

V&A reveals plans for photography centre

One of the largest galleries is to be named after California donors Bern and Ronny Schwartz

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London's Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A) has released the first rendering of its future photography centre, which is planned to open in autumn 2018. David Kohn Architects are converting four 19th-century picture galleries into a versatile, climate-controlled space for the museum's expanded photography holdings, displaying original photographs, equipment and archival materials ranging from the 1820s to the present. The project is part of the V&A's ongoing FuturePlan development scheme.

The image shows one of the largest galleries, to be named the Bern and Ronny Schwartz Gallery in recognition of a major donation by the California-based Bern Schwartz Family Foundation. The foundation, which sponsored the museum's Julia Margaret Cameron exhibition in 2015, is dedicated to the appreciation of photography as an art form. The US businessman Bernard "Bern" Schwartz became a successful portrait photographer in the 1970s, late in life, with sitters including Prince Charles and Henry Moore. The foundation recently gave Schwartz's 1978 portrait of the former V&A director, Roy Strong, to the museum.

While the size of the donation is undisclosed, a spokeswoman says the V&A is seeking to raise a total of £7m to fund the 2018 opening and a second phase. This will expand the centre to almost 2,500 sq. m, adding educational facilities such as a library and a studio and darkroom.

The catalyst for the project was the controversial transfer, announced in early 2016, of more than 270,000 photographs from the National Media Museum in Bradford (run by the Science Museum Group and since renamed the National Science and Media Museum) to the V&A's own 500,000-strong collection. The Bradford-born artist David Hockney and the photographer Martin Parr were among the opponents of the decision to remove the vast archive—owned by the Royal Photographic Society—from the northern city. The V&A is currently engaged in cataloguing the works for a digital resource launching in 2018.