



V&A

Embroidered silk waistcoat, France, 1780–9.
Image Vee Speers © V&A

Fashioned from Nature


GALLERY TRAIL

Designed objects draw on nature for raw materials and inspiration. This trail around the Museum showcases how natural forms have inspired design on many levels. The objects included also demonstrate how humans have used the inherent properties of natural materials to create beautiful, and at times, mesmerising objects.

Please use this guide with the V&A map. Our gallery assistants can also help you to find your way through the galleries to each object.

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Level 0
Europe, Room 6, The Lisa and Bernard Selz Gallery

Cabinet-on-stand
Museum No. W.8-1965



CABINET-ON-STAND

As well as fashion accessories such as fans and canes, turtle-shell was used to decorate impressive furniture like this cabinet. Plates of the shell were flattened and shaped using hot salt water and extreme pressure. Turtle-shell is a natural thermoplastic; it can be shaped when softened and will hold its shape once it re-hardens. The deep red colour of the turtle-shell on this cabinet is created by gluing vermillion-coloured paper to the reverse.

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Level 1
South Asia, Room 41

Table
Museum No. 1085-1882



TABLE

From French fans to Japanese kimono fasteners, ivory was widely used in male and female fashion. Taken from the tusks and teeth of elephants, it was also used to make larger scale objects such as furniture. This display shows the extent of ivory exploitation with four objects made in Murshidabad, the Nawabi capital of Bengal, in the east of India.

Vegetable ivory, derived from the tagua nut, is a fascinating alternative to ivory that was popular for small objects in the 19th century. Fashioned from Nature includes an example carved in the form of a rose and attached to a lady's parasol.

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Level 3
Sculpture, Room 111, The Gilbert Bayes Gallery

Shell Cameo
Museum No. 1386-1874



SHELL CAMEO

Shellwork pieces appeared in the 17th century but became an incredibly popular craft in Victorian Britain. Shellwork uses the natural properties and structure of its material. In this example, the artist's pencil outline of the portrait can be seen and he has skilfully used the shell's colours to raise the subject's face. In the 19th century, shellwork was less costly than a gemstone cameo, and was used as a means of engaging with nature.

4

Level 3
Jewellery, Rooms 91 to 93,
The William and Judith Bollinger Gallery

Tiara
Museum No. M.10-2003



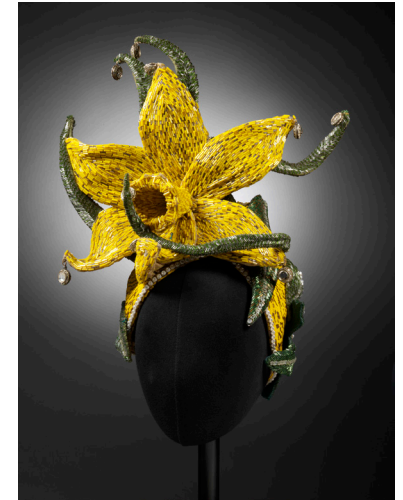
TIARA

In the late 18th century and 19th century, coral was a popular material in European jewellery. Most commonly derived from the Mediterranean Sea, coral with a red pigmentation was often sought out for women's accessories. This tiara moulds coral to the floral form of a wreath with berries. Coral mining profoundly depleted the reefs of many continents and persists today for the use of fashion accessories.

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Level 3
Theatre and Performance, Room 105

Headdress
Museum No. S.955-1984



HEADDRESS

Opening in 1933 in Soho's Beak Street, Murray's Cabaret Club became famous for its performers' imaginative and extreme costumes. This beaded daffodil headdress is an exaggerated and humorous imitation of nature and was worn by a showgirl at Murray's in the 1960s. It would have been paired with a yellow floral decorated bra and skirt, clad in colourful bugle beads.

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Level 3
Tapestries, Room 94

Tapestry
Museum No. 232-1894



TAPESTRY

This tapestry fragment is an example of a 'millefleurs', meaning a thousand flowers. This refers to the rich abundance of flowering plants that decorate the ground. Tapestries such as this were a way to bring the beauty and vibrancy of nature indoors.

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Level 3
Silver, Room 68, The Whiteley Galleries

Clutch bag 'Cul-de-Sac'
Museum No. T.57-2016



CLUTCH BAG 'CUL-DE-SAC'

Michele Oka Doner explores her fascination with natural forms by creating striking, carefully crafted objects such as this clutch bag. Cast to simulate the rough, richly textured surface of tree bark, the bag's purpose is disguised by its unconventional form.

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Level 3
Gilbert Galleries, Room 70

Cup
Museum No. LOAN:GILBERT.61-2008



CUP

From as early as the 16th century, coconuts were fashioned into drinking cups in Britain, the Netherlands and Germany. This intriguing example from Ulm is in the form of a falcon with a coconut body carved to give the illusion of feathers. The bird is complete with carnelians for eyes, and hinged wings that become a handle.

9

Level 2
British Galleries, Level 2, Room 58b

Herball or Historie of Plants
Museum No. L.814-1975



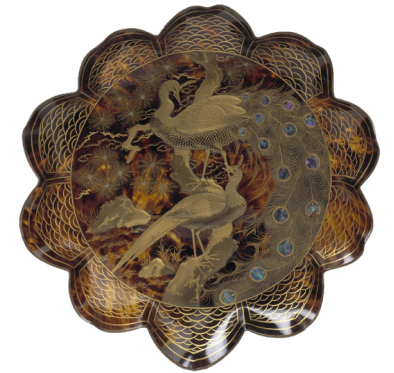
HERBALL OR HISTORIE OF PLANTS

Book printing enabled the spread of knowledge about the natural world through publications such as John Gerard's Herball or Historie of Plants, which included some 1800 engravings. The illustrations included in herbals such as this were often copied in designs for embroidered decoration on clothing and textiles. You can browse a facsimile of the book in front of the case.

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Level 4
British Galleries, Level 4, Room 125,
Edwin and Susan Davies Galleries

Dish
Museum No. 887-1869



DISH

Nature not only inspires the figurative design of this exquisitely crafted decorative dish, but also provides the materials for its dazzling surfaces. Delicate mother-of-pearl inlay is used to mimic the spectacular iridescence of peacock feathers.

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Level 6
Furniture, Room 133, The Dr Susan Weber Gallery
Desk and Bookcase
Museum No. W.3-1943



DESK AND BOOKCASE

Mother-of-pearl was used extensively as decoration on furniture during the 18th and 19th centuries. This desk and bookcase, covered entirely in mother-of-pearl veneer, takes its use to the extreme and showcases the material's brilliant iridescence.

Find the interactive table nearby for more information on mother-of-pearl and other natural materials.

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Level 6
Ceramics, Room 143,
The Timothy Sainsbury Gallery
Teapot
Museum No. 414:1068-1885



TEAPOT

This teapot features naturalistic decoration with a lead-glazed creamware cover moulded to resemble the colours and surface of a pineapple. Homewares like this were often highly decorative as tea was made in front of family members and guests. Pineapples were a popular motif across European courts as an indicator of foreign trade and travel during the late 17th and 18th centuries.

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Level 4
Contemporary Glass, Room 129
Tactual Stimulation
Museum No. C.74-2014



TACTUAL STIMULATION

Composed of lampworked glass and silicon, *Tactual Stimulation* mimics the appearance of a sea urchin or a flowerhead frozen in its bloom. Playing on our sensory experience, Israeli artist Dafna Kaffeman manipulates the natural properties of glass to replicate the fragility and power of nature.

Visit our new display in the Toshiba Gallery, Room 45 to see dress and textiles made from fascinating alternative fibres such as bark, banana and wisteria.

