

Explore treasures of the V&A

Use this guide to discover 20 highlights in the Museum. The location of each object is indicated on the map. Visit as many as you like or choose your favourite.

While we have made every effort to make sure that each of the 20 Treasures are on display, sometimes galleries have to be closed for renovation or objects need to be conserved.

Please ask a member of staff if you cannot find an object or need any help.

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V&A

20 TREASURES

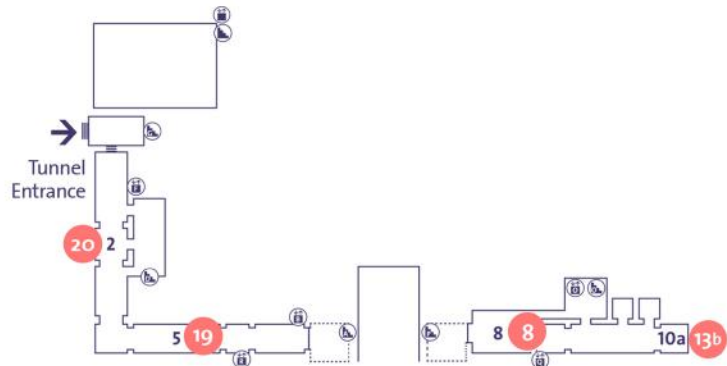
highlights from
the collection



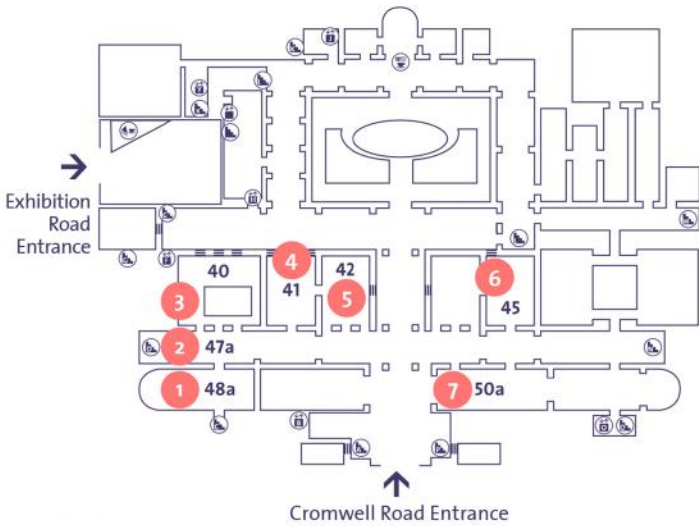
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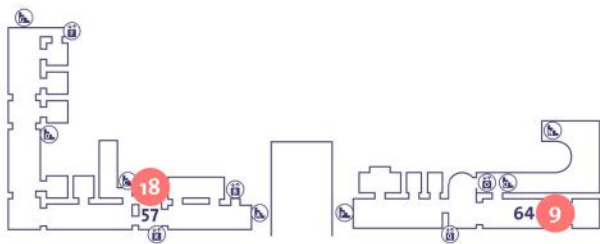
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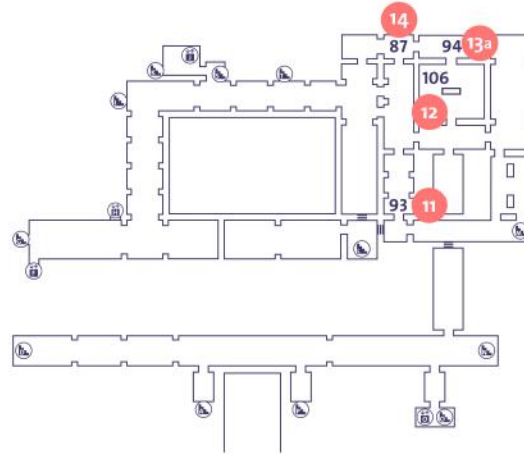
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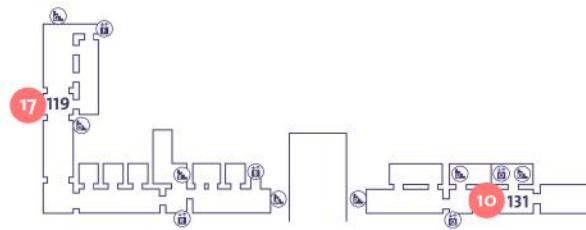
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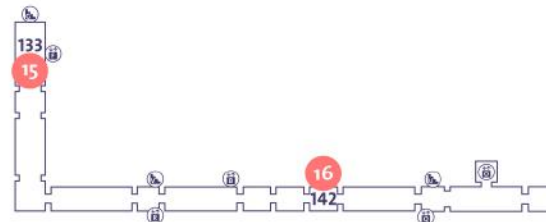
Level 1



Level 2



Level 3



Level 4



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20 TREASURES

The Victoria and Albert Museum is the world's leading museum of art, design and performance. Founded in 1852 by Prince Albert, it is home to over 2.3 million objects that span 5000 years of human creativity.

Prince Albert's wish was to create a museum that would improve British industry by displaying works of art and design to educate and inspire designers, manufacturers and the public. Today, many of the UK's national collections are housed at the V&A, alongside some of the most outstanding examples of ceramics, furniture, architecture, fashion, glass, jewellery, photography, painting, sculpture, textiles and theatre and performance works.

This short guide cannot cover all of the treasures the Museum has to offer. Instead it features 20 objects that represent some of its most precious, famous or intriguing highlights, providing a taste of the exceptional and diverse collection of the V&A.



The Raphael Cartoons, about 1515–16

Raphael (1483–1520)

THE RAPHAEL CARTOONS, Room 48a, Level 0

1



When Leo X became pope in 1513, he commissioned a set of tapestry designs to contribute to the ornate decoration of the Sistine Chapel in Rome. He chose Raphael as the designer, who was already considered a great artist of the time and was working on the decoration of the Vatican Palace. The cartoons show episodes from the Acts of the Apostles – the lives of St Peter and St Paul, founders of the Christian Church.

The tapestries made from Raphael's designs vary slightly: the images are reversed and some of the colours are different. They were woven over 1000 miles from Rome, in Brussels between 1516 and 1521. The Low Countries had been an important centre for cloth-weaving since the early 14th century. The cartoons were sent there and sliced into large strips to make templates for the weavers to use. Although they were reassembled in the 17th century, today the joins are still faintly visible.

On loan from Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II



Betel nut container, 1780–1885

SOUTH-EAST ASIA, Room 47a, Level 0

2



The bird-shaped box is designed to hold betel, a mild drug like tobacco used throughout Asia. Traditionally made from areca nuts and lime wrapped in a leaf from the betel tree, betel was offered as a mark of respect during ceremonies. For centuries, most households kept equipment for its preparation.

This box represents a sacred bird or *hintha*. It is special because it formed part of the royal regalia of Burma (now Myanmar). These richly decorated and valuable ceremonial objects, symbolising the power of the Burmese monarchy, belonged to King Thibaw, the last King of Burma. When the British overthrew King Thibaw, the regalia was seized and brought to England. It was displayed in the Museum from 1890 until 1964, when it was returned to Myanmar. As a gesture of friendship and thanks, the Myanmar government gave the container back to Britain. It has remained at the V&A ever since.

Museum no. IS.246&A-1964
Given by the Government of Burma, pp H.E.U. Hla Manly,
Ambassador of Burma, London



Evening coat, 1937

Elsa Schiaparelli (1890–1973)

FASHION, Room 40, Level 0

3



Witty and elegant, this evening coat is typical of the designs of Italian-born Elsa Schiaparelli, who ran a highly successful couture house in Paris in the 1920s and '30s.

In 1931 she opened a branch in London which was patronised by flamboyant clients like Viscountess Doris Castlerosse. A prominent socialite of the time, the Viscountess ordered the coat from Schiaparelli's autumn 1937 collection.

The design was embroidered by the leading Parisian workshop Lesage, following a drawing by the French artist and film-maker Jean Cocteau. He was one of many key Surrealist artists with whom Schiaparelli collaborated. The vase holding the roses that adorn the shoulders is made up of two faces in profile, their lips puckered ready to kiss. The double image was a recurring motif for Cocteau and other Surrealist artists, including Salvador Dalí. Schiaparelli herself once wrote: 'Dress designing... is to me not a profession but an art'.

Museum no. T.59-2005
Given by the American Friends of the V&A



Tipu's Tiger, about 1793

SOUTH ASIA, Room 41, Level 0

4



Tipu's Tiger is seen as a symbol of the strength of its owner, Tipu Sultan. Tipu was ruler of Mysore in south India from 1782 to 1799. A powerful leader, he fought back against attacks on his kingdom

from the British East India Company. The tiger was Tipu's personal emblem – he had many of his possessions decorated with tiger designs, including his throne. This almost life-sized model shows a tiger devouring a European enemy. A handle on the side of its body can be turned to work a mechanical organ hidden inside, which makes the sound of the growling animal and cries of its victim.

Tipu was defeated by the British in 1799, and this tiger was taken from his palace and brought to London. It was exhibited in the East India Company's museum where it became a favourite with visitors. Moved to the South Kensington Museum (now the V&A) in 1879, it continues to intrigue.

Museum no. 2545 (15)



The Ardabil Carpet, 1539–40

ISLAMIC MIDDLE EAST, THE JAMEEL GALLERY,
Room 42, Level 0

5



The Ardabil Carpet is one of the world's most significant carpets, important for the quality of its design and craftsmanship, as well as its history. It was woven over 400 years ago for a shrine in north-west Iran. The carpet was then sold in the late 19th century, possibly to fund urgent building repairs to the shrine. We can date it exactly thanks to an inscription in Persian woven at one end, which contains the date '946' from the Muslim calendar, equivalent to 1539 to 1540.

The dramatic medallion design at the centre of the carpet forms part of a repeat pattern, with quarter medallions in each of the four corners. Two hanging lamps in the middle recall the original sacred context of the carpet – the Ardabil shrine. The designer William Morris recommended the Museum purchase the carpet in 1893, describing it as 'by far the finest Eastern carpet which I have seen'.

Museum no. 272-1893



The Mazarin Chest, about 1640

JAPAN, THE TOSHIBA GALLERY,
Room 45, Level 0

6



The Mazarin Chest is made from black lacquered wood with lavish gold and silver lacquer decoration. Some of Japan's most highly skilled craftsmen worked on chests like these, which were made specifically for export to the West. During the 17th century wealthy Europeans developed a taste for these exotic luxury goods and displayed them as symbols of status and power.

The chest is named after the Mazarin family. One of its first owners was Jules Mazarin, a famous French statesman and Catholic cardinal. After his death it was handed down through his family. In 1800 William Beckford, an eccentric English novelist and avid collector of Japanese lacquer, bought the chest. Beckford later fell into debt and had to sell large parts of his collection. Eventually the V&A was able to buy the chest in 1882 for the then enormous sum of £772.

Museum no. 412-1, 2-1882



Samson Slaying a Philistine, 1560–62 7 Giambologna (1529–1608)

MEDIEVAL & RENAISSANCE, THE PAUL AND JILL RUDDOCK GALLERY,
Room 50a, Level 0



The artist Giovanni Bologna, known as Giambologna, was admired for the sense of action and movement in his sculptures. Here Samson wields a jawbone to strike a Philistine, in a scene from the Bible's Old Testament. His muscles are tautly drawn and he looks down over his shoulder at his victim, raising his right arm for the deadly blow. The dramatic pose was based on a composition by Michelangelo.

This sculpture was commissioned in Florence by Prince Francesco de' Medici, a member of the ruling Medici dynasty known for their patronage of the arts in Italy. It came to London in 1623 and rapidly became the most famous Italian sculpture in England. It is considered to be the most important group sculpture by Giambologna outside Italy. The sculpture's spiralling, interconnected bodies mean it has no single viewpoint. Its visual appeal and technical skill have challenged and inspired artists for centuries.

Museum no. A.7-1954
Purchased with Art Fund support



The Gloucester Candlestick, commissioned between 1107 and 1113 8

MEDIEVAL & RENAISSANCE, THE WILLIAM & EILEEN RUDDOCK GALLERY,
Room 8, Level -1



This candlestick is a unique example of the skill of medieval English goldsmiths. No other example of English metalwork as technically and artistically complex survives from this time. Analysis has shown that it was cast from a mixture of precious metals, possibly from a hoard of coins melted down and recycled.

The candlestick was probably used to light an altar. Unusually, it bears inscriptions in Latin that refer to its history and religious symbolism. One states that 'Abbot Peter' presented it to the church of St Peter in Gloucester. Another reads: *'This flood of light, this work of virtue, bright with holy doctrine instructs us, so that Man shall not be benighted in vice.'*

The figures decorating the intricate candlestick climb up towards symbols of the four Evangelists around the middle of the stem, and the candle-holder at the top. They embody those who strive to follow the light of Christ's teachings, represented by the burning candle.

Museum no. 7649-1861



Notebooks of Leonardo da Vinci, known as the Forster Codices, about 1487–97, 1505 Leonardo da Vinci (1452–1519) 9

MEDIEVAL & RENAISSANCE, THE WOLFSON GALLERY, Room 64, Level 1



An artist, draftsman, inventor and philosopher, Leonardo da Vinci's contributions to society were numerous and can still be felt today. Throughout his lifetime he kept dozens of notebooks which he used to record his thoughts and ideas on a huge variety of subjects, ranging from architecture to anatomy and philosophy. Five of these notebooks are now in the V&A collection, bound in three volumes or 'codices'.

The notebooks are written in Leonardo's famous 'mirror writing'. There has been much speculation over the years about why he used this method of writing. Was he trying to make sure that only he could read his notes? Or was it that he was left-handed and found it easier to write from right to left? Writing masters of the period taught mirror writing, so it may not have seemed as strange during Leonardo's time as it does today.

Museum nos. MSL/1876/Forster/141/I-III
Bequeathed by John Forster



Winged Head I, 1962 Stanislav Libenský (1921–2002) and Jaroslava Brychtová (born 1924) 10

GLASS, Room 131, Level 3



The harmony between shape, colour and light in *Winged Head I* is typical of sculptural works by the husband and wife team Libenský and Brychtová. They were among the first to explore the sculptural potential of glass, previously seen as a predominantly decorative material. The couple worked in post-war Czechoslovakia where glass art developed strong traditions. The death of Stalin in 1953 heralded a period of relative freedom and tolerance, allowing their new kind of glass sculpture to flourish. *Winged Head I* represents the couple's journey towards abstraction.

The more painterly Libenský would draw the designs which Brychtová would translate into clay models. She made plaster moulds from these models and filled them with crushed glass to be fused in a hot kiln. By varying the thickness of the form, the couple could control the intensity of the colour and translucency of the glass. The pair are widely considered the greatest innovators of 20th-century art glass.

Museum no. C.19:1, 2-1996



The Heneage Jewel, about 1595

11

JEWELLERY, THE WILLIAM AND JUDITH BOLLINGER GALLERY,
Room 93, Level 2

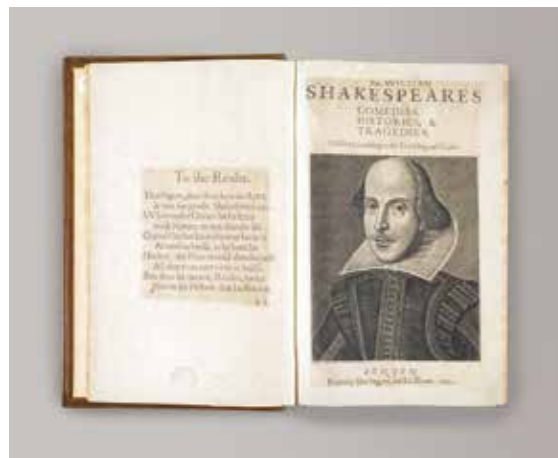


The Heneage Jewel is decorated with a detailed profile portrait of Queen Elizabeth I (1533–1603) in gold. It is one of the finest jewels to have survived from her reign. On the reverse is an image of a boat sailing peacefully on stormy seas – intended to represent the Church of England weathering religious turmoil, steered by Elizabeth.

The ‘jewel’ is actually a locket. The inside is set with a miniature of Elizabeth painted by Nicholas Hilliard (1537–1619), an eminent artist of the Elizabethan era. The Queen’s favourites among her courtiers included Sir Thomas Heneage, who was Vice-Chamberlain of the Royal Household. They exchanged gifts throughout their friendship, probably including this miniature. Heneage may have had the surrounding locket made later to show his devotion to the Queen. An inscription inside praises Elizabeth’s virtue and beauty.

An interactive in the gallery called ‘Hidden Treasures’ shows the inside of the locket.

Museum no. M.81-1935
Given by the Rt. Hon. Viscount Wakefield CBE, through Art Fund



The First Folio, 1623

12

William Shakespeare (1564–1616)

THEATRE & PERFORMANCE, Room 106, Level 2



The Theatre & Performance galleries display a copy of the first collected edition of the works of William Shakespeare. Published in 1623, seven years after his death, the First Folio contains 36 of the 37 plays Shakespeare wrote. Without this book, 18 of his plays – including *Julius Caesar* and *Macbeth* – would never have been known, as none of Shakespeare’s original manuscripts have survived.

The First Folio was compiled by John Heminges and Henry Condell. They were two members of The King’s Men, the acting company to which Shakespeare belonged. The pair divided the plays into comedies, tragedies and histories. This was an editorial decision that has shaped the world’s understanding of Shakespeare’s work ever since.

The folio also contains an engraved portrait of Shakespeare by Martin Droeshout (1601–50), one of the few authentic images of the writer to exist. It is thought that 750 First Folios were printed, but so far only about 235 copies are known to survive today.

Museum no. Dyce 25.F.63



Devonshire Hunting Tapestries, 1430–50 13

**TAPESTRIES, Room 94, Level 2 and
MEDIEVAL & RENAISSANCE, THE FRANÇOISE AND GEORGES SELZ
GALLERY, Room 10a, Level -1**



The Devonshire Hunting Tapestries are four intricately designed large wall hangings. Tapestries were expensive and highly sought after during the medieval and Renaissance periods, but very few of this scale and quality survive. The examples in the V&A were owned and preserved by the Dukes of Devonshire for centuries at Hardwick Hall in Derbyshire.

These tapestries were probably made in Arras in modern-day France. The town was known for supplying the courts of France and Burgundy with magnificent wall hangings to decorate and insulate palaces and castles. Their imagery also provided entertainment and interest, depicting well-known stories from the Bible and mythology, as well as universal themes like love and war. The Devonshire Tapestries show the popular courtly pastime of hunting. The scenes in Room 94 depict falconry and hunts of deer, swans and otters. Ferocious boar and bear are hunted in Room 10a.

Museum nos. T.202, 203, 204, 205-1957
Accepted by HM Government in lieu of tax payable on the estate of the
10th Duke of Devonshire and allocated to the V&A



Salisbury Cathedral from the Bishop's Ground, 1823 14

John Constable (1776–1837)

PAINTINGS, THE EDWIN AND SUSAN DAVIES GALLERY, Room 87, Level 2



Dr John Fisher, the Bishop of Salisbury, was Constable's friend and patron. He commissioned this painting and is shown in its bottom-left corner with his wife, admiring Salisbury Cathedral.

Constable found the cathedral difficult to paint, labouring over its architectural detail, but he enjoyed the play of light and shadow in the scene. Fisher however complained of the 'dark cloud', preferring 'a clear blue sky'.

Today Constable is one of the nation's best-loved artists. This painting embodies his fresh, naturalistic view of the British landscape. But two years before he painted it, he wrote to Fisher: 'I shall never be a popular artist'. It was only after Constable's death that he became widely appreciated. This work was part of a collection of paintings given to the Museum in 1857 by John Sheepshanks to found a 'National Gallery of British Art'. The gift formed the basis of the V&A paintings collection.

Museum no. FA.33[O]
Given by John Sheepshanks, 1857



Club Armchair, designed 1925–26

Marcel Breuer (1902–81)

FURNITURE, THE DR. SUSAN WEBER GALLERY, Room 133, Level 4

15



The Club Armchair in tubular steel is one of the most important and popular designs of the 20th century. It was created by the Hungarian designer Marcel Breuer when he started to teach at the Bauhaus school in Dessau, Germany. The armchair is the first example of steel tubing used for indoor domestic furniture. Its radical design has become a symbol of the Modernist movement.

The inspiration for the chair came from the lightness and strength of Breuer's bicycle. He worked with a plumber to bend lengths of tubular steel into a chair frame. Club armchairs were traditionally very heavy and upholstered. Breuer's design was lightweight in comparison and the components of the chair seem to float in space.

Breuer's fellow Bauhaus teachers, including the artist Wassily Kandinsky, were some of the chair's earliest admirers. When it was manufactured again in the 1960s, the model was dubbed the 'Wassily'.

Museum no. W.2-2005
Supported by the Friends of the V&A



'Cavalier sur sa Monture' (Mounted Cavalier), 1950–51

Pablo Picasso (1881–1973)

STUDIO CERAMICS, THE LYDIA AND MANFRED GORVY GALLERY,
Room 142, Level 4

16



One of the most influential artists of the 20th century, Pablo Picasso's work spans artistic media. At the age of 65 he turned his attention to ceramics. Around this time, Picasso moved from Paris to the south of France where he visited the Madoura Pottery in Vallauris and met its owners, Suzanne and Georges Ramié. They welcomed him into their workshop and he began to produce ceramics on a prolific scale. He decorated hundreds of plates with unique painted or incised designs, sometimes adding decoration in relief. He also had ceramic forms specially made for him by the potter Jules Agard, which he decorated in a similar way.

Picasso's ceramics are often playful, depicting animals, myths or human figures, like this pitcher in the form of a mounted cavalier. When these vibrant pieces, influenced by Mediterranean sources, were first shown in Britain in the 1950s, they inspired a new generation of potters.

Museum no. C.15-1958
Given by the artist



The Three Graces, 1814–17

Antonio Canova (1757–1822)

17

BRITAIN 1760–1900, Room 119, Level 3



The Three Graces were the daughters of the Greek god Zeus. Thalia represents youth and beauty, Euphrosyne mirth, and Aglaia, elegance. In the late 18th and early 19th century, sculpture depicting subjects from Greek and Roman mythology was considered the finest form of European art. Antonio Canova was the leading artist of his day in Europe. Like others, he was inspired by antique art, and he used it to create and perfect his own style – today often referred to as Neo-classical.

The 6th Duke of Bedford commissioned this marble group sculpture after seeing another version in Canova's studio in Rome. That earlier piece was made for Napoleon I's estranged wife Josephine and is now in the Hermitage in St Petersburg. Canova created this second version for the Duke to house in a specially-built Temple of the Graces at his home, Woburn Abbey.

Museum no. A.4-1994

Purchased jointly with the National Galleries of Scotland, with the assistance of the National Heritage Memorial Fund, John Paul Getty II, Baron Heinrich Thyssen-Bornemisza, Art Fund and numerous donations from members of the public



The Great Bed of Ware, about 1590

18

BRITAIN 1500–1760, Room 57, Level 1



The Great Bed of Ware has been famous from the time it was made in the 1590s. Shakespeare knew of it and mentioned it in his play *Twelfth Night* in 1601. Since then, it has become the subject of many humorous tales about the potential goings-on inside such an enormous bed. A visitor to Ware once described the bed as so big that 'four couples might comfortably lie side by side'.

Although it is not an outstanding example of design, and has been damaged and repaired over the years, the V&A bought the bed in 1931 as a cultural icon. Its style is typical of flamboyantly carved beds of the late Elizabethan period, and the figures in the headboard would originally have been brightly painted. It is thought the bed was made for a coaching inn at Ware. The town was one day's journey north from London and the extraordinary bed could have been used to attract customers.

Museum no. W.47-1931

Purchased with Art Fund support



Banyan, 1690–1720

EUROPE 1600–1815, THE FRIENDS OF THE V&A GALLERY, Room 5, Level -1

19



By the 17th century, European men wore loose-fitting gowns instead of formal close-fitting suits when at home or while entertaining friends or business associates. These banyans were made

of different fabrics according to the needs and taste of the wearer. Wool provided warmth while patterned linens, cottons and silks were colourful fashion statements. The silk of this banyan was one of the more expensive and luxurious choices. Merchants' records listed such patterned silks as 'bed damasks', suggesting that they may originally have been intended for furnishings.

The style and naming of banyans were the result of increasing trade links between Europe and Asia. The cut is based on the Japanese kimono, its silk is from China and the term 'banyan' – in use by the 1720s – comes from the Gujarati word for a merchant or trader. The wearer of this striking and rare example is not known, but many artists and aspiring intellectuals favoured being shown in these exotic garments in their portraits.

Museum no. T.31-2012



The Sérilly Cabinet, 1778

EUROPE 1600–1815, THE WOLFSON GALLERY, Room 2, Level -1

20



The Museum purchased this *cabinet*, or garden room, as an exceptional example of the Neo-classical style of decoration fashionable in 1770s Paris. It was designed for Madame de Sérilly, the 16-year-old

bride of the Paymaster General to the French army. His family owned the Hôtel Sérilly in the Marais district of Paris. The tiny room was attached to the main house of the hôtel, but could only be accessed from the garden. Whether or not this allowed Madame de Sérilly to escape her in-laws and older husband, the garden room was intended as a private retreat for the young woman.

Sadly, financial difficulties forced the family to give up their townhouse only four years after the *cabinet* was completed. When it was dismantled and sold to the South Kensington Museum (now the V&A) in 1869, it became the first of several 'period rooms' the Museum acquired.

Museum no. 1736-1869

