi Ceiling suspended at height, which will be shown for the first time in over 70 years

It was announced today that the V&A has received initial support* from The National Lottery Heritage Fund for plans to transform its historic South Asia Gallery to create a major new gallery for one of the world's most important and varied collections of South Asian art and design. Made possible by National Lottery players, the project will open in Spring 2028 and will re-present and reinterpret the V&A collection, creating a welcoming and visually arresting gallery, with its opening complemented by a compelling, wide ranging activity programme onsite, offsite and online. Development funding of £250,000 has been awarded by The National Lottery Heritage Fund to help the V&A progress their plans to apply for a full National Lottery grant of £4m at a later date.

For the first time since 1990, transformed displays, interpretation, and integrated audio-visual technology will reshape the visitor experience. The gallery will be built around a new grand narrative exploring South Asian artistic production and its influence around the world, divided across three time periods – early and medieval South Asia (ca. 3000 BCE to 1500 CE), early modern (ca. 1500 CE to 1800 CE) and modern (ca. 1800 CE to the present).

One of the highlight objects that will be displayed in the gallery is The Kochi Ceiling – a painted and carved 19th century wooden temple ceiling from South India that will be conserved, reconstructed and suspended at height, providing an instant and dramatic visual impact. This impressive object has fine sculpted panels which depict Hindu deities and stories from the Ramayana. The ceiling has been in storage for over 70 years and was last on display in 1955. A contemporary artist or designer will be commissioned to create a series of new panels to fill gaps in the original ceiling, bringing together historic and contemporary art, showing continuity and innovation in South Asian design.

Tristram Hunt, Director of the V&A said: *“We’re delighted to have the support of The National Lottery Heritage Fund to transform our historic South Asia gallery, which houses one of the oldest collections at the V&A. The collection is one of the most significant of its kind in the Western world and we’re enormously grateful for this grant that will help create a world-leading gallery of South Asian art and design and engage with a new generation of British, global and diasporic communities.”*

Stuart McLeod, Director of England - London & South at The National Lottery Heritage Fund, said: “*We are delighted to give our initial support to the V&A to re-present and reinterpret their incredibly important collection of South Asian art and design. One of the things that stood out for us was their commitment to consultation and co-working to develop a gallery which reflects the diverse histories and cultures of South Asia. We look forward to working with the team to progress their plans to apply for a full grant at a later date.*”

The redevelopment of the gallery will:

- Create a new world-leading gallery for the appreciation of South Asian art and design, showcasing the regions diverse cultures and its international impact.
- Transform the visitor experience through a full redesign and redisplay of the gallery, making it accessible to the broadest possible audience.
- For the first time, include modern and contemporary South Asian art and design by leading artists and designers.
- Bring new transparency to the colonial history of the V&A’s South Asian collection and the complex history of collecting South Asian art in the UK.

The South Asian collection at the V&A is one of the most significant and comprehensive of its kind in the Western world. It consists of approximately 50,000 objects dating from 3000BC to the present day. Unrivalled in its range, it contains exceptional works that represent the sophisticated artistic achievements of the region. The distinctive strengths of the collection are the decorative arts and manuscripts relating to court cultures, particularly the Mughal court (1526-1857), the unparalleled body of textiles and dress, and the extensive range of paintings. The museum has a fine body of South Asian sculpture and architectural pieces, arms and armour and Indo-European furniture. Modern and contemporary works range from paintings and graphic arts to jewellery and fashion.

The new gallery will build upon a strong legacy of community engagement which started with the *Arts of Bengal* exhibition (1979) held at the Whitechapel Art Gallery located in the heart of the Bangladeshi community and includes the pioneering *Shamiana: The Mughal Tent project* (1997) which inspired hundreds of South Asian women across the country. More recently, festivals, music concerts, seasonal celebrations, and Friday Late events have engaged families and attracted younger audiences.

The V&A’s ambitious programme of temporary exhibitions reflects the breadth of the collection and the museum’s commitment to highlight a variety of narratives. This includes *Colours of the Indus: Costume and Textiles from Pakistan* (1997-8), *The Arts of the Sikh Kingdoms* (1999), *Cinema India: The Art of Bollywood* (2002), *Maharaja: The Splendour of India’s Royal Courts* (2009-10) and more recently *The Fabric of India* (2015-16) and *Lockwood Kipling: Arts and Crafts in the Punjab and London* (2017). In November 2024, *The Great Mughals: Art, Architecture and Opulence* will open at V&A South Kensington – the first exhibition to present the monumental artistic achievements of the ‘Golden Age’ of the Mughal court (c. 1560-1660).

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About the V&A

The V&A is a family of museums dedicated to the power of creativity. Our mission is to champion design and creativity in all its forms, advance cultural knowledge, and inspire makers, creators and innovators everywhere.

V&A South Kensington is a world of extraordinary global creativity, with unmissable exhibitions, experiences and educational programmes for all. One of London's most iconic buildings, it is home to national collections of art, design, fashion, photography and furniture to theatre, performance, architecture, and ceramics, as well as the UK's National Art Library. It is a place where everyone can experience a story of creativity that spans 5,000 years and every creative discipline, which brings that story to life through programmes and activities for all ages and specialisms, and world-leading research and conservation.

About The National Lottery Heritage Fund

National Lottery Heritage Fund grant applications over £250,000 are assessed in two rounds. The V&A has initially been granted round one development funding of £250,000 by The National Lottery Heritage Fund, allowing it to progress with its plans. Detailed proposals are then considered by The National Lottery Heritage Fund at second round, where a final decision is made on the full funding award of £4m.

As the largest dedicated funder of the UK's heritage, The National Lottery Heritage Fund's vision is for heritage to be valued, cared for and sustained for everyone, now and in the future as set out in our strategic plan, Heritage 2033.

Over the next ten years, we aim to invest £3.6billion raised for good causes by National Lottery players to bring about benefits for people, places and the natural environment.

We help protect, transform and share the things from the past that people care about, from popular museums and historic places, our natural environment and fragile species, to the languages and cultural traditions that celebrate who we are.

We are passionate about heritage and committed to driving innovation and collaboration to make a positive difference to people's lives today, while leaving a lasting legacy for future generations to enjoy.

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