



## News Release

# V&A joins China Merchants Shekou Holdings in launching Design Society

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As Design Society, the name of a new cultural hub located in Sea World Culture and Arts Centre is announced in Shekou (Shenzhen), the V&A reveals more details of the pioneering collaboration with China Merchants Shekou Holdings (CMSK). The first of its kind between a UK museum and a Chinese partner, the collaboration comprises the provision of professional advice and training to help CMSK establish and develop a world class design museum; the concept, development and design of a V&A Gallery devoted to 20th and 21st century international design; and the presentation of two major touring exhibitions in 2017 and 2018.

The V&A Gallery will consider how values drive design, and how design is valued, from a chandelier that unites nature and lighting technology; a meticulously embellished Christian Dior dress; a Braun transistor radio and portable record player by Dieter Rams; a poster using Zimbabwean bank notes which highlights that hyperinflation had rendered them worth less than the paper they were printed on; to the latest drone technology.

The highly diverse selection of objects in the gallery will be drawn from the V&A's major collections including fashion, photography, furniture, product and graphic design, theatre and performance. In addition to 20th and 21st century objects, which represent the majority of the items on display, the V&A Gallery will also include several examples from earlier historical periods and different geographical areas, in order to explore and position design values within a much wider historical and cultural framework. Examples include an astrolabe dating from 1650-1800 in Iran, which illustrates early advances in multi-functional design, an Egyptian water filter made in 900-1200 which shows design for an environmental context, and a 17th century pocket watch documenting an early form of miniaturisation of design. They will be complemented by a number of new acquisitions of contemporary design collected especially for the gallery.

Seven themes will provide the framework of the gallery narrative, each representing broad value statements that have been made in the past about design: performance, cost, problem solving, materials, identity, communication and wonder.

Tim Reeve, Deputy Director and Chief Operating Officer of the V&A said: *“The V&A has a long history of working with China, and this project is enabling us to connect with the fast moving design, manufacturing and creative scene here in Shenzhen, as well as sharing our collections, knowledge and expertise in one of the most energetic and progressive cities in the world. We support the objectives of Design Society to use the power of design to address major issues of our time and elevate the role of design in society.”*

*“The launch of Design Society is a great opportunity to celebrate the result of the very productive dialogue we have had with our colleagues at CMSK over the past two years. This pioneering collaboration between a UK museum and a Chinese partner is part of a new approach to our international engagement strategy. We are looking to develop new longer-term international collaborations, which enable us to engage in more creative ways, by building a global network of trusted partners with whom we can share the idea of the V&A by creating new culturally meaningful projects which we could not do alone.”*

The V&A has been developing networks with local creative communities and professionals in order to inform the research and curatorial approach of the new gallery and its public programme. The V&A team has been exploring the unique design and creative practices in the city, including innovative models in technology, digital platforms, and in the wider manufacturing system of Shenzhen and the Pearl River Delta, the area generally known as 'The Factory of the World' and now developing into a hub of further economic growth and innovation.

The V&A presented selected case studies from its wider ongoing research at the 2015 Urbanism and Architecture Bi-City Biennale (2015 UABB). *Unidentified Acts of Design* showed a series of innovative acts of design that have occurred or are emerging outside of the conventional studio context in this area. The case studies that will be displayed in the new V&A Gallery include Seeed, a micro-controller company that offers a platform for makers, inventors and engineers to develop and prototype ideas, and examples of 'shanzhai', objects made within the open hardware and electronic manufacturing environment characterising Shenzhen. The research challenged the notion that design in Shenzhen is limited to reproductions with little originality, and aimed to expand and redefine our understanding of design history in the region. The exhibition won the Independent Jury Bronze Dragon Award.

A major part of the partnership between the V&A and China Merchants Shekou Holdings is in providing professional advice and training. Luisa E. Mengoni, Head of the V&A Gallery, has been based in Shenzhen since 2014 as part of a three-year secondment from the V&A, to facilitate its contribution to the project in China. She works closely with the Shekou project

team in London. Her role has enabled the V&A to develop a closer dialogue with its partners and the opportunity to develop networks with creative professionals, academics and educators, entrepreneurs and local communities. The collaboration also includes designing a learning programme, curatorial advice to support new acquisitions, training in operational procedures across the Museum including conservation, branding and marketing, human resources and project management.

## **NOTES TO EDITORS**

### *About the V&A*

The Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A) is the world's leading museum of art and design with collections unrivalled in their scope and diversity. It was established to make works of art available to all and to inspire British designers and manufacturers. Today, the V&A's collections, which span over 5000 years of human creativity in virtually every medium and from many parts of the world, continue to intrigue, inspire and inform.

The V&A holds one of the most important and comprehensive collections of Chinese art and design dating from 3000 BC to the present and continues to collect actively, with a focus on contemporary Chinese work. The Museum has held many successful exhibitions at various venues in China including the National Museum of China, the Palace Museum, the Central Academy of Fine Arts (CAFA), The Shanghai Museum, the Capital Museum, the Hong Kong Heritage Museum and the Liaoning Provincial Museum in Shenyang.

The V&A has also played an important role in bringing an understanding of Chinese culture to Europe through exhibitions such as *Masterpieces of Chinese Paintings* (2013), which was the first comprehensive presentation of the topic in Europe since the 1930s and included some of China's national treasures. In 2008 the V&A held *China Design Now*, a survey show of design and architecture being created in contemporary China, and in 2005 the exhibition *Between Past and Future*, the first major display of contemporary Chinese photography and film in the UK.

### *About Sea World Culture and Arts Centre*

Sea World Culture and Arts Centre is being created by China Merchants Shekou Holdings (CMSK) in the Shekou district of Shenzhen, China and will open in 2017. It comprises Design Society, alongside the BAOKU Art Center and BAOKU Treasury, restaurants and retail spaces. Maki & Associates are designing the architectural scheme, their first architectural project in China.

### *About Design Society*

Design Society is a new cultural hub, offering a design museum within which the V&A Gallery will be located, a theatre, a multi-purpose hall, Shenzhen Guanfu Museum, and a learning and public event programme.

Follow the V&A team's blogs on the latest developments in Shekou at [vam.ac.uk/shekou](http://vam.ac.uk/shekou)

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