SAINSBURY
CENTRE
Living Art Sharing Stories

Sainsbury Centre art museum receives £91.2 million donation to revitalise its Norman Foster architectural masterpiece

One of the largest donations ever given to a UK museum

Aerial view of the Sainsbury Centre. Photo by Donovan Jones

A vision to revitalise the Sainsbury Centre, one of the most popular art museums in the UK, has been made possible with a gift of £91.2 million from Lord David Sainsbury through Gatsby, his charitable foundation, representing one of the largest ever donations made to a UK museum.

Lord David Sainsbury, said: *"My father always regarded his commissioning of Norman Foster to produce the Sainsbury Centre as one of the best things he ever did, and it gives me great pleasure to provide the funding to enhance its future."*

Breaking all the rules when the museum opened in 1978, this Lord Norman Foster architectural masterpiece is innovative in its use of light and space to create an open indoor landscape for the public to enjoy the world-class art collection within. This funding will enhance the Sainsbury Centre, a grade II* listed architectural icon as it approaches its 50th anniversary, protecting its legacy, and enhancing the future of this much-loved museum.

Sainsbury Centre's Executive Director, Jago Cooper said: *"This incredible gift secures the future of the Sainsbury Centre. Foster's vision for the most radical art museum in the world half a century ago is being revitalised for the next generation of visitors. Long into the future*

the public can experience one of the best art collections in the world in an architectural wonder that breaks the museum rules."

This funding will ensure the 1.1 million people who visit the Sainsbury Centre and Sculpture Park every year can continue to enjoy the unique ways in which art is activated within the museum.

The Sainsbury Centre opened following the donation of Sir Robert and Lady Lisa Sainsbury's groundbreaking collection of art and material culture to the University of East Anglia in 1973. The museum remains a social and academic focus on the University of East Anglia campus, contributing to the institution's identity as a cultural and creative hub. Foster + Partners is undertaking this new phase of refurbishment of the Grade II* listed building, to protect and enhance this valuable asset for the future. The project will make an important contribution to the university's commitment to achieving a net zero campus by 2045.

Lord Foster, Founder and Executive Chairman, Foster + Partners, said: *"Designed as a gallery without walls, the Sainsbury Centre has always been defined by its ability to adapt. The inherently flexible framework of the building has allowed it to evolve over the past five decades. This latest project will ensure that the Sainsbury Centre meets future sustainability targets – and can continue to welcome present and future generations for many decades to come. I am grateful to Sir David Sainsbury for his generous patronage in making this new phase possible."*

In 2024, Foster + Partners was appointed to undertake a feasibility study to determine which parts of the Centre should be upgraded or replaced to improve energy efficiency, enhance the visitor experience, and ensure easy maintenance. The project team identified three key areas of the building for renovation: the envelope, its environmental systems, and some of the key visitor amenities.

These alterations to the building's envelope are expected to halve the amount of energy required to operate the building, significantly reducing carbon emissions. Photovoltaic panels will be incorporated into the new roof system to allow renewable energy to be generated on site. Aging environmental systems will also be replaced, and the building will be connected to the university's district heating and cooling systems to allow improved control over the building's internal environment.

The University of East Anglia's Vice-Chancellor and President, Professor David Maguire, added: ''*We are thrilled to receive this exceptionally generous gift. It serves to emphasise the national and international artistic and cultural significance of the Sainsbury Centre, a much-admired treasure in the heart of our Norwich campus.*

"We are extremely proud to have such a fantastic gallery here at UEA and it is loved by students, staff and visitors alike. The collection was deliberately located on a university campus to inspire students and enable academic research into the collection as well as to be highly popular museum with the wider public and community."

Renewed entrances, lifts, signage, and flooring will further enhance the visitor experience, while renewed solar controlled blinds will bring more natural light into the gallery spaces throughout the day in line with the original design intent. There will also be upgrades to the bathrooms, café, kitchen, and spaces for staff, as well as an extension to the south café terrace and enhancements to the surrounding landscape to improve connections between the building and the sculpture trails within the surrounding campus.

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NOTES TO EDITORS

For more information, interviews and images:

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The Sainsbury Centre is a world-class art museum with a unique perspective on how art can foster cultural dialogue and exchange. Following a radical relaunch in 2023 the Sainsbury Centre formally recognises the living lifeforce of art, enabling people to build relationships across an arts landscape.

The art of the Sainsbury Centre can help reframe and answer the most important questions people have in their lives. It is not a museum to only learn more about artists, cultures or movements like Francis Bacon, the Tang Dynasty or Modernism, it is a place of experience, where collections are animate, and visitors are emotionally connected.

One of the first museums in the world to display art from all around the globe and from all time periods equally and collectively, Sir Robert and Lady Lisa Sainsbury created one of the most sought after yet non-conformist art collections. In 1973 they donated their collection, which transcended traditional barriers between art, architecture, archaeology and anthropology, to the University of East Anglia (UEA), and created an entirely new type of museum. Housed in Sir Norman Foster's revolutionary first ever public building, the space aimed for an interactive relationship between people, object and landscape, where art was placed within an open yet intimate 'Living Area'.

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