Royal Jewel is Centre Stage in V&A Gallery

Queen Victoria's coronet is among 80 new exhibits in the recently reopened refurbished William & Judith Bollinger Gallery in the V&A museum.



Queen Victoria's sapphire and diamond coronet

Acquired by the V&A in 2017 – purchased by the arts-loving philanthropic couple William and Judith Bollinger, and their sons Douglas and James as a gift to the Nation and the Commonwealth – the sapphire and diamond coronet is now on permanent display in the Gallery. An iconic symbol of young love, it was designed for Queen Victoria by Prince Albert in 1840, was made by Josph Kitching of London-based Kitching & Abud and incorporates stones from other pieces of her jewellery. It became one of her most important jewels – indeed, after Albert's death in 1861 the grief-stricken Queen wore it instead of her crown in 1866 when she finally felt able to open Parliament.

Fittingly, this year marks the 200th anniversary of the births of Victoria and Albert. "Together with an array of 80 new acquisitions and loans, made possible by the generosity of many supporters, the display of the coronet inaugurates the next phase in the life of this much loved gallery," says Richard Edgcumbe, senior curator at the V&A.

The Gallery – refreshed by original architects Eva Jiricna and George Papathanasiou (Atelier A&D) – tells the story of European and Western jewellery from Ancient Greece and Rome to the present. One of the V&A's most popular galleries (over 4.2m visitors since opening in 2008), it houses 4,000+ pieces and now boasts much-improved lighting (gems really sparkle) as well as updated interactive areas (such as design-your-own-ring) and display material.



A new glass-surround spiral staircase leads to the upper floor of the Gallery, where one of the latest acquisitions can be found – a collection of 49 Art Deco vanity cases, loaned as a promised gift by Kashmira Bulsara in memory of her brother, Freddie Mercury. She clearly has a great eye; the beautiful examples of feminine accessorising of a bygone age, created by the likes of Cartier, Van Cleef & Arpels and Lacloche, take inspiration from Modernism, Persia, Ancient Egypt, China and Japan.

An altogether more unconventional (in turns quirky, fun, edgy, challenging...) gathering of contemporary jewellery can be found along one wall of the gallery. V&A curator Clare Phillips has made space for around 30 new pieces including a sculptural Fairtrade gold ring by Ute Decker, Flora Vigi's brooch made from the curling pages of an old book and Christopher Thompson Royd's necklace with poppies of gold, enamel and diamonds. There's even a gold Paddington Bear pendant by Cartier.

The reopening of the William and Judith Bollinger Gallery is marked by the publishing of Clare Phillipps' 'Jewels & Jewellery' (£24.95, Thames & Hudson), an impeccably researched and inspiring survey of jewellery through the ages, largely taken from the Gallery and including the new acquisitions.



Blue Sea Anemone II' brooch by Flora Vagi



Enamelled gold vanity case by Cartier, Paris