V&A’s new Photography Centre now open

written by Diane Smyth

London’s prestigious museum releases new images of the centre, which more than doubles its existing space and which has plans for a further extension opening in 2022.

“The new Photography Centre brings to life some of the V&A’s most beautiful original picture galleries and provides a permanent home for one of the finest and most inspiring collections of photography in the world,” says Martin Barnes, senior curator of photographs at the V&A. “The spaces and facilities allow visitors to access, explore and enjoy photography in its many forms.

“The Photography Centre encompasses more than a new gallery space. Beyond its walls lies an associated programme of research, digitisation, learning activities, publications, exhibitions, access to items in stores, and collaborations with other UK and international partners. Photography is one of our most powerful forms of global communication, and I’m thrilled that we can contextualise the past and present of this powerful medium in new and exciting ways.”

It’s an important development for photography in the UK and it opens on Friday – the V&A’s new Photography Centre, which more than doubles the museum’s existing photography space. Initiated when the Royal Photographic Society collection was transferred to the London museum – controversially for some – the photography centre shows off key pieces from an archive that now “seamlessly spans the entire history of photography, telling the story of the medium from the daguerreotype to the digital”, as V&A director Tristram Hunt puts it.

V&A Photography Centre – the Dark Tent, The Modern Media Gallery © Will Pryce
Designed by David Kohn Architects, phase one of the Photography Centre showcases cameras and objects from the history of the medium, as well as key images by luminaries such as Julia Margaret Cameron, Alfred Stieglitz, Walker Evans, Madame Yvonnde, Cindy Sherman, and many more. It also includes newly-commissioned works by 21st century artists Thomas Ruff and Penelope Umbrico in the Modern Media Gallery, which also includes a ‘Dark Tent’ projection area inspired by 19th-century photographers’ travelling darkrooms. Entry to the Photography Centre is free.

To mark the opening, the V&A is hosting a month-long Photography Spotlight, which includes talks by photographers such as Mary McCartney, and Chris Levine, the premiere of the collaborative performance piece Last Evenings by artist Garry Fabian Miller and musician and composer Oliver Coates; a screening of Lisa Immordino Vreeland’s Love Cecil; special performances, events, courses, workshops; and a photography-themed Friday Late on 26 October.

Phase Two of the Photography Centre is expected to open in 2022, and will further expand the space – with plans for a teaching and research space, a browsing library, and a studio and darkroom for photographers’ residencies.

Read BJP’s interview with Martin Barnes, senior curator of photographs at the V&A, on the Photography Centre: www.bjp-online.com/2018/09/va-new-photo-centre-
More stories on the V&A's new Photography Centre:

"V&A's new photo centre opens on 12 October" www.bjp-online.com/2018/05/vaphotocentre12oct


The exhibition Tim Walker is currently on show in the main V&A building, the exhibition ending on 08 March 2020 vam.ac.uk