

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: Monday 7 September 2020

WEST LONDON MUSEUM REOPENS

- Leighton House reopens for visitors on weekends only from Saturday 12 September, with Covid-safe measures in place
- The former home of Victorian artist Lord Leighton presents its permanent collection enhanced with new artworks on display for the first time
- Last chance for art fans to see the collections before planned closure for refurbishment in Spring 2021

Leighton House, the former home and studio of Victorian artist Frederic, Lord Leighton (1830 – 1896), will reopen for pre-booked visits at weekends from Saturday 12 September.

The museum – which houses a vast collection of paintings by Leighton and his contemporaries – has been closed for six months due to Covid-19 restrictions. Safety measures are in place to protect staff and visitors including screens in the reception area, a hand sanitiser station at the entrance and strict cleaning routines throughout the day. Visitors are required to wear a face covering and tickets must be pre-booked through [Eventbrite](#).

With the exception of Leighton's private bedroom and garden, the rest of the historic spaces are fully accessible as part of a one-way route designed to allow visitors to navigate safely and comfortably throughout the interiors. A free introductory booklet is included in the entry ticket and further resources are available to download or browse from the Museum's website, including a virtual curated tour on Smartify. The one-way route is clearly indicated by visible signage and our team of Museum Assistants are at hand to offer guidance and assistance.

Cllr Emma Will, lead member for culture, said:

"We are lucky to have such rich culture in the borough. Staff have worked hard to make sure the museum is safe for visitors while still providing a memorable experience driven by the unique stories around Leighton and his art. The reopening of Leighton House presents a great opportunity to get back to enjoying London's art in a peaceful and safe environment."

The museum's permanent collection has been enhanced with recent acquisitions. The highlight is Albert Moore's oil painting, *A Vase of Dahlias*, c 1880. Visitors to the museum will see the painting on display for the first time since 1896, hanging in its original position in the Silk Room, close to John Everett Millais's *Shelling Peas*. This work, gifted to Leighton by Moore, who also lived in Kensington very close to Leighton's house, has been acquired with the assistance of the V&A Purchase Grant Fund and Art Fund.

Visitors are encouraged to book soon as the reopening of Leighton House this September marks the start of a special moment in the history of the house. A major capital project is underway at the museum. Completion will require the museum to close again fully in Spring 2021 meaning this period will be the last opportunity to view the house before this transformation. This will provide visitors with additional exhibition and learning spaces, new visitor facilities, including a brand-new café and improved access for all. The £8 million project, supported by the National Lottery Heritage Fund, The Friends of Leighton House, individual donors and foundations and Kensington and Chelsea Council, will be unveiled in Autumn 2021, accompanied by an exciting exhibition and new public programme.

NOTES TO EDITORS:

For press enquiries, please contact Marketing Officer, Ana Garcia on ana.garcia@rbkc.gov.uk.

Pre-booked tickets here: <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/leighton-house-public-open-access-tickets-119223818651>

The Leighton private bedroom and garden are not currently accessible.

About Leighton House

Leighton House is the former home and studio of the leading Victorian artist, Frederic, Lord Leighton (1830-1896). It is unique among the capital's museums in combining an exceptional collection of Victorian art with the intimacy of a private home.

The house was designed by his great friend, the architect George Aitchison RA as a showcase for artistic taste and to entertain and impress the foremost artists, collectors and celebrities of the day. The exterior of Leighton House gives little clue as to the treasures that lie within.

The highlight of any visit is the extraordinary Arab Hall which reflects Leighton's fascination with the Middle East where he travelled widely. This room was built

between 1877 and 1881 to display his outstanding collection of 16th and 17th-century Islamic tiles and also contains mosaic floors, a gold mosaic frieze, set beneath a gilded dome, and a calming fountain. Also not to be missed is Leighton's painting studio on the first floor, with its large north-facing window, picture slot and screen. Leighton produced all the works of his mature career in this room, including the iconic Flaming June which is now at the Museo de Arte Ponce, Puerto Rico.

About Frederic Leighton

Leighton was born in Scarborough, Yorkshire in 1830 to a wealthy medical family, the second of three children. At an early age he showed an interest in drawing, and went on to study art on the continent, despite his parents' early reservations about his choice of career. Leighton did undeniably succeed – Queen Victoria bought his first major painting in 1855, and in 1878 he reached the pinnacle of his profession, with his election as President of the Royal Academy of Arts. He also received numerous international honours and was highly regarded by his peers. However, the man himself remains something of an enigma. His private life was closely guarded – he lived alone, travelled alone and left no diaries. Even his letters make little reference to his personal circumstances.

Just before his death in 1896, Leighton was ennobled, becoming Baron Leighton of Stretton. He is the only British artist to have been awarded this honour and is buried in St. Paul's Cathedral.