



## **V&A opens new Medieval & Renaissance Galleries on 2 December**

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The V&A's new £31.75million Medieval & Renaissance Galleries open on 2 December 2009. The ten new galleries, occupying an entire wing of the Museum house one of the world's most remarkable collections of treasures from the period, including the Becket Casket, Gothic altarpieces and the notebooks of Leonardo da Vinci. There is also an outstanding collection of Renaissance sculpture by Italian masters such as Donatello and Giambologna.

The galleries have taken seven years to create and are the V&A's largest project since the opening of the British Galleries in 2001. They mark the completion of the V&A's £120million transformation under the first phase of the Museum's ambitious Future Plan. The new galleries have been made possible by generous private donations of over £20million and a £9.75million grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF).

The new Medieval & Renaissance Galleries for the first time present the collections in continuous displays to tell the story of European art and design from the fall of the Roman Empire to the end of the Renaissance period. More than 1800 works of art are on display including important loans from the British Library, British Museum and National Gallery.

Architects MUMA have designed the new galleries, reconfiguring the existing 1909 Aston Webb architecture to create ten linked galleries and a central orientation point. Working closely with V&A curators they have created beautiful and innovative new displays which place objects within their original social and cultural context. In a gallery of religious artworks, light filters through translucent onyx window screens, suggesting the use of such windows in medieval churches. In 'The Renaissance City' gallery which contains large scale works that were once part of impressive Renaissance buildings, a courtyard garden is evoked by setting dramatic sculptures by Giambologna and Francavilla next to a working fountain.

The design includes a new day-lit gallery created from previously unused external space by connecting two buildings with specially designed glass beams. Natural light pours into this new space displaying some of the Museum's largest objects such as Pindar's House, one of the few timber house fronts to have survived the Great Fire of London.

The new galleries make connections between the medieval and Renaissance periods with objects from both northern and southern Europe. The displays are chronological and each gallery has its own narrative highlighting themes, stories, historical figures and important patrons, such as the Emperor Charlemagne and the Medici family.

The V&A has the greatest collection of Italian Renaissance sculpture outside Italy, including an exceptional group of sculptures by Donatello, the most gifted and innovative sculptor of his age. An entire gallery is devoted to the work of this 15th-century sculptor, along with work by his contemporaries and followers.

Displays explore Renaissance ideas and beliefs, including the influence of antiquity. Luca della Robbia's 12 glazed terracotta ceiling roundels from Piero de' Medici's study of 1450-56 are displayed to evoke the setting and space of the original study of the powerful Florentine patron.

The elegant Santa Chiara Chapel is the only example of Florentine Renaissance church architecture to be seen outside Italy. Another large-scale and imposing architectural feature is the choir screen from the Cathedral of St John at 's-Hertogenbosch (1610-13) in the Netherlands, one of the largest objects on show.

Masterpieces of medieval craftsmanship include the largest and most splendid of the enamel caskets dedicated to St Thomas Becket (about 1180) and the elaborate Gloucester Candlestick (1104-15). The Symmachi Panel, one of the finest surviving ivories from the Late Antique period in Rome, dated around 400, shows the influence of the later Roman Empire on medieval art. The Lorsch Gospels Cover is one of the largest and grandest ivory medieval book covers to have survived from the Court of Charlemagne in around 800. An 11th-century statuette of the Virgin and Child is the only Byzantine ivory figure to be carved entirely in the round.

Luxury goods such as the gold and enamelled Mérode Cup (1400-1420) from the lavish court of Burgundy illustrate the theme of noble living, focusing on scenes of ostentatious display related to hunting, dining and courtship.

Many highlights come from the V&A's internationally significant collections of textiles. The magnificent Boar and Bear Hunt is one of the so-called Devonshire Hunting Tapestries, the only great hunting tapestries to have survived from the 15th-century. On display for the first time in 20 years is the Troy Tapestry, depicting the Trojan wars, it is a masterpiece of Netherlandish luxury tapestry production which has been specially conserved for display, taking over 4000 hours of work to complete.

A major programme of conservation work has been undertaken to prepare objects for display in the new galleries, providing curators and conservators with an opportunity to study the objects in more detail and often bringing to light new information about their history and function.

Mark Jones, Director of the V&A, said: *“The Medieval & Renaissance Galleries mark the culmination of nine years of systematic renewal at the V&A. The new galleries present some of the world’s greatest treasures in beautifully designed galleries that we hope will inspire all our visitors.”*

Dame Jenny Abramsky, Chair of the Heritage Lottery Fund, said: *“These wonderful new galleries are a very welcome addition to one of London's most popular museums. Spanning over 1,000 years of history – from the exquisite Becket Casket to the magnificent Santa Chiara Chapel – the V&A tells the stories of medieval and Renaissance art and design with great imagination and verve. HLF is particularly proud to have supported this redevelopment which will attract a whole new set of fans to the subject, giving people a much deeper understanding of how this fascinating period sits within the complexities of world history.”*

**ENDS**

## Notes to Editors

### Information on the Medieval & Renaissance Galleries

- Admission to the V&A's Medieval & Renaissance Galleries is FREE.
- In addition to the ten new galleries is a central orientation hub, including The Bonita Trust Study Area with computer terminals to access online resources, an orientation timeline and an area with seating for rest and relaxation.
- There are two discovery areas (in 'Devotion and Display' and 'Splendour and Society') for a range of activities from dressing up in period costume to brass rubbing.
- Throughout the galleries there are six short introductory films, as well as interactive interpretation.

### Funding

- The V&A has been given £9.75 million from the Heritage Lottery Fund. Using money raised through the National Lottery, the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) sustains and transforms a wide range of heritage for present and future generations to take part in, learn from and enjoy. HLF has supported more than 28,800 projects, allocating over £4.3 billion across the UK. For more information, please call Katie Owen, HLF Press Office on 020 7591 6036/07973 613820.
- There have also been generous donations from Paul and Jill Ruddock; The Garfield Weston Foundation; The Monument Trust; Simon Sainsbury; The Wolfson Foundation; Edwin and Susan Davies OBE; The American Friends of the V&A through the generosity of Robert H Smith; The Hintze Family Charitable Foundation; The Selz Foundation; The Bonita Trust; The Foyle Foundation and from many other private individuals and trusts.

### Publications

- Publications accompanying the galleries include *Medieval and Renaissance Art: People and Possessions* by Glyn Davies and Kirstin Kennedy; *Medieval Jewellery* by Marian Campbell; *Fashion and Armour in Renaissance Europe: Proud Lookes and Brave Attire* by Angus Patterson; *Death and Art in Medieval and Renaissance Europe* by Eleanor Townsend; *Trade Secrets: Renaissance Recipes and Formulas* by Jo Wheeler and *Medieval & Renaissance Treasures from the V&A* edited by Paul Williamson and Peta Motture.

**For further PRESS information and images please contact the V&A Press Office on 020 7942 2502 or [press.office@vam.ac.uk](mailto:press.office@vam.ac.uk) (not for publication).**

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