



Artist's impression of the campus at King's Cross: a new chapter in the history of Central St Martins

King's Cross a blank canvas for art college's next move

IT will cost the equivalent of two Picassos and a Pollock to relocate one of the world's most feted arts colleges, Central St Martins, to a 64-acre goods yard site at King's Cross.

By 2011, the Holborn and Charing Cross Road studios which nurtured Lucien Freud, Gilbert and George, Antony Gormley, Stella McCartney and Alexander McQueen will

by SIMON WROE

be abandoned in favour of developer Argent's purpose-built £170million site, bearing the grand new title of University of Arts London.

The project is the jewel in the crown of the area's extensive, 10-year redevelopment, but it is also a massive leap into the unknown for the college.

Jane Rapley, CSM's head of college, admitted the move has been tempered with a certain amount of sentimentality from staff and students who would "die on the doorstep" rather than leave, but insisted taking risks was part and parcel of the art world.

She said: "The important thing is you take the values that you want to protect, and it's the people who hold the values, not the bricks and mortar. They create the atmosphere and attitudes that we want to sustain – pushing at the edges, being a little subversive, taking risks. Institutions have to move – if you stand still you go backwards. You have to keep that momentum of thinking differently. It's what we ask our students to do all the time."



Jane Rapley

Ms Rapley, who has been at CSM since the Central School of Arts and Crafts and St Martins School of Art merged 20 years ago, hopes the move will further unite the two disparate colleges: the "edgy, aggressive" St Martins and the more "measured" Central.

"Although we are nearly 20 years old we will all be starting together in a new place. We'll take our histories with us but we'll be starting a whole new history together."

More than 4,000 students will use the latest equipment in art, design and performance on the landmark site, which will bring the listed, industrial Granary building and train shed together with a modern library, research centres,

art gallery and open spaces.

The location, just five minutes from St Pancras International, will also have a bearing on the university's artistic output and character.

Situated behind the Granary will be a "ramblas" with a large atrium to allow light into floors and balconies. Workshops and a theatre will branch off this internal thoroughfare, designed to provoke a "community of disciplines".

Ms Rapley draws parallels between the Central building in Holborn – built in the rush of Edwardian construction around Kingsway in the 1890s – and the complete regeneration of King's Cross now.

Her wish for the new complex to be "plain and flexible" is a conscious echo of the "plain, reasonable and well-built" principles the architect William Lethaby stated when he designed Central.

Ms Rapley added: "It's the balance of respecting the past but responding to challenge. Something as cathartic as this makes you rethink, but I'm sure we'll take a few cobwebs with us."