

AFTER NYNE

V&A GALLERY OPENS AT DESIGN SOCIETY IN SHEKOU, SHENZHEN, AS PART OF A UNIQUE INTERNATIONAL COLLABORATION



A unique partnership between a major UK national museum and a Chinese state-owned company has come to fruition, with the opening of Design Society, including the V&A Gallery, in the vibrant and fast-moving design city of Shenzhen, China.

Design Society in Shekou, Shenzhen, is a new cultural hub dedicated to design that features the V&A's first international gallery, alongside several other exhibitions and cultural spaces. Its launch marks a major milestone for the pioneering international collaboration between China Merchants Shekou Holdings (CMSK) and the Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A) in London.

The V&A Gallery opens with the site-specific exhibition, 'Values of Design', designed by the Sam Jacob Studio, featuring over 250 objects from the V&A's collections. It is located inside the Sea World Culture and Arts Center (SWCAC), a new purpose-built cultural destination operated by Design Society and designed by renowned Japanese architecture firm Maki & Associates. Design Society aims to connect China to the world through its collaborative work, and will explore how design, society, industry and everyday life interconnect.

The collaboration is the first of its kind between an international museum and a Chinese partner, and is the latest and most ambitious initiative to result from the V&A's long-standing relationship with China. As part of the partnership the V&A has given professional advice, consultancy and provided training to help establish Design Society as a new cultural platform. It has developed the V&A Gallery and the exhibition 'Values of Design', and has committed to feature two touring exhibitions from the V&A at Design Society in the next few years.

In developing the exhibition 'Values of Design', the V&A has expanded its collection to reflect this dialogue with the wider design world, adding forty-five new objects over two years. One such piece is the version of WeChat (Weixin), the most widely used social platform in China, displayed in 'Values of Design'. The addition of WeChat, announced in September 2017 and complemented by a display in South Kensington, makes the V&A the world's first museum to collect a social media application. Other key acquisitions, developed in Shenzhen, include a Phantom drone from DJI, a company which has revolutionized UAV-technology by making it affordable and easy-to-use, and the Seeeduno Microcontroller by Seeed Studio, who have become a key advocate for maker culture in China.

Shenzhen and the Pearl River Delta is one of the fastest growing design and technology hubs in the world. The V&A has been embedded in Shenzhen for the past three years as part of an international knowledge exchange programme. Since the project was initiated in 2014, the V&A, in close collaboration with Design Society team, has been working extensively to build a local network and engage with creative practices, museum professionals, educators and the wider local community to ensure the collaboration would be unique, significant and responsive to its context. V&A and Design Society staff have worked with university design schools, local and international schools, makerspaces, museums and designer studios in Shenzhen as well as in other cities such as Guangzhou, Shantou, Hong Kong, Shanghai and Beijing, interviewing key players and taking part in classes and workshops. Since 2014, the V&A, together with Design Society has collaborated with approximately 25 local and international schools, eight university design schools, ten maker spaces and many more of Shenzhen's designers, studios and community groups.

As part of the research activity in the region, the V&A presented the exhibition 'Unidentified Acts of Design' at the Hong Kong-Shenzhen Bi-city Biennale (UABB) in 2015 and the exhibition was featured at the V&A as part of London Design Festival in 2016. The V&A and Design Society teams hosted the first maker in residence in Shenzhen as part of Design Society pre-opening activities and the British Council's 'Hello Shenzhen' project in March and October 2017. Training has been provided to 140 volunteers from Shenzhen University and the broader community recruited to support the public programme at Design Society during and after the opening.

Tim Reeve, Deputy Director of the V&A, said "We are extremely proud to celebrate the opening of the new V&A Gallery with its first exhibition 'Values of Design' at Design Society today. Our role as founding partner of Design Society marks an important milestone for the V&A's history of international engagement, as well as the design community of Shenzhen, with this the most significant international collaboration in our history. The UK's creative industries continue to be one of Britain's greatest and most enduring achievements, and we are delighted to be sharing our 165 years of experience and expertise with the wider design world. Our inaugural exhibition is the result of three years of extensive research and cross-cultural dialogue between the V&A team, Design Society team and academic, museum and creative professionals in China. The V&A has a long history of working with China and we will continue to explore future creative collaborations, with local relevance and always aiming to inspire and engage new audiences with the world of design."

Luisa Elena Mengoni, Head of the V&A Gallery at Design Society, said "Over the last three years, we have been thrilled to expand and strengthen our network in the city and engage with the local community, gaining valuable knowledge and expert advice, widening our experience in China and fostering an inspiring dialogue about design, museum practices and learning approaches. Practice-based research and experimentation conducted by our Learning Manager Sarah Green in close collaboration with DS Learning team have provided a strong foundation for the development of the V&A Gallery's exhibition and public programme, as well as for innovative learning opportunities and interventions that will continue to be tested and developed in the future."

Ole Bouman, Director of Design Society, said "After three years of close collaboration, the moment of unveiling to the public has come. We are very proud to offer our audiences a slice of the vast design collection of the V&A to help people understand the power and value of design. We can even be prouder that this is embedded in the Shenzhen context. We look back to a collaboration that brings fresh ideas, new acquisitions, expanded networks and site specific narratives for Design Society and the V&A. This will be a catalyst for Design Society's role to elevate creative industries and help the public in China to learn, appreciate and enjoy design."