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V&A's new Europe 1600-1815 galleries to open this winter with contemporary commission



Peter Kelleher/ V&A Museum

The Victoria and Albert Museum in London announced today (30 July) that its Europe 1600–1815 galleries would finally open on 9 December following a £12.5m restoration, with £4.75m from the Heritage Lottery Fund. The project has been delayed due to a “complicated build”, according to a museum spokesman.

The new display of over 1,100 artefacts, from the museum’s collection of 17th- and 18th-century European art and design, will be complemented by a new commission from Cuban artists Los Carpinteros. *The Globe* (2015) is based on the design of a Panopticon prison and sits in the corner of the L-shaped galleries, halfway through the chronological hang. Despite its reformatory roots, the spherical wooden structure is intended as a space for reflection—an “oasis in the middle” of the busy galleries, says one-half of the artistic duo Dagoberto Rodríguez Sánchez.

The ground floor revamp has been designed by London-based architectural practice ZMMA. The removal of panelling and partitions added in the 1970s as well as the addition of a new gallery (formerly a plant room) means that there will be an extra 1,550 sq. m of space. Amongst the many items on display will be a recently restored Rococo writing cabinet made for Augustus III; a 17th-century Venetian table by Lucio de Lucci; the *Château de Juvisy* (around 1700) oil painting by Pierre-Denis Martin and objects made for powerful figures of the time such as Louis XIV, Marie Antoinette, Catherine the Great and Napoleon.

The four large galleries running chronologically will be split by three smaller thematic rooms (one of which will explore the concept of the cabinet of curiosities) and three period rooms, including a 17th-century French bedroom and a mirrored room from 18th-century Italy.

There will also be views all the way down the galleries, meaning that visitors get a glimpse of Los Carpinteros new installation in the distance as they make their way past the displays. *The Globe* has a lip built into its interior for visitors to sit on and will host “small intimate events”, says the project curator Joanna Norman. It is a “21st-century space” where visitors can “engage with ideas of the Enlightenment”, Norman says.