

# Exploring Skylines

Cast Court Activity

Teacher's Information

Room 46a



Trajan's column, plaster cast, Monsieur Oudry, about 1864, after an unknown sculptor, AD 113. Museum no. 1864-128



Arch Riaño, Juan F., about 1871 Museum no. 1871-60



Plaster cast of the Puerta de la Gloria, 19th century

## The objects

The Cast Court is like a city full of life-size fragments of buildings, monuments, statues and details from Northern Europe, Italy and Spain. These faithful copies were mainly taken from works of art or architectural details throughout Europe during the 19th century, when the collecting of such casts was at its most popular. The V&A commissioned or bought these reproductions from some of the leading cast manufacturers of the day. The collection that was assembled allowed people who could not travel abroad to admire, study and draw some of the major European monuments and works of art. Each part was cast piece by piece, then reassembled in the galleries. Nowadays they are sometimes used to support restoration projects where an original has been damaged and the details lost.

Trajan's Column. You can see the original built in 113 in Rome today. Around the column runs the story of the Emperor Trajan's victory in the Dacian wars.

Pórtico de la Gloria archway. This huge 12<sup>th</sup> century façade is from the cathedral at Santiago de Compostela, cast by Domenico Brucciani in 1866 and is 18m wide. Santiago de Compostela is an important site of Christian pilgrimage.

### **Exploring skylines**

Individual buildings, their design, structure and materials, when combined create an important aspect of a city's visual identity, its skyline. A skyline is the outline formed by the profile of a collection of buildings against the sky on a horizon. The outline shape of some buildings has become iconic as they have become universally recognised and contribute towards the identity of a place. Iconic buildings featured in this gallery include Trajan's Column and the the Pórtico de la Gloria archway from the cathedral at Santiago de Compostela.

### **Themes to explore**

What fragments of buildings can you find? Doorways, columns, and arches.

Which fragments or buildings have interesting shapes or outlines?

Which have interesting patterns or details?

Can you find any people or animals? Observe their clothing or expression.

### **Student activities**

Explore and record the shapes, details and fragments using a range of drawing techniques. Use the extension activity sheet to research one fragment or building in more depth. Piranesi's drawings of Rome, which can be seen in the Exploring Skylines Study Room Resource, allude to classical ruins and fragments like many of those which can be seen in the Cast Courts.

**At school** Show students images of Piranesi's drawings of Rome as inspiration for creating their own imaginary skyline inspired by the architecture collections at the V&A. Work collaboratively to create a panorama featuring historical and contemporary structures, fragments, and details.