

V&A Academy

THE DRESS DETECTIVE: BEHIND THE SEAMS

Thursdays 28 May – 25 June 2026,
14:00-16:30



Introduction



Thursdays 28 May – 25 June 2026, 14:00-16:30. Watch lecture recordings on demand, available at the end of each day, until 30 July 2026.

Overview

Clothes are some of the most intimate and compelling of all objects because of their close connection to the body. Whether held in a museum collection or stored in an attic, a dress, a kimono, a pair of shoes, or other garment holds information from the past that might not otherwise be available in the written record. With careful study, such objects might reveal narratives linked to their maker(s) or wearer(s), serve to illuminate aspects of history and culture, or provide inspiration for new creative works.

Knowing what to look for and how to interpret clues in the folds and seams of an article of clothing requires the skills of a dress detective, especially since there is a difference between looking and seeing. In this course, participants will learn and practice the Slow Approach to Seeing as well as come to appreciate the wide array of narratives embodied in clothing. Object case studies will feature objects such as a man's embroidered waistcoat from 1740 that conveys wealth and status and Yves Saint Laurent's Mondrian dress from 1965-66 that merges art and fashion. Guest lecturers will include several curators from the V&A including Jenny Lister and Cassie Davies-Strodder.

Your course leader

Ingrid Mida (PhD Visual Arts & Culture) is an art and dress historian, artist, and former fashion curator. She is the author of several books published by Bloomsbury including *The New Dress Detective* (forthcoming 2026), *Dressing and Undressing Duchamp* (2022) as well as *Reading Fashion in Art* (2020). Dr. Mida has lectured on object-based research in: fashion, fashion & art, and drawing & creativity at universities and museums in North America, the UK and Europe.

Programme

Week 1 – 28 May

- 13.50 Welcome, *The New Dress Detective*, **Ingrid Mida**
- 15.30 Museum Dress Collections, **Ingrid Mida & Jenny Lister**

Week 2 – 4 June

- 14.00 Fashion & Identity, **Ingrid Mida**
- 15.30 Dress, Wardrobes and Biography, **Ingrid Mida**

Week 3 – 11 June

- 14.00 How to Read a Dress, **Ingrid Mida**
- 15.30 The Slow Approach to Seeing, **Ingrid Mida**

Week 4 – 18 June

- 14.00 The Language of Fashion across Cultures, **Ingrid Mida**
- 15.30 Fashion In and As Art, **Ingrid Mida**

Week 5 – 25 June

- 14.00 Object-based Research and Creativity, **Ingrid Mida**
- 15.30 Case Studies in Couture: Balenciaga, **Cassie Davies-Strodder**

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