

McQUEEN'S V&A

Alexander McQueen was one of the most visionary designers of his generation. He used to visit the V&A's fashion and textiles archives and took inspiration from the museum's diverse collections, which he incorporated into his designs.

He once said "The collections at the V&A never fail to intrigue and inspire me. The nation is privileged to have access to such a resource."



How to use this guide

The guide has been designed to take you around points of connection between the V&A and Alexander McQueen. Each area may take about ten minutes to find and explore. The guide should be used in conjunction with the V&A map.

Search the V&A's collections online:
collections.vam.ac.uk

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All objects featured in this guide are on display at time of going to press

Designed for the V&A by Bureau for Visual Affairs.
Original design by Charlie Smith Design

Silent Light

ALEXANDER MCQUEEN AND TORD BOONTJE, 2003
GRAND ENTRANCE, LEVEL 1

In 2003 the V&A commissioned McQueen and lighting and furniture designer Tord Boontje to design a Christmas tree for the Grand Entrance. The six metre high tree, named 'Silent Light', was made from 150,000 Swarovski crystals on polished stainless steel branches. It rotated slowly on a mirrored plinth over a shattered mirror, reflecting light around the Grand Entrance.



'Silent Light' by Alexander McQueen and Tord Boontje © Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

Fashion In Motion

ALEXANDER MCQUEEN AND SHAUN LEANE, 2001
IRONWORK, LEVEL 3, ROOM 113

The 2001 Fashion in Motion live catwalk event celebrated the longstanding collaboration between McQueen and jewellery designer Shaun Leane. Models stalked around the museum wearing Leane's contemporary jewelled body armour. The ironwork gallery proved a striking backdrop to the pieces which are now considered landmarks in the art of couture jewellery and contemporary body sculpture.



Fashion in Motion: Alexander McQueen and Shaun Leane, October 2001.
© Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

Religious iconography

MEDIEVAL & RENAISSANCE GALLERIES,
LEVEL 0, ROOM 10, CASE 3

McQueen admired fifteenth-century Flemish and Dutch art. In explaining his fascination with its artists; he said 'because of the colours, because of the sympathetic way they approached life [...] I think they were very modern for their times'. The Medieval and Renaissance Galleries contain many examples of religious iconography, including Robert Campin's painting Virgin and Child. McQueen used imagery from Campin's painting The Thief to the Left of Christ on a jacket in the collection It's a Jungle Out There (Autumn/Winter 1997).



Virgin and Child, oil painting, Robert Campin, 15th century. Museum No. 769:1-1865.
© Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

Fashion In Motion

ALEXANDER MCQUEEN, 1999
THE CAST COURTS, LEVEL 1, ROOM 46A AND B

The first time McQueen took part in the V&A's Fashion In Motion live catwalk series was in 1999. Here models walked around the museum, in particular the Cast Courts, wearing garments from McQueen's Arts and Crafts Movement-inspired collection No. 13, (Spring/Summer 1999).

McQueen was fascinated by the Cast Courts and once said 'It's the sort of place I'd like to be shut in overnight.'

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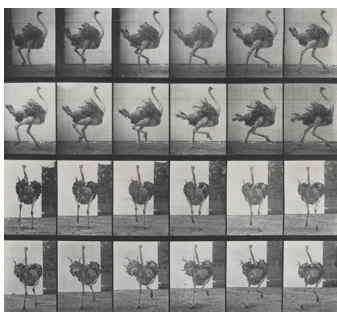
Fashion in Motion: Alexander McQueen, 1999.
© Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

Photography

PHOTOGRAPHY, LEVEL 3, ROOM 100

McQueen said on several occasions that if he had not become a designer, he would have liked to become a photojournalist. His favourite photographers were Joel-Peter Witkin, August Sander and Don McCullin, whose photographs he printed on garments and used as inspiration for transgressive installations in his fashion shows. He was also intrigued by the pioneering work of the nineteenth-century photographer Eadweard Muybridge who had photographed humans and animals in motion.

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Photograph, Eadweard Muybridge, 19th century. Museum no. PH.1287-1889.
© Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

The Textile and Fashion archive

LUNCHROOM, LEVEL 3, 110 STORE

The V&A holds the national collection of Textiles and Fashion, which spans a period of more than 5000 years, from Pre-dynastic Egypt to the present day. This collection is now housed at the Clothworkers' Centre, but until 2012, a large portion of the V&A's collections of hats, shoes, shawls and Victorian garments were archived in the wooden cupboards in 110 store (now the V&A lunchroom). It was here McQueen would look at the collections and in particular study the construction of frock coats, crinolines and corsets.

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© Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

McQueen's research library

NATIONAL ART LIBRARY, LEVEL 3

McQueen's research library was full of books on fashion, tailoring, art, the animal kingdom, photography and gothic literature. He especially loved reading the National Geographic magazine. McQueen was known to have more than 300 references in one collection, and his research boards are a testament to his passion for research and storytelling. Explore the books and magazines that informed McQueen's development as a designer in the NAL, including volumes by John James Audubon, Juan de Alcega, Charles Darwin, Ernst Haeckel, Nick Knight, Peter Beard, and the magazines Dazed & Confused and Visionaire.

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© Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

National pride

BRITISH GALLERIES: 1500 – 1760,
LEVEL 2, ROOM 57A

McQueen's collections were fashioned around elaborate narratives that were profoundly autobiographical, often reflecting upon his ancestral history, specifically his Scottish heritage. Indeed, when he was once asked what his Scottish roots meant to him, he responded, "Everything." McQueen's national pride is most evident in The Widows of Culloden (Autumn/Winter 2006) which was based on the final battle of the Jacobite Risings in 1746.

Explore this gallery where you will find portrait miniatures of Elizabeth I and embroideries made by Mary Queen of Scots. The British collections enable the V&A to explain not just the history of design in the British Isles but also the broader sweep of their cultural history.

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Portrait of Mary Stuart, Queen of Scots, Francois Clouet, 17th century. Museum no. 625-1882.
© Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

Memento Mori

BRITISH GALLERIES: 1500-1760,
LEVEL 2, ROOM 58

Memento mori are images and symbols which are intended to both memorialise the deceased and remind one of death. The skull motif is one example, which has become heavily associated with the McQueen brand. The V&A's collections contain many examples of memento mori such as a gold ring with a death's head, which reminds the wearer of their own mortality.

McQueen once said; 'It is important to look at death because it is a part of life. It is a sad thing, melancholy but romantic at the same time. It is the end of a cycle – everything has to end. The cycle of life is positive because it gives room for new things.'

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Ring, unknown maker, 1550 – 1600.
Museum no. 13-1888.
© Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

The Fashion Gallery

FASHION, LEVEL 1, ROOM 40

McQueen's training on Savile Row, and his attendance of Central Saint Martins made him a confident tailor and an alchemist with textiles. He frequently referenced and reinterpreted historic silhouettes in his collections, including eighteenth-century frock coats, nineteenth-century crinolines, and Dior's 'New Look' from 1947.

Explore the gallery which houses the Museum's fashion collection, and shows European fashion, fabrics and accessories from 1750 to the present day.

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Riding habit jacket, John Redfern & Sons, 1885-1886. Museum no. T.430-1990.
© Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

Grinling Gibbons

BRITISH GALLERIES: 1760-1900,
LEVEL 4, ROOM 118A, CASE 6

McQueen was fascinated by the work of seventeenth-century woodcarver Grinling Gibbons, and it is likely that he saw this cravat during one of his many visits to the Museum. Gibbons was a Dutchman working in England, and his London workshop produced spectacular set piece carvings for palaces and churches. In 1998, McQueen commissioned Bob Watts of Dorset Orthopaedic and master carver Paul Ferguson to create a pair of wooden prosthetic legs for Paralympic athlete and double amputee Aimee Mullins to wear in the show No. 13, (Spring/Summer 1999). The carving on the solid one-block wooden legs was inspired by the work of Gibbons.

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Carving, Grinling Gibbons, about 1690.
Museum no. W.181:1-1928.
© Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

Gothic

BRITISH GALLERIES: 1760-1900, GOTHIC REVIVAL,
LEVEL 4, ROOM 122D

A defining feature of McQueen's collections was their historicism. While his historical references were far reaching, he was frequently inspired by the nineteenth century, particularly the Victorian Gothic.

McQueen admired the work of William Morris, and the cabinet in this gallery is an example of the design reformer's work. The Gothic style which dominated architecture and decoration in the Middle Ages became the most popular revival style in Britain in the nineteenth century.

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King René's Honeymoon Cabinet, 1861.
Museum no. W.10:1 to 28-1927.
© Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

Victorian London

BRITISH GALLERIES: 1760-1900, TECHNOLOGICAL
INNOVATION, LEVEL 4, ROOM 122C

London was the epicentre of McQueen's world. The son of a taxi-driver, he grew up in the city's East End and left school at 15 to become a tailor's apprentice on Savile Row in Mayfair. In 1990 he joined the prestigious MA Fashion course at Central Saint Martins.

McQueen was fascinated by London's history, its world-class museums and emerging 'Brit art' scene. His research library was filled with photography books on Victorian street life, literature such as Charles Dickens' novel *Oliver Twist* and technological innovations such as daguerreotypes.

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The "Wall Worker", photograph, John Thomson, 1877 - 78. Museum no. PH.332-1982.
© Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

William Morris

BRITISH GALLERIES: 1760-1900,
ROOM 122 AND 125

McQueen had a profound respect for William Morris and the Arts and Crafts Movement, identifying with its idealism and the way it placed value on the joy of craftsmanship and the natural beauty of materials. He spray-painted William Morris-inspired floral prints onto dresses in the collection *Highland Rape* (Autumn/Winter 1995), and incorporated Morris-inspired embroidery on dresses in the collection No. 13 (Spring/Summer 1999).

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Strawberry Thief, furnishing fabric, William Morris, 1883. Museum no. T.586-1919.
© Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

The William Morris Room

LEVEL 1, CAFÉ

McQueen's favourite gallery in the Museum was the William Morris room, and he spent hours sketching here. Morris was commissioned by the museum's first director Henry Cole to design one of the V&A's three dining rooms. This room's design demonstrates Morris's interest in myth and legend. The deep colours of the scheme show that he was still under the influence of the Gothic Revival at the time of its production.

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