

V&A Academy

LONDON: THE GLOBAL CITY 1851 - 2020

V&A

Introduction

A city shaped by empire, war and decolonisation, London has gone from the heart of a vast and powerful Empire, an unrivalled centre of global trade and finance to becoming a global melting pot, shaped by the twin forces of modernisation and migration, seen in its architecture, art and design. This term course will explore the rich cultural and social history of a city whose fortunes waxed and waned with rise and fall of Imperial Britain, but which has always been sustained by the creativity and genius of its peoples, drawn from the four corners of the globe. Drawing on the work of cultural and social historians, V&A curatorial staff, and experts on art, design and fashion, we will explore the vicissitudes of London's greatness as a world city, from the creation of Albertopolis to the dawn of the new millennium.

Information

Wednesdays, 22 April – 24 June 2026, 11.00-15.30. Onsite and Online.

Watch lecture recordings on demand, available at the end of each day, until Wednesday 2 August 2026

Your course leader

Mike Berlin is a Lecturer at Birkbeck College, University of London. He is a specialist in the social history of early modern London and has published extensively on the history of London's guilds. Before joining Birkbeck, he was a research officer at the Centre for Metropolitan History, Institute of Historical Research.

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

** Meet & Greet for either online or in-person*

***Gallery talks will not be recorded; additional ticket holder will receive further details where to meet. Usually Exhibition Road Entrance, Blavatnik Hall*

Week 1 – Wednesday 22 April 2026

- 10.45 Introduction **Mike Berlin**
- 11.00 The Great Exhibition: a world of things
- 12.30 Mapping Poverty: Charles Booth **Sarah Wise**
- 14.30 Popular Theatre: Music Hall, Melodrama and Modern Theatre **Giles Ramsay**
- 15.30 In-person Meet & Greet **Mike Berlin** – In-person ticket holders only*

Week 2 – Wednesday 29 April 2026

City of Dreadful Delight

- 10.00 Gallery Talk (Group A) *additional ticket holders only***
- 11.00 Policing London and the White Slave Trade **Sarah Wise**
- 12.30 Queer London **Matt Cook**
- 14.30 Radical London **David Rosenberg**
- 15.30 Gallery Talk (Group B) **Nikke Ariff** - *additional ticket holders only***

Week 3 – Wednesday 6 May 2026

London Enlightened and Entertained

- 11.00 The Making of the Modern Art World in London
- 12.30 London theatre 1900-now **Giles Ramsay**
- 14.30 History of the South Kensington Museum **Julius Bryant**
- 15.45 Online Meet & Greet **Mike Berlin** – Online ticket holders only*

Week 4 – Wednesday 13 May 2026

Shopping, Domesticity and the Pleasure of the City

- 10.00 Gallery Tour (Group A) – *additional ticket holder only***
- 11.00 The Department Store **Sonia Ashmore**
- 12.30 The Suburban Villa **Rosemary Yallop**
- 14.30 Plutocratic London, 1880-1914 Steve Brindle
- 15.30 Gallery Tour (Group B) – *additional ticket holder only* **

Week 5 – Wednesday 20 May 2026

London and the New Century

- 11.00 London and the Empire **Mike Berlin**
- 12.30 Drugs and Clubs **Marek Kohn**
- 14.30 TBC

Week 6 – Wednesday 27 May 2026

‘Moderne to Modern’ in the Metropolis

- 10.00 Gallery Talk (Group A) – *additional ticket holders only***
- 11.00 “You can’t Jazz in a Crinoline”: London in the Jazz Age **Mike Berlin**
- 12.30 The Golden Age of London Transport
- 14.30 Cinemas, Shops, Factories and Deco Style **Mike Berlin**
- 15.30 Gallery Talk (Group B) – *additional ticket holders only***

Week 7 – Wednesday 3 June

London at War and at Peace

- 11.00 London and the Great War **Mike Berlin**
- 12.30 The Hitler Émigrés and the London Art World **Monica Bohm-Duchen**
- 14.30 London and the Second World War **Jerry White**

Week 8 – Wednesday 10 June 2026

Post war London

- 10.00 Gallery Talk (Group A) – *additional ticket holders only***
- 11.00 Mid-century Modern Interiors
- 12.30 The Festival of Britain **Greg Votolato**
- 14.30 Soho from the forties to the sixties **Mike Berlin**
- 15.30 Gallery Talk (Group B) – *additional ticket holders only***

Week 9 – Wednesday 17 June 2026

A New London

- 11.00 London Fashion of the sixties **Jenny Lister**
- 12.30 Windrush and Beyond **Colin Grant**
- 14.30 David Bowie's London **Geoffrey Marsh**

Week 10 – Wednesday 24 June 2026

Soft City, Big Bang and beyond: London since the 1970s

- 10.00 Gallery Talk (Group A) – *additional ticket holders only***
- 11.00 Tower Blocks and Regeneration **James Hulme**
- 12.30 The Bengali East End **Ansar Ahmed Ullah**
- 14.30 Big Bang to Millennium Dream **Mike Berlin**
- 15.30 Gallery Talk (Group B) - *additional ticket holders only***

Additional study options

This 10-weeklong course is part of the London course series over three terms, available online, in-person or in-person with gallery tours.

With our in-person London walking tours you can complement your learning.

London 1666-1851: Emporia and Empire – Spring term (January 2026)

London: The Global City 1851 – 2020 - Summer term (April 2026)

A History of London: 1066-1666 - Autumn term (September 2026)

Walking tours

Stratford Walking Tour: London from the East with Mike Berlin

Friday 27 February, 20 March 2026

Hackney Wick & Fish Island Walking Tour: Sense of Place with Colin

Thursday 22 January, 19 February, 17 July, 24 July

Egypt in London with Mike Berlin

Friday 6 February 2026 – waiting list

Spitalfields Walking Tour: Immigration and Creativity with Mike Berlin

Friday 20 February & 13 March 2026 – waiting list

South Kensington Walking Tour with Mike Berlin

Friday 8 May, 22 May 2026

Hampstead Walking tour with Christine Lalumia

Friday 24 April 2026

The City of London: Medieval City to Modern Metropolis with Mike Berlin (Autumn term) coming soon

Shakespeare's London with Mike Berlin (Autumn term) coming soon

Discover all the walking tour events and courses via V&A Academy

V&A Members enjoy priority booking at term launch. [Find out more](#)

Email courses@vam.ac.uk to join a walking tour waiting list if the event shows as sold out.