Programme

Costume Design for Stage: A History

Details

Thursdays, 7 November - 12 December 2024, 14.00-16.30. Online.

Watch lecture recordings on demand, available at the end of each day, until Thursday 23 January 2025.

Overview

The V&A has an unrivalled collection of costume designs for theatre, opera, dance, circus, pantomime and film covering 400 years of the artform. Taking inspiration from the museum’s earliest costume design collection – the 1620s Court Ballet of Louis XIII – this course will examine and celebrate the design process from script to stage.

Costume design is an essential role in performance storytelling and informs the audience of the ‘who, when and where’ of the narrative. The costume designer is central in bringing characters to life from a variety of contexts including text, choreography, and libretto. Costumes can create an entire world in the performance space and can be understood without scenery; costume can also define social status, history, and personality.

The course will explore the techniques and working methods of artists such as Léon Bakst, Oliver Messel, Cecil Beaton, Maria Björnson, Lez Brotherston and Vicki Mortimer. It will also explore the role of the ‘costume house’ – costumiers who design, make, adapt and hire costumes for live performance. The oldest in the world was Nathans, founded in 1790.

Guest designers will include V&A Curator of Dance Jane Pritchard and Dr. Veronica Isaac, expert on Victorian actor Ellen Terry and her costume designer Alice Comyns-Carr. The course will highlight current working practices for live-performance and illuminate how designers work with writers, directors and actors.

2024 is the centenary of the Theatre Collections becoming part of the V&A. The course will examine collecting practice and how design for stage and screen is being recorded for future generations. It will also celebrate the costume
displays in the V&A galleries and how mounting and staging techniques have evolved over time.

Your course leader

Keith Lodwick is a theatre historian, curator and lecturer. He is the former Curator of Theatre and Screen Arts at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London. Keith curated the V&A touring exhibition *Vivien Leigh: Public Faces, Private Lives* and has written extensively about Vivien Leigh and her life and work. Keith was the assistant curator for the major V&A exhibition *Hollywood Costume*, one of the most successful exhibitions in the museum’s history.


Keith has appeared in several television programmes including the BBC TV’s *Secrets of the Museum* Series 1 and 2 (2020 - 21) and advised for numerous documentaries including *Vivien Leigh autant en emporte le vent* (2020) for French TV Arte.

*Note: V&A Academy programmes are subject to change without notice.*

Programme

*Costume Design for Stage: A History*

**Week 1 – 7 November 2024**

13.50  Welcome *Ian Ellard*

14.00  Introduction *Keith Lodwick*

15.30  Costume for Dance: A History *Jane Pritchard, Curator of Dance V&A*

**Week 2 – 14 November**
14.00  The Costume House: A History  
Keith Lodwick

15.30  Ellen Terry and Alice Comyns-Carr:  
Dr Veronica Isaac, University of Brighton

**Week 3 – 21 November**

14.00  The Emergence of the Twentieth-Century Theatre Designer  
Keith Lodwick

15.30  Oliver Messel: A Renaissance Designer in the Modern Age (Q&A)  
Thomas Messel

**Week 4 – 28 November**

14.00  Costume in the Galleries, Q&A with  
Simon Sladen, Senior Curator, Theatre & Performance  
(Pre-recorded film)

15.30  Displaying the Talent: Conserving and Costume Mounting Performance Costume  
Susanna Fajardo, Senior Preventative Conservator, V&A

**Week 5 – 5 December**

14.00  Stage Collaborators: Directors and Designers  
Keith Lodwick

15.30  Q&A with Costume Designer  
TBC

**Week 6 – 12 December**

14.00  Theatre & Performance Design Collections: A History and The Future: V&A East  
Keith Lodwick

15.30  Q&A with  
Simon Kenny, Costumer Designer and Exhibition Designer for Enthoven Unboxed: 100 Years of Collecting Performance, V&A