

Press release

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The Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts is equipped for the future

In 1978 the Sainsbury Centre opened to much acclaim. 13 years later, a significant new wing, the Crescent Wing, was added below the terrace in front of the original building. On Sunday 21 May when the Centre reopens, the final piece of the jigsaw will have been put in place: a major new gallery for the display of works on paper will link the Centre to the Crescent Wing directly below ground. Leading off this gallery there will be new educational facilities, a new shop and better access for visitors with disabilities. The main entrance has been enhanced and after 30 years of intense use the building services and other facilities have been renewed to refurbish the Centre for the future. All of this has been done to enhance the visitor experience and ensure that the Sainsbury Centre is equipped to meet the demands of a new century and a developing campus.

Lord Foster said: "The Sainsbury Centre was a formative project for me in all sorts of ways - personally and professionally. I say this because the quality of the architecture of the Sainsbury Centre is closely bound to the enlightenment and the driving force of Robert and Lisa Sainsbury - the patrons behind it. Revisiting it - and to some degree reinventing it - more than thirty years later has been an exciting privilege. Given the personalities of the Sainsburys themselves, it is not surprising that the building challenged preconceptions about museums. For example, I selected a location on the campus away from the other arts and next to the sciences - to encourage cross-fertilisation. And as a building it put all the varied functions and user groups - galleries and teaching spaces, students, academics and the public - together in a single space, under one roof. It was a gallery without walls in the conventional sense. It was also an early example of a low-energy, 'green' architecture - these are fashionable ideas today, but at the time the concept of sustainable, ecological buildings was virtually unheard of."

Director Nichola Johnson said: "This project has been an example of really creative and productive collaboration between clients, designers and architects and I am in no doubt that it will further enhance public enjoyment of the Centre, which is already recognised as one of the UK's outstanding cultural venues."

The Centre, which first opened in 1978, was built to house the Robert and Lisa Sainsbury Collection of world art, which the couple donated to the University in 1973.

NOTES TO EDITORS

Further notes on the changes that have been made:

The entrance to the Main Gallery has a canopy and new doors have been installed, improving access to the building.

Inside the main gallery entrance the existing spiral staircase and a new lift extend down through light

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wells to the new link lobby and gallery.

There will be new bathrooms, cloakroom and locker facilities at the entrance.

As the visitor walks past the light wells on the ground floor, they will find a new reception desk and the entrances into the Permanent Collection and the Special Exhibition galleries.

Continuing past the reception desk, the Gallery Café will be refurbished, replacing the Café furniture and refitting the kitchen.

At the bottom of the atrium a new Gallery Shop has been created. In this space, the visitor will be able to look along a wide corridor, flooded by daylight both from above and from the far end where it links with the Crescent Wing reception area.

A wall of glass along the link gallery will screen the new dedicated education studio.

Bays along the link will provide extra display space.

All the flooring, lighting and the heating system in the main building have been renewed.

Signage and branding has been reviewed, both inside and outside the Gallery.

The project has cost over £10 million and has been supported by the Sainsbury family and the University of East Anglia.

The building work has been undertaken by Kier Eastern.

The launch exhibition is Pacific Encounters: Art and Divinity in Polynesia 1760-1860, the most comprehensive celebration of the arts of Polynesia ever mounted featuring 270 rare and extraordinary sculptures, ornaments, textiles and valuables.

Pacific Encounters runs from Sunday, May 21 to Sunday, August 13. The exhibition is open Tuesday to Sunday (closed Monday), 10am to 5pm and is also open until 8pm on Wednesdays. Admission is free, tel 01603 593199. www.scva.ac.uk.

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