

RETAIL

Selfridges invests in art via contemporary commissions

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Selfridges is installing art in its store. Image credit: Selfridges

By SARAH JONES

British department store chain Selfridges is turning part of its flagship location into a permanent gallery, mixing shopping and the arts.

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Located in Selfridges' soon to open Accessories Hall, the Art Block will showcase a rotating series of large-scale sculptures. This project is one of three contemporary art installations Selfridges is putting up this year, part of its larger investment in the arts.

"Selfridges' Art Block project is a great way to create a memorable experience while shopping," said Gene Bornac, senior vice president and practice lead at **Boston Retail Partners**, Boston. "Linking the Art Block to a newly opened entrance will create new traffic and generate buzz for the historic flagship location."

Mr. Bornac is not affiliated with Selfridges, but agreed to comment as an industry expert. **Selfridges** was reached for comment.

Art and accessories

Selfridges is overhauling its Accessories Hall, tapping architect David Chipperfield to create a new look for the department. The final phase of the project is set to wrap this summer, at which point it will be the largest retail space for handbags and accessories.

As part of the commission, Mr. Chipperfield created the Art Block. The marble and steel structure is designed to showcase works of art that are up to 13 feet tall and almost 4 tons.

Together with Yorkshire Sculpture Park's senior curator Helen Pheby, Selfridges will curate a series of installations in the Art Block. Each of the newly commissioned pieces will be on view for six months.

The debut sculpture is by Holly Hendry. Inspired by a digging machine used to build the London Crossrail, the piece is made of rubble from the construction of Selfridges' Accessories Hall. The artist also used silicone, gum, soap, ash, grit, lipstick pigment, aluminum, steel, jesmonite and marble, intending to bring to light issues of waste.

Ms. Hendry's piece is titled "Phyllis," named after the mechanical inspiration for the work. The real Phyllis was used to carve out tunnels for the Crossrail, and the parts of the machine were left underground after the job was completed, as it was too heavy to remove from the site.

Phyllis will be up in the Art Block until October.



"Phyllis" by Holly Hendry at Selfridges. Image credit: Selfridges

Selfridges will soon also be inaugurating The Courtyard, an outdoor space on its third floor that will house installations. At launch in late May, the open air venue will display a commission from artist Rebecca Ackroyd.

The Courtyard is visible from Selfridges' Body Studio, a department that sells merchandise that touches the body such as lingerie and activewear. Taking inspiration from this section, Ms. Ackroyd's installation represents the cyclical nature of bodies and people, creating a respiratory system for the store.

Selfridges is also giving back to its hometown by supporting the City of London's Crossrail Art Programme.

The retailer is funding the installation of an art piece at the Bond Street station for the city's new Elizabeth Crossrail line, which is located nearby to Selfridges' flagship Oxford Street store. As the only retailer to sponsor this art program, Selfridges will be gaining an additional presence in its neighborhood ([see story](#)).

"The art world is a leader in fashion and style for many, and by partnering with artists, Selfridges can associate themselves with style and expression beyond product," Mr. Bornac said. "This creates a nice differentiator against product-only competitors."

Art affiliations

Retailers often link with artists, providing a platform and an audience for their work while bringing a sense of newness to their stores.

For instance, global art platform Artsy is joining forces with Dior, Bergdorf Goodman and American Express to spotlight some of the most significant artists of today.

The Artsy Vanguard is a collaborative project that spans in-store displays and editorial content. Kicking off May 3, this multichannel initiative brings together art and fashion, two fields that frequently collide over shared creative pursuits ([see story](#)).

Infusing retail spaces with art opens up room for more than shopping.

"The Art Block will provide consumers with more reasons to visit Selfridges that are not linked to traditional shopping and product cycles," Boston Retail Partners' Mr. Bornac said. "Selfridges should see an increase in foot traffic around the Art Block and a social media lift from shoppers who are eager to associate themselves with art and the exhibits."

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