

V&A South Kensington
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PERFORMANCE FESTIVAL



SHAKESPEARE TRAIL

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SHAKESPEARE TRAIL: ALL THE WORLD'S A STAGE

Follow this trail to explore the British Galleries through a Shakespearean lens. Take this self-led trail to discover 'a little western flower' like the magical one in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, a precious jewel, mermaids and the famous Great Bed of Ware mentioned in *Twelfth Night*.

Along the way, enter the cinema room and watch a documentary by the German Theatre Museum that captures the creative processes behind the scenes of Elsa-Sophie Jach's 2025 production of *Romeo and Juliet* for the Residenztheater, Munich.

1 Figure of Cupid

British Galleries, Room 58, Level 1

*Flying between the cold moon and the Earth,
Cupid all armed. A certain aim he took
At a fair vestal thronèd by the west,
And loosed his love-shaft smartly from his bow
As it should pierce a hundred thousand hearts.
A Midsummer Night's Dream – Act 2, scene 1*

We begin our journey in the 16th century. Find the winged cupid in this room, whose certain aim will point us to our next stop. This terracotta relief was produced for the exterior of Suffolk Place, the home of the Dukes of Suffolk, situated near what would become the site of the Globe Theatre.

Terracotta fragment of a decoration, 1518–1522

A.28-1938



2 The 'Old Palace'

British Galleries, Room 58, Level 1

Double double toil and trouble;

Fire burn and cauldron bubble.

Macbeth – Act 4, scene 1

The Bromley-by-Bow Room was built in the first years of the reign of King James I. Tradition says that the house was used by the king as a hunting lodge. *Macbeth* was written just three years after James' accession to the throne, possibly inspired by his own obsession with witches.

The 'Old Palace' at Bromley-by-Bow, Room, 1606
248-1894



3 Embroidered Pillow

British Galleries, Room 58, Level 1

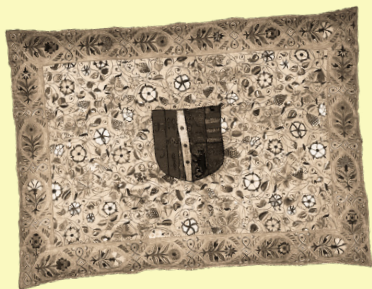
*Yet marked I where the bolt of Cupid fell.
It fell upon a little western flower,
Before, milk-white, now purple with love's wound,
And maidens call it "love-in-idleness".*

A Midsummer Night's Dream – Act 2, scene 1

The 'little western flower' pierced by Cupid's arrow is a pansy. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream* pansies have magical powers – touch someone's eyes with the flower and they will fall in love with 'the next live creature' they see. Titania dotes on Bottom, while Lysander and Demetrius become besotted with the wrong partner. Find pansies on this embroidered pillow.

Embroidered pillow, 1592

T.262-1968



4 Ring

British Galleries, Room 58, Level 1

Alas, poor Yorick! I knew him, Horatio: a fellow of infinite jest, of most excellent fancy, he hath borne me on his back a thousand times; and now, how abhorred in my imagination it is!

Hamlet – Act 5, scene 1

Holding up the skull of Yorick, Hamlet is reminded of the fullness of life by looking at death. Find the skull on this betrothal ring, which was made to both celebrate a marriage and act as a ‘memento mori’, a reminder that death is inevitable. Look closely to see the inscription ‘BE HOLD THE ENDE.’

Gold and enamel memento mori ring, 1550–1600

13-1888



5 The Great Bed of Ware

British Galleries, Room 57, Level 1

Are you sure

That we are awake? It seems to me

That yet we sleep, we dream.

A Midsummer Night's Dream – Act 4, scene 1

In Shakespeare's plays characters often find themselves caught between illusion and reality. Dreams can be 'happy' or 'fearful', prophetic or nightmarish. Whether the sleepers in the Great Bed of Ware would have had a dreamless good night's sleep is debatable. The famous bed, believed to have been made for an innkeeper as a visitor attraction, could accommodate eight people or more. Shakespeare mentions it in *Twelfth Night*.

The Great Bed of Ware, 1590–1600

W.47:1 to 28-1931



6 Pendant Ship

British Galleries, Room 57, Level 1

*Full fathom five thy father lies
Of his bones are coral made.
Those are pearls that were his eyes.
Nothing of him that doth fade
But doth suffer a sea change
Into something rich and strange.
The Tempest – Act 2, scene 1*

Find the precious ship adorned with pearls. *The Tempest* opens with a dramatic storm summoned by the magician Prospero, which wrecks ‘a brave vessel’. Later, the ‘airy spirit’ Ariel describes a drowned man who has been transformed. This pendant was given to Queen Elizabeth I by her cousin Lord Hunsdon, Henry Carey, nephew of Anne Boleyn.

The Hunsdon jewel, about 1580

LOAN: MET ANON.2:3-1998

7 Ewer and Basin

British Galleries, Room 56, Level 1

*Since once I sat upon a promontory
And heard a mermaid on a dolphin's back
Uttering such dulcet and harmonious breath
That the rude sea grew civil at her song
And certain stars shot madly from their spheres
To hear the sea-maid's music.*

A Midsummer Night's Dream – Act 2, scene 1

This mermaid-shaped ewer (jug) and basin were used for washing hands during and after a meal in the 17th century. To the Elizabethans, mermaids were dangerous creatures. The beauty of the mermaid's song could enchant sailors, causing them to sail their ships onto rocks.

Silver ewer in the shape
of a mermaid, 1610–1611

M10&A-1974



8 Doublet

British Galleries, Room 56, Level 1

*I prithee, and I'll pay thee bounteously,
Conceal me what I am, and be my aid
For such disguise as haply shall become
The form of my intent.*

Twelfth Night – Act 1, scene 2

When Viola is shipwrecked and alone in a strange country, she dresses herself as a young boy to enter the court of Count Orsino. Shakespeare regularly used clothing to disguise female characters as male, in plots which play with gender ambiguity and mistaken identity. The doublet in this room dates from around the end of Shakespeare's life. Imagine how you might dress or disguise yourself in the 17th century.

Doublet, 1615–1620

T.147-1937



9 **Romeo and Juliet**

British Galleries, Room 56, Level 1

*Two households, both alike in dignity,
in fair Verona, where we lay our scene,
From ancient grudge break to new mutiny,
Where civil blood makes civil hands unclean.*
Romeo and Juliet – Prologue

Enter the cinema room and watch a documentary by the German Theatre Museum that captures the creative processes behind the scenes of Elsa-Sophie Jach's 2025 production of *Romeo and Juliet* for the Residenztheater, Munich.

10 Dagger and Sheath

British Galleries, Room 56, Level 1

*Is this a dagger which I see before me,
The handle toward my hand? Come, let me
clutch thee.*

*I have thee not, and yet I see thee still.
Art thou not, fatal vision, sensible
To feeling as to sight? or art thou but
A dagger of the mind, a false creation,
Proceeding from the heat-oppressed brain?
Macbeth – Act 2, scene 1*

Haunted by his conscience, Macbeth imagines a floating dagger moments before he murders King Duncan. This object is called a 'Buckingham' dagger, since its popularity coincided with the ascendancy of George Villiers, 1st Duke of Buckingham and favourite of James I.

Dagger and sheath

M.1&A-1929



11 Mirror

British Galleries, Room 54, Level 1

*Give me the glass, and therein will I read.
No deeper wrinkles yet? Hath sorrow struck
So many blows upon this face of mine,
And made no deeper wounds?*

Richard II – Act 4, scene 1

Find your reflection in this heart-shaped looking glass. Does it show what you expect? When the deposed King Richard II looks in a mirror, he cannot believe that the reflection shows him as he really is. The figure in the mirror seems an illusion, untouched by trouble, unlike the man in the real world.

Diamond-point engraved glass, with
ebony-veneered wood frame

C.202-1977



12 Margaret 'Peg' Woffington

British Galleries, Room 53a, Level 1

*But Shakespear's Magick could not copied be,
Within that Circle none durst walk but he.
The Enchanted Island by John Dryden and
William Davenant.*

Shakespeare's plays have never lost their popularity, and in the 18th century were adapted to suit tastes of the time. Roles that Shakespeare wrote for boy actors were now played by women. *The Tempest* was reworked as *The Enchanted Island*, featuring a new female character called Dorinda. This portrait shows actress Margaret 'Peg' Woffington, who had great success in the role.

Oil painting, 'Margaret (Peg) Woffington',
Jean-Baptiste van Loo, about 1738

601-1882



13 William Shakespeare

British Galleries, Room 52e, Level 1

Some are born great, some achieve greatness, and some have greatness thrust upon 'em.

Twelfth Night – Act 2, scene 5

This is a terracotta version of a stone bust of Shakespeare that stood in the Temple of the Worthies at Stowe, a stately home in Buckinghamshire. The Worthies were significant historical figures in British history. Who would you choose to join Shakespeare today?

Bust, terracotta, of Shakespeare, by John Michael Rysbrack, about 1730

A.6-1924

