

# Exploring Skylines

V&A + RIBA  
Architecture Partnership

Study Room Resource

Teachers' Notes

These notes are intended for use with Key Stage 3 to 5 Art & Design students.

Access to original drawings is one of the most inspiring and vivid ways through which students can begin to assess the scope and learning potential for appreciating architecture and for understanding the architectural design process.

## Why Explore Skylines?

Fifty percent of the world's population currently live in cities; urban design and architecture impact on both the look of cities and also the quality of life within cities. This resource box focuses on city skylines and explores how individual buildings, their design, structure and materials, when combined can create an important aspect of a city's visual identity, its skyline. It asks students to explore a range of creative drawing approaches, discuss their views on historical and contemporary architecture and think about what they would like cities to look like in the future. It identifies some key designers and historical events that have influenced the design of London's skyline and considers what factors make some skylines more distinctive than others.

See the ArchiLab Exploring Skylines online resource for more information about this subject, ideas and student worksheets for further activities to do at school and at the museum, and useful links and references. [\[add link\]](#)

## The V&A's and RIBA's architecture collections

There are over a million drawings in the V&A's and RIBA's architecture collections. The different types of drawings reveal the design process architects use to research, create, develop, present and build their ideas. These original drawings can be seen in the V&A and RIBA Prints and Drawings Study Room and some are on display in the V&A+RIBA Architecture gallery.

The medium an architect uses depends on what stage they are in the design process as well as the budget, the needs and expectations of their client, and the materials they have available to visualise their ideas. Initial sketches, in the form of models as well as drawings, are used to create and develop their first ideas. Sketchbooks are used to show first ideas or record drawings of completed buildings for research. Plan, elevation and section drawings are the most common types of drawing an architect uses for developing, presenting and building an idea. Three dimensional models, computer drawings, computer animations, drawings, painting, prints, photomontage and collage can be used to visualise and present an idea. Detailed drawings are used for building an idea.

A selection of these drawings are by artists and created to explore, record and promote a particular place or environment.

### **Key Questions**

Encourage the students to consider some of the following questions before reading the notes on each drawing:

The artist or architects' intentions:

- What do you think are the artist or architect's aims and intentions?
- Who is the image for?
- Is it for more than one audience?
- Does the image successfully communicate the artist or architect's aims and intentions?

Analysing the image:

- Do you think this is a real or imaginary place? Explain why.
- What types of building can you see in the drawing?
- Can you tell what materials are the buildings or fragments made out of?
- Can you find out the name of the artist or architect and what date the drawing was made?
- Is there any annotation such as words or numbers on the drawings? If so, what do they tell you?

- Does the artist or architect show a whole building, a fragment of a building or a detail of a building?
- What shapes and details make the buildings or fragments interesting?
- What medium has the artist or architect used?
- Has the artist or architect used a traditional or contemporary drawing style?
- How has the artist or architect used line, colour and tone?
- What viewpoint has artist or architect chosen, and how does this impact on your view of the buildings and spaces in between? Is there a focal point?
- Does the image have a foreground, middle ground and back ground?
- Has the artist or architect used perspective? If so, can you find the vanishing point?
- Does the artist or architect use scale to add drama?
- Does the artist or architect include any people, animals or natural forms?
- What preliminary work do you think the artist or architect did to research and record this image?

#### Personal Responses:

- Do you recognise, and can you name, any of these buildings?
- Are there any details shown in the image that are new, old, or unfamiliar?
- What words would you use to describe this place or building?
- What smells and sounds might you find in this environment?
- Do you think this is a successful design proposal?
- What skyline would you choose for a city? High rise or low-rise?  
Traditional or contemporary style buildings?
- If you were making a composition of a skyline would you create an imaginary or real place?