# V&A East Storehouse revolutionises public access with interactive order-an-object scheme



The evolution of museums is distinctly manifesting in the recently launched V&A East Storehouse, where visitors can now engage directly with a staggering 250,000 objects from the Victoria and Albert Museum’s extensive collection. Operating from the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park, this innovative space features a striking “order-an-object” initiative, allowing guests to book and interact with priceless artefacts, all within a user-friendly digital framework. Offering free access to its treasures—including a Balenciaga gown and PJ Harvey’s hotpants—this initiative aims to transform the traditional museum experience into one that is inclusive and welcoming.

This remarkable transformation stems from a decade-long journey following the V&A’s eviction from its previous storage location. In response, the museum seized the opportunity to repurpose what could have remained a hidden resource into an engaging public attraction. The change mirrors a critical issue faced by many institutions; for instance, a mere 1% of the British Museum's over eight million artefacts are on public display. In light of this, the V&A’s proactive approach to showcase its extensive yet underutilised collection reflects a broader trend towards transparency and accessibility. As Tim Reeve, the V&A's deputy director, noted, the initiative seeks to evoke a sense of joy and curiosity, inviting visitors to feel as if they are “trespassing” into the inner workings of the museum.

Portals like the Depot Boijmans Van Beuningen in Rotterdam have already paved the way for open-access storage of art since its launch in 2021. This facility allows the public to explore the behind-the-scenes aspects of art collections typically relegated to obscurity. The V&A East Storehouse takes this model a step further by inviting visitors into an immersive environment where conservation and display intertwine. Such formats not only democratise access to art but also foster a deeper connection between the public and cultural heritage.

Meanwhile, the Manchester Museum recently garnered the European Museum of the Year award for its groundbreaking approach to curation. In revamping its spaces, the museum actively engaged with various community groups, notably Manchester’s South Asian diaspora, to collaboratively design the new South Asia gallery. This initiative exemplifies a significant shift in museum practices, emphasising inclusivity and collective authorship in showcasing diverse narratives. Such collaborations provide an antidote to traditional institutional ownership models and align well with the growing calls for transparency in how artefacts are acquired and displayed.

This broader cultural movement within museums highlights the urgent need to address complex questions surrounding provenance and heritage. As institutions grapple with their historical acquisitions, they are called upon to provide clearer narratives about their collections. The shift towards community involvement not only enhances public trust but also ensures that exhibitions resonate with a diverse audience, fostering an environment that feels relevant and reflective of contemporary society.

The introduction of the V&A East Storehouse and the recognition of transformative initiatives like those at Manchester Museum signal a pivotal moment for the museum sector. As institutions pivot away from the models of exclusivity and passivity, embracing community engagement and openness brings forth a more profound appreciation of shared heritage. The evolution is not merely about displaying artefacts but about inviting the public to partake in the ongoing narrative of cultural history—an invitation to fill one's basket with the past while looking towards the future of museology.

The rapid transformations inspired by the pandemic, funding challenges, and a desire for relevance have united institutions in their quest to redefine their role. While the past weighs heavily on many collections, new approaches promise to enrich our understanding of culture, making our museums not just repositories of history but vibrant community hubs integral to our shared narratives.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2025/may/30/the-guardian-view-on-a-new-era-for-museums-letting-the-public-take-control), [[2]](https://www.vam.ac.uk/press/article/press-release-v-a-east-storehouse-opening)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2025/may/30/the-guardian-view-on-a-new-era-for-museums-letting-the-public-take-control), [[4]](https://www.boijmans.nl/en/overview/depot-boijmans-van-beuningen)
* Paragraph 3 – [[3]](https://www.manchestermuseum.ac.uk/news/museum-of-the-year-2023-award/), [[6]](https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2022/dec/15/museums-and-the-importance-of-provenance)
* Paragraph 4 – [[3]](https://www.manchestermuseum.ac.uk/news/museum-of-the-year-2023-award/), [[6]](https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2022/dec/15/museums-and-the-importance-of-provenance)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2025/may/30/the-guardian-view-on-a-new-era-for-museums-letting-the-public-take-control), [[6]](https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2022/dec/15/museums-and-the-importance-of-provenance)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2025/may/30/the-guardian-view-on-a-new-era-for-museums-letting-the-public-take-control> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.vam.ac.uk/press/article/press-release-v-a-east-storehouse-opening> - The V&A East Storehouse, opening at the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park, showcases 250,000 objects. With an innovative 'order-an-object' initiative, visitors can access priceless artefacts for free, enhancing engagement and making museum collections more accessible. This debut reflects the museum's shift towards inclusivity, inspired by earlier relocations and storage challenges. The Storehouse encourages public involvement, allowing people to experience the joy of discovery. By actively involving the community, the V&A aims to attract a younger audience while demonstrating transparency in museum practices.
3. <https://www.manchestermuseum.ac.uk/news/museum-of-the-year-2023-award/> - Manchester Museum received the European Museum of the Year award for its innovative curatorial approach. The museum’s revamp involved community engagement, particularly from Manchester’s South Asian diaspora, in designing the new South Asia gallery. Such initiatives represent a progressive shift in museum practices, emphasising collaboration and inclusivity. The project highlights how community members can shape museum narratives, ensuring that displays resonate with diverse audiences and reflect shared histories. This method of curation challenges traditional ownership models within museums, inviting a broader public participation.
4. <https://www.boijmans.nl/en/overview/depot-boijmans-van-beuningen> - Depot Boijmans Van Beuningen in Rotterdam is the world's first publicly accessible art storage facility. Opened in 2021, it allows the public to explore the workings behind art exhibitions. Unlike traditional museums, it offers a chance to discover vast collections that are usually hidden from view. The depot serves as an innovative model for transparency in museum operations and promotes public engagement with art. This inclusion shifts perceptions of how collections are managed and accessed, encouraging wider participation in cultural experiences.
5. <https://www.sadlerswells.com/whats-on/2023/stratford-festival> - Sadler's Wells launched a venue in Stratford to enhance artistic accessibility and engage diverse audiences. The initiative aligns with broader aims to draw in younger crowds and those who feel excluded from traditional arts environments. The new Stratford venue not only offers performances but is also a community hub for dance and arts education. This strategy highlights how organisations are rethinking their outreach and promotional activities, ultimately fostering a more inclusive arts culture in the region.
6. <https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2022/dec/15/museums-and-the-importance-of-provenance> - This article explores the significance of provenance in museum collections amidst growing calls for transparency. It discusses how historical acquisitions can impact public perception and trust in museums. The analysis underscores the challenges institutions face in addressing contentious histories while educating the public. Highlighting cases of museums that engage with their communities, the article calls for a re-evaluation of how artefacts are presented and interpreted. This shift is seen as essential for modernising museums and making them more relevant to contemporary audiences and issues.
7. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m0001wpj> - BBC's 'The Repair Shop' showcases expert artisans restoring treasured family heirlooms, capturing the essence of communal stories. The programme resonates with audiences as it highlights the emotional connections between individuals and their possessions. By involving the original owners in the restoration process, it fosters a sense of shared history and craftsmanship. This approach parallels recent trends in museology, where public interaction plays a vital role in appreciating cultural artefacts. The show celebrates the importance of preserving personal narratives within a broader historical context.