Science Museum to launch landmark communications gallery

14/08/2014

An exhibit of a Mackintosh computer

- The first gallery in the UK dedicated to the history of information and communication technologies
- More than 800 unique objects from Science Museum collections, some that witnessed incredible moments in history
- The most ambitious Science Museum project in over ten years will transform the largest exhibition space in the Museum

This October, the Science Museum will launch the first permanent gallery in the UK dedicated to the history of information and communication technologies.

Information Age: six networks that changed our world will explore the remarkable technological breakthroughs that have transformed how we communicate over the last 200 years. From the first transatlantic telegraph cable that connected Europe and North America in minutes rather than weeks, to the advanced computing power of the modern smartphone, Information Age will look at the huge impact of developments in communication technology on all our lives.

More than 800 unique objects from the Science Museum collections and state-of-the-art interactive displays will bring to life the dramatic personal stories of those whose lives were changed by each new wave of technology. This landmark project for the museum has been made possible by generous support from funders, including a £6.3million grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF).

“As the single largest gallery inside the Science Museum, Information Age is one of our most ambitious projects ever”, said Ian Blatchford, Director of the Science Museum. “Combining our world beating communications and computing collections with the latest digital technology and interactive experiences, this gallery will reinvigorate the heart of the Museum. We are grateful to all our funders for making this important gallery a reality.”

Carole Souter, Chief Executive of HLF, said: “With the help of Lottery players we’ve awarded over £6m to help the Science Museum create the ground-breaking Information Age gallery. This new space will bring to life the remarkable innovations in technology that have transformed the way we communicate, making it an essential destination for visitors who want to learn more about our rapidly changing world.”

Information Age will explore how our modern connected world was created through six networks, the electric telegraph, the telephone exchange, radio and television broadcasting, satellite communications, computer networks and mobile communications.

Within each network visitors will discover many remarkable objects and stories, including:

- Thomson's original galvanometer used to receive the first telegraph messages sent across the Atlantic between President Buchanan and Queen Victoria in 1858
- The original Marconi radio transmitter that made the first public broadcast in 1922 with the famous words ‘This is 2LO calling’ – announcing the arrival of the BBC and the birth of British broadcasting
- The intimate oral histories of women who operated our telephone exchanges until the introduction of the automatic dial
- Two of the world’s fastest supercomputers in the 1960s, the Russian BESM-6 and the American CDC 6600, and how computing became the front line of the Cold War
- The development of two generations of satellite communication technology told through the first worldwide TV broadcast starring the Beatles in 1967 and the crucial role of GPS satellites first used to help coalition forces navigate the desert during the first Gulf War
- The NeXT cube, the original machine used by Sir Tim Berners-Lee to design the World Wide Web in 1989 and start a new age of instant access to information

“Information Age marks a step change in the way we have worked to uncover the personal stories behind our rich collections. The gallery shows that in the past, as today, innovation didn't just come from a few pioneers, but from the users of technology,” said Lead Curator Tilly Blyth. “We have worked closely with communities in the UK and overseas to identify these fascinating user stories, from the application of mobile technology by entrepreneurs in Cameroon, to private telegrams donated to us by British families.”

The 2500square metre gallery has been designed by award winning consultancy Universal Design Studio. At its centre will sit the spectacular six-metre high aerial inductance coil from Rugby Radio Station. This enormous and strangely beautiful object resembles a series of giant spider webs. It

was once part of the most powerful radio transmitter in the world and was donated to the Science Museum by BT.

Gavin Patterson, Chief Executive of BT Group, said: “BT has long been a supporter of the Science Museum, since our first donation of telegraphy equipment in 1876. We are proud to help the museum create the UK’s first permanent gallery celebrating the history of information and communication technologies and how they transformed our world – an area in which BT has played a huge role.”

Each network will include exciting new on-gallery collaborations with leading artists and thinkers, including Olivier award-winning video and projection designer Finn Ross, artist Matthew Robins, broadcaster Bonnie Greer and computer scientist Sir Tim Berners-Lee. The Science Museum has also commissioned BAFTA award winning artist Rafael Lozano-Hemmer to create a unique digital art work for Information Age. Fiducial Voice Beacons is a dynamic light and sound installation that all visitors will be able to interact with and is Lozano-Hemmer’s first permanent commission in the UK.

The gallery will open on 25 October 2014. It will be supported by a programme of workshops aimed at family and education groups, as well as specially commissioned drama character shows and events.

Information Age has been made possible through the generous support of the Heritage Lottery Fund, BT (Principal Lead Sponsor), ARM (Principal Sponsor), Bloomberg Philanthropies and Google (Principal Funders). Major funders include the Garfield Weston Foundation, the Wolfson Foundation, the Bonita Trust and the Motorola Solutions Foundation. Additional support has been provided by Accenture (Connect Circle Sponsor) as well as the Institution of Engineering and Technology, Cambridge Wireless (CW), the David and Claudia Harding Foundation and other individual donors. The Science Museum would also like to thank the BBC for their assistance.

Visitor information – Information Age opens on 25 October 2014. Further information can be obtained at Science Musseum's Information Age page. Twitter: @sciencemuseum, #smInfoAge.

Further information

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