

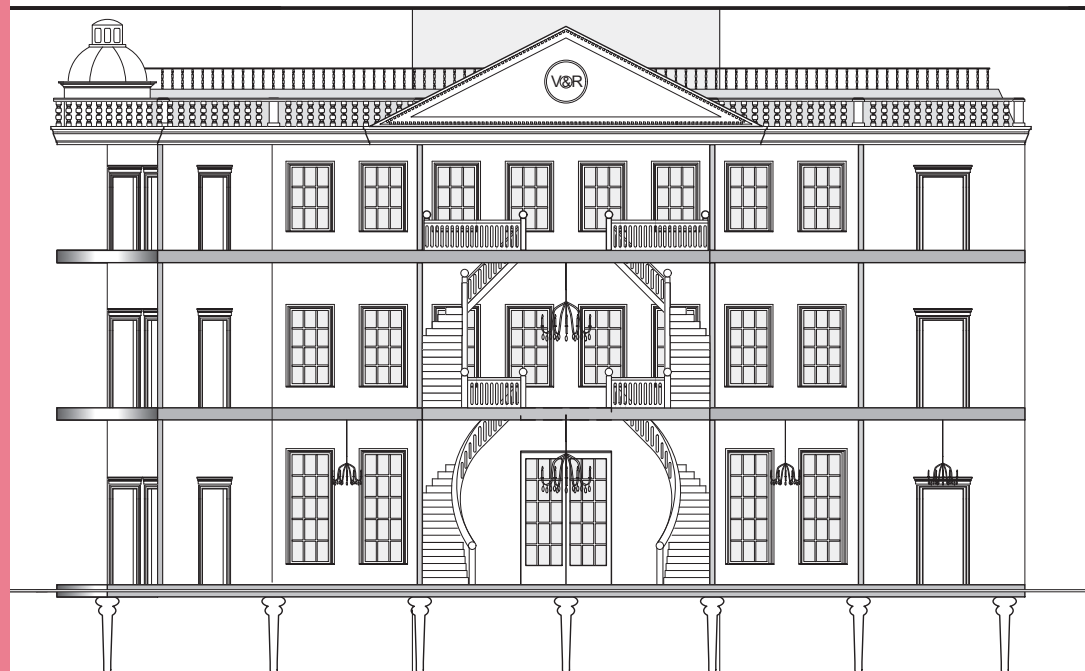
barbican do something different

# The House of Viktor & Rolf

18 Jun – 21 Sep/08

Barbican  
Education

## Teaching Resource: Key Stage 3, 4 and A level / Art & Design



Front elevation of Doll's House

### Contents

Introduction to the exhibition and this resource	p 01
Exhibition themes and ideas	p 02
Further information and planning your visit	p 08



## Barbican Education

Inspired by the extraordinary diversity of the Barbican arts programme, Barbican Education offers pupils and teachers powerful learning opportunities and the chance to discover more about the arts and their own creativity. A comprehensive education programme accompanies every Art Gallery exhibition, including teachers' resources, CPD events and gallery tours. For more information, to download other resources or book events please visit [www.barbican.org.uk/education](http://www.barbican.org.uk/education)

## Introduction to the Exhibition

### The House of Viktor and Rolf

This is the first time in the UK that an exhibition has been devoted to this highly influential duo. Over the past 15 years Viktor & Rolf have taken the fashion world by storm with their particular blend of cool irony and surreal beauty.

The House of Viktor & Rolf presents each of the designer's signature pieces from 1992 to date, in a specially commissioned dollhouse on finely detailed dolls, along with the full-scale room sets and original couture pieces: a characteristically theatrical installation that confronts the debate surrounding fashion, art, couture and styling that Viktor & Rolf delight in antagonising.

## Introduction to this Resource

The subjects featured here reflect the different themes of the work of Viktor & Rolf. They are selected with teachers' needs and students' interests in mind. A range of fashion and art practices have been discussed. With each subject are suggested open questions for students, information about the theme and books and web resources to take your explorations further. This resource is intended to inspire, inform and encourage you to visit the gallery with your students. Use it, and amend it in whatever way is useful to you in preparing your visit.

The information and classroom ideas are aimed at KS3+, though there are elements throughout which may be adaptable to younger and older students. The focus is on this exhibition, but the resource can be used to explore Viktor and Rolf's work outside of this exhibition, and as inspiration for ways of studying other contemporary fashion designers and for putting their work into a historical and thematic framework.

Main image:  
Viktor & Rolf  
'Final preparation' doll (detail) 2008  
From *Russian Doll*, Autumn/Winter 1999–2000  
Photograph and copyright: Peter Stigter

Left hand image: Viktor & Rolf  
Photograph and copyright: Inez van Lamsweerde  
and Vinoodh Matadin, 2002

Right hand image:  
Viktor & Rolf  
*Flowerbomb* Spring/Summer 2005  
Photograph and copyright: Peter Stigter

# Historicism in fashion

## History

It is a well-known fact that designers plunder fashions of the past as inspiration for their 'innovative' designs. This isn't anything new; designers and dressmakers have been doing this since at least the Regency period when the fashionable look was influenced by the Classical world and women dressed in Greek and Roman-inspired drapery. The late 19th century saw a revival of 18th century styles, and so it goes on, with Vivienne Westwood reviving those same Victorian / 18th century bustles and corsetry for the 1990s. Even the shoulder-pads of the 1980s were a direct revival of the 1940s. Designers have continued to adapt and develop styles of the past, and only occasionally have come up with something completely new and radical like miniskirts.

## Practice

Viktor and Rolf have excelled in taking ideas from the past and re-inventing them, not so much by changing and adapting the shapes, as by making the meaning of the clothes as important, maybe more important, than the silhouette. Over their career, they have experimented with re-worked frilled cuffs and collars in *White*, (Spring/Summer 2002), where raw-edged fabrics took on an exaggerated shape, and with the use of traditional Dutch clogs in *Fashion Show* (Autumn/Winter 2007-08).

They also pay homage to other fashion designers, both their contemporaries and those who designed classic styles like Dior and Chanel. For Viktor and Rolf, historicism is as much about the concept of their garments and the presentation of their shows as the styles of the clothing. *Flowerbomb* (Spring/Summer 2005) showed the models in a tableau vivant presentation as in the iconic Dior staging of 1957 (see page 1). They reference not only other fashion designers, but also artists, which is part and parcel of their position as artists who work in the medium of fashion.

Viktor & Rolf  
Black Light  
Spring/Summer 1999  
Photograph: Inez van Lamsweerde and Vinoodh Matadin  
Courtesy Inez van Lamsweerde and Vinoodh Matadin

## Further Reading

Laver, J. *Costume and Fashion: A Concise History*. Thames and Hudson, 2002.  
Rothstein, N. *Four Hundred Years of Fashion*. V&A Publications, 1999.  
Waugh, N. *The Cut of Women's Clothes, 1600-1930*. Faber & Faber, 1994.

## Online resources

Spectres: When Fashion Turns Back. V&A exhibition website.  
[www.vam.ac.uk/spectres](http://www.vam.ac.uk/spectres)

## Discussions & activities

- Looking at a collection or even an individual garment, what do you think inspired it? Does it come from something specific that you can immediately recognise?
- Discuss the following statement: "There is nothing new in fashion any more: all designers can do is reinvent the past." Do you think this is true or will new technologies and ways of living create completely new garments?
- How do other designers use similar inspiration and what are the differences in the work they each create?
- Certain periods of Western fashion history have been used extensively by fashion designers as inspiration, particularly the 18th and 19th centuries. Explore the clothing of earlier periods to inspire a fresh perspective and new style of clothing.

## Curriculum links

Art and Design KS3 Unit 9B Change your Style



# Theatre

## History

It's probably no surprise that fashion and theatre overlap. In the early 20th century stage and film actresses were the leaders in fashion. Today, the clothes worn by actresses on screen and the red carpet, as well as in their daily lives, have a strong impact on the sales and success of fashion brands. Fashion designers including Elsa Schiaparelli in the 1930s and Gianni Versace in the 1980s and 90s, have created garments for the stage and screen too.

Today's catwalk fashion shows can seem more like theatre productions or even performance art. In the 1960s, Mary Quant was the first designer to have a theatrical fashion show. Her models danced to music and had fun on the catwalk, in contrast to the staid, straightforward walking to-and-fro which had gone before. Since then, designers have staged dramatic productions with lighting, music and choreography all taking on important roles.

## Practice

Viktor and Rolf have excelled in creating eagerly-anticipated performances which just happen to include clothing at their centre. They have collaborated with artists, actors and musicians to create imaginative stage shows.

Bedtime Story (Autumn/Winter 2005-06) was one of their most memorable, with singer/songwriter Tori Amos performing specially-composed music, seated at her piano wearing pajamas, while models wore dresses of quilts with collars made like pillows and hair carefully arranged as though they were asleep.

Ballroom (Spring/Summer 2007) was similarly dramatic, with music performed by Rufus Wainright and a small orchestra accompanying ballroom dancing models.

Antidote, their men's fragrance, was launched after Ballroom with a performance of all-male ballroom dancing.

Viktor & Rolf  
Bedtime Story  
Autumn/Winter 2005-2006  
Photograph: Peter Stigter  
Photograph copyright Peter Stigter

## Further Reading

Evans, C. The London Look. Museum of London, 2004.  
Mendes, V., & Wilcox, C. The Art and Craft of Gianni Versace. V&A 2003.  
Tierney, T. Schiaparelli Fashion Review Paper Dolls. Dover, 2003.  
Wilcox, C. Radical Fashion. V&A, 2003.

## Online Resources

V&A Theatre Collections Online  
[www.vam.ac.uk/tco](http://www.vam.ac.uk/tco)

## Discussion and activities

- Viktor and Rolf's clothes can look like costumes from fantasy stories or scenes from dreams. Use their clothes as a basis for story-making and developing ideas of a narrative in a piece of artwork.
- Develop storyboards and animations based on a single garment or collection.

Try some of the following questions to generate discussion:

- What do the clothes make you think of?
- Do you think the clothes might be for some special activity?
- Where might you go wearing this outfit?
- Who might wear this outfit?
- How would you feel wearing these clothes? Powerful, magical, ridiculous...?
- What about the colours and textures? Do they trigger other ideas?
- Milliner Philip Treacy designed hats for the catwalk show of Viktor and Rolf's Atomic Bomb collection. Use one or more garment from the exhibition as the inspiration for a hat-design research project.

## Curriculum links

Art and Design KS2 Unit 4A: Viewpoint  
Art and Design KS2 Unit 6B: What a Performance



## Fashion as Art

### History

Opinion about fashion has always been divided between the fans and the detractors. Newspaper reports of fashion shows can be scathing about the frivolities of the genre and the apparent unwearable-ness of many catwalk pieces. In contrast to the popular opinion of high fashion many academics and galleries consider fashion an important branch of art, and discuss, debate and exhibit fashion. Fashion Theory courses exist at major universities and contemporary fashion is accepted as a respectable academic subject. However, there remain anguished debates about whether fashion is really art when major museums and art galleries choose to display contemporary fashion.

Yinka Shonibare is an artist who uses the medium of clothes to express himself and make statements about society. Hussein Chalayan and Martin Margiela are fashion designers who use artistic constructs but are firmly based in the fashion world as they show in fashion arenas and sell their clothes in shops.

### Practice

Viktor and Rolf have aligned themselves with the art world by showing their early collections in a gallery context and creating collections which are conceptual in both content and presentation. However, their branding has been very strongly fashion-focused and they have become part of the fashion establishment. This is a remarkable feat considering that for several years their couture collections were bought by museums and galleries rather than by consumers. Even today, when their clothes are often considered quite wearable, they continue to present their work more like performance art than fashion. The ultimate in ironic conceptual art was their Autumn/Winter 2007-2008 collection Fashion Show, where garments included their own portable lighting and sound rig to create self contained fashion shows on each model, to interrogate the relationship between garment and catwalk presentation..

Viktor & Rolf  
The Fashion Show Autumn/Winter 2007-2008  
Photograph: Peter Stigter  
Photograph copyright Peter Stigter

### Further reading

Fukai, A, English, B., Mitchell, L., The Cutting Edge: Fashion From Japan. Powerhouse Museum, 2005.  
Leventon, M. Artwear. Fashion and Anti-Fashion. Thames and Hudson, 2005.  
Mackrell, A. Art and Fashion. Batsford, 2005.  
Wilcox, C. Radical Fashion. V&A Publications, 2003.  
Willoughby, A. 49½ Skirts. A&C Black, 2008.  
Wood, G. Surreal Things: Surrealism and Design. V&A, 2007  
Millar, L. Cloth and Culture Now. University College for the Creative Arts, 2007

### Online resources

[www.freddierobins.com](http://www.freddierobins.com)  
[www.carolewallier.co.uk](http://www.carolewallier.co.uk)  
BBC GCSE Bitesize Revision guide on the work of Caroline Broadhead.  
[www.bbc.co.uk/schools/gcsebitesize/art/gallery2/caroline\\_broadheadrev1.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/gcsebitesize/art/gallery2/caroline_broadheadrev1.shtml)

### Discussion and activities

- Investigate artists working with clothes as a medium, but who are not fashion designers. Compare and contrast the work with fashion designers such as Viktor and Rolf.
- What are the similarities or differences? Do they have similar stylistic roots?
- Are they making similar social statements?
- Fashion designer Elsa Schiaparelli created extraordinary surrealist clothes in response to the wider Surrealist art movement. Design and create a garment (possibly in miniature) in response to a painting, sculpture or other work of art. Contemporary and traditional work can be inspirational.
- Think about what the work means, represents and depicts, and how these ideas could be translated into a garment. Explore textures, shapes, decoration and pattern as well as more conceptual ideas in works of art.

### Curriculum links

Art and Design KS3 Unit 9C: Personal places, public spaces



## Miniatures

### History

Before the widespread availability of print media, influential dressmakers created fashion dolls called pandoras to promote new styles and fabrics. They reached a height of popularity in the 18th century, before being superceded by printed fashion plates. The practice was revived by top Parisian couturiers just after the Second World War and 200 dolls were created and dressed with outfits created by top couturiers, to be shown with sets by famous artists including Jean Cocteau. They were known as the Théâtre de la Mode and toured the world to raise money for charity and to revive the profile of Parisian Haute Couture.

### Practice

Viktor and Rolf have a long association with fashion dolls and miniature mannequins. Lacking money and space, but not ambition, they presented their first collection, Launch (1996), on miniature dolls. True to their ambitions, the dolls were presented on a perfectly proportioned catwalk and in their as-yet-unrealised boutique outlet.

They have returned to this thought-provoking means of display for The House of Viktor & Rolf and created 55 dolls in a selection of outfits from their Haute Couture and Ready-to-Wear collections. The dolls have been created with extraordinary care and replicate the hairstyles, accessories and even postures of the original catwalk models. For Viktor and Rolf, the presentation of their work in miniature is ideally suited to create a sense of surrealism and fantasy which synchronize their aesthetic and artistic ambitions.

Viktor & Rolf  
Miniatures  
Photograph: Peter Stigter  
Photograph copyright Peter Stigter

### Further reading

Dover Book publish a range of books of paper dolls covering different styles and periods of fashion.

Wilcox, C. The Golden Age of Couture: Paris and London 1947-1957, V&A, 2007

### Online resources

The Golden Age of Couture. Paris and London 1947-1957. V&A exhibition website [www.vam.ac.uk/couture](http://www.vam.ac.uk/couture)

### Discussion & activities

Working in miniature can be more manageable than working full-size. Younger children will easily relate to dolls and enjoy the creation of miniatures.

- Create paper dolls to dress up and decorate, fitting in with other themes you are working on. The same could work with older students, using fashion illustration style and using drawing, paint, collage or digital media to create the dolls and clothing. There are several examples of fashion illustration in the exhibition catalogue.

Viktor and Rolf are masters of surrealism in fashion, with models dressed to look like they are asleep with their heads on pillows or showcasing their work in the acclaimed upside-down shop in Amsterdam.

- Create miniature surrealist scenes using small dolls and sets created in shoe-boxes. Collect backdrops from magazines and small props like toys and dolls-house furniture. Set up the scenes and photograph close-up. The scenes could be used as inspiration for creative writing and storytelling activities.

### Curriculum links

Art and Design KS1-2. Unit 5C. Talking Textiles



## Craft and Couture

### History

Although the term couture simply means sewing, it is now used to describe bespoke clothing created for an individual client. Not all famous designers, even those who do fashion shows in Paris or New York, offer a couture service. Since the 1950s, couturiers have had to diversify to keep alive, and Ready-to-Wear designer clothes have become the norm. So much so, in fact, that for designers, that is all they do. For example, Marc Jacobs only designs Ready-to-Wear, while Giorgio Armani produces Emporio Armani (Ready-to-Wear) and the Giorgio Armani Privé couture service. Couture dresses (usually called gowns) cost upwards of £10,000. A couture gown would be created from an individually-fitted pattern and be hand-sewn by experts. Couture garments have an extraordinarily high standard of construction with special techniques employed in the assembly, fitting and decoration and the finest quality of materials from interfacing and lining to the main fashion fabric.

### Practice

When Viktor and Rolf started out, they presented only couture garments in Paris (albeit without the endorsement of the highly exclusive Chambre Syndicale de la Couture Parisienne, the body that regulates haute couture) rather than launching a Ready-to-Wear collection to sell wholesale to shops. This was a bold step, and one which made sure they hit the headlines for their dramatic and barely-wearable creations rather than disappearing in the general morass of designer fashion. The craftsmanship of Viktor & Rolf's pieces embody the detail that the couture world is renowned for. Fine materials, attention to detail and skilled workmanship in beading, embroidery and other embellishments set the pieces apart from factory-made Ready to Wear garments. Viktor & Rolf's ateliers devote months to ensure the tongue-in-cheek references to other worlds, eras and styles are delivered to the highest possible standard. In the millennium year, they moved into the more commercial realm of Ready-to-Wear in typical ironic style with Stars and Stripes (Autumn Winter 2000), referencing the power, money and clout of the American fashion buying market. Viktor and Rolf still create couture clothing and in 1999 were invited to join the Chambre Syndicale de la Couture Parisienne, a long-awaited acknowledgement of their design practice and quality.

Viktor & Rolf  
Silver  
Autumn/Winter 2006-2007  
Photograph: Peter Stigter  
Photograph copyright Peter Stigter

### Further reading

de la Haye, A. *The Cutting Edge. 50 Years of British Fashion 1947-1997*. V&A, 1997.  
McDowell, C. *Fashion Today*. Phaidon, 2003.

### Online resources

The Golden Age of Couture. Paris and London 1947-1957. V&A exhibiton website [www.vam.ac.uk/couture](http://www.vam.ac.uk/couture)

### Discussion & activities

- Using a couture garment, either from this exhibition or an older garment in a museum, study the techniques used in the embellishment or decoration.
- Research other couture sewing techniques and experiment with them but use materials other than textile. Try different weights and types of paper, thin plastics or natural materials to stitch, embellish, cut-away, layer and distort. The samples could be used as the basis for a garment or textile project, or for use in another collage or illustration project.
- Consider the contrast between time-consuming, couture-level techniques like hand embroidery, hand painting and appliqué and rapid, mass production techniques suitable for a high street clothing manufacturer. What limitations or freedoms would these two methods generate for designers? For retail prices? For consumers?
- Discuss the distinction between couture, bespoke, made-to-measure and ready-to-wear? What benefits or disadvantages arise from each type of garment?

### Curriculum links

Art and Design KS1-2 Unit 3B: Investigating Pattern



## Body Shape

### History

Clothing can emphasise or distort natural body shape. Some garments simply exaggerate or envelop the body, while others, like corsets, mold or even force the body into a different silhouette.

The late Victorian fashion for tightly-laced corsets has had a lasting impact on our feelings about fashion, with corsets being considered a symbol of female repression for most of the 20th century. In general, before the 1980s, distortion of the body in fashionable Western clothes was about enhancing parts of the female figure which were considered attractive.

Since the 1980s, avant garde or radical designers have been pushing the boundaries of distorted body shape by creating new shapes without the emphasis on sexiness. Vivienne Westwood revived the corset as a fashion accessory, but failed to do the same with the less-restrictive (but possibly less sexy) bustle. Japanese designer Rei Kawakubo (with her company Comme de Garçons) led the way towards clothes which were deconstructed and more akin to artistic forms presented upon the body, rather than clothes as we would traditionally think of them. Their work moved body-distorting fashion in a new direction away from sexuality.

### Practice

Viktor and Rolf have continued this radical movement by creating a number of distorted and surreal-shaped garments. Atomic Bomb (Autumn/Winter 1998-99) used silk balloons to puff out and distort the shape of garments, in homage to Rei Kawakubo's contemporaneous 'bump' clothes which had similar distortions. In contrast, Viktor and Rolf's clothes had removable padding which meant the garments were draped and elegant when worn without balloons.

Another repeated theme they have used since their early days is of layering, particularly of garment details like collars. This was used to great effect in, for example, One Woman (Autumn/Winter 2003-04), where models wore shirts with multiple collars.

Viktor & Rolf  
 'Tuxedo'  
 Atomic Bomb, Autumn/Winter 1998-1999  
 Photograph: Peter Stigter  
 Photograph copyright Peter Stigter

### Further reading

Fukai, A, English, B., Mitchell, L., The Cutting Edge: Fashion From Japan. Powerhouse Museum, 2005.  
 Koda, H. Extreme Beauty: The Body Transformed. Yale University Press, 2004.  
 Steele, V. The Corset: A Cultural History. Yale University Press, 2003.  
 Wilcox, C. Radical Fashion. V&A, 2003.

### Online resources

Metropolitan Museum of Art online resources:  
 Extreme Beauty: The Body Transformed exhibition website.  
[www.metmuseum.org/special/Extreme\\_Beauty/body\\_transformed\\_more.html](http://www.metmuseum.org/special/Extreme_Beauty/body_transformed_more.html)  
 Eighteenth Century Silhouette and Support.  
[www.metmuseum.org/TOAH/hd/18sil/hd\\_18sil.htm](http://www.metmuseum.org/TOAH/hd/18sil/hd_18sil.htm)  
 Nineteenth Century Silhouette and Support  
[www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/19sil/hd\\_19sil.htm](http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/19sil/hd_19sil.htm)

### Discussion & Activities

- Create basic silhouettes using strong lighting and trace the students' profile onto paper, or use digital cameras to take pictures, adjust them in a photo software programme or simply cut out carefully. Transform the model's profile into unusual and surrealist shapes by adding headwear, eyewear or specially-constructed additions. To avoid sensitive issues among students, use head and shoulders only for this exercise.
- Alternatively, use images of figures cut from magazines, collage shapes on top of them, then trace off the resulting distorted figure.
- Using a self-portrait, experiment with different illustration styles to create a unique version of a self-portrait which reflects your personality and identity. Suggested styles to explore include African and Indian art, Japanese manga, fashion illustration, caricature, graffiti and cartoons.

### Curriculum links

Art and Design. KS3. Unit 7A: Self-image  
 Art and Design KS3 Unit 8B: Animating Art  
 Art and Design KS1. Unit 1A: Self-portrait  
 Citizenship. KS3. Unit 04: Britain - a diverse society?

# Planning your visit

## Barbican Art Gallery

Level 3 Barbican Centre  
Silk St  
London EC2Y 8DS

For all group bookings and general enquiries please call the Groups Booking Line on 020 7382 7211, fax 020 7382 7270 or email [groups@barbican.org.uk](mailto:groups@barbican.org.uk).  
The telephone booking line is open 10am–5pm, Monday to Friday.

## Gallery opening times

Open daily 11 am - 8pm (except Tue and Wed until 6pm)  
Late night every Thu until 10pm  
£3 schools and full time student groups of 10 or more, Mon–Fri only  
Teachers / group leaders go free with groups of 10 or more students  
Dedicated group booking line 020 7382 7211

## How to find us

Barbican Art Gallery is on Level 3 of the Centre. Enter via the main entrance on Silk St and cross the Foyer to the lift and stairs to reach Level 3.

Nearest tube stations:  
Barbican, Moorgate, St Paul's, Liverpool Street

Nearest train stations: Liverpool St, Farringdon, City Thameslink, Barbican, Moorgate

Coach: there is a setting down and picking up point in Silk St. Parking is limited to the metered bays in Silk St and Fore St. For further information contact 020 7606 3030, asking for Parking Services

## Disabled visitors

Barbican Art Gallery is fully accessible for wheelchair users. For full Access information please visit <http://www.barbican.org.uk/visitor-information/disability-access>. You can also call or email the Barbican Access Manager on [access@barbican.org.uk](mailto:access@barbican.org.uk) 020 7382 7389/7083.

## Cloakrooms

There is a free cloakroom on Level 3, directly outside the Art Gallery.

## Toilets

There are toilets on Level 3 directly outside Barbican Art Gallery, and in addition on Level –1 for when you are on your way into and out of the Centre.

## Cafes / Packed Lunches

Waterside Café, just off the foyer on Level G, offers full meals as well as sandwiches, drinks and also children's meals.

If you have brought packed lunches you can eat in the stalls floor foyer (Level –1) the main foyer (Level G) or outside on the Lakeside where there are plenty of picnic benches and tables.

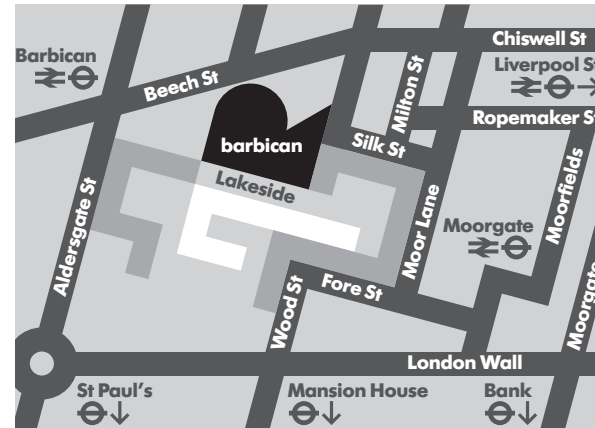
## Phones

You can find public telephones in the lift lobby just across the road from the Level –1 exit and on Level 2.

## Further information

There is medical assistance available on site at all times. Full evacuation staff are available at all times. Barbican Education has a full CRB child protection policy. If you would like to see the full policy please contact Barbican Education on 020 7382 2333.

Please also contact Barbican Education if you would like risk assessment information.



The Barbican Centre is provided by the City of London Corporation as part of its contribution to the cultural life of London and the nation

## Top tips for planning your visit

### Beforehand

Book your visit via our dedicated groups booking line – 020 7382 7211. Subject to availability, please call the Groups booking line for times available. See [www.barbican.org.uk/education](http://www.barbican.org.uk/education) for information about CPD and other Education events.

### Preliminary visit

Make a preliminary visit before bringing your group. This will enable you to make best use of your visit to achieve your teaching and learning objectives. If you have any questions during your visit, please speak to a member of the Art Gallery staff who will be happy to help.

### Planning your visit

Use your preliminary visit to plan how your students will use their time. Create your own worksheets – we have included some ideas in this resource, but are fully aware that one size will never fit all.

### At the exhibition

We suggest you visit the Gallery in groups of no more than 30 students. Make sure your group have materials for drawing and note taking. A4 clipboards and paper or sketchbooks would be ideal. Please note: dry drawing materials only.

## Contact

We would welcome feedback on this teachers' resource and the exhibition.

We would also love to see any resources you create yourself –and any work that your pupils do as a result. You and your students might like to compile a CD and send it to us at the address below. It could contain:

- Images of students' work in progress.
- Images of completed work.
- Short report on the ideas that underpinned their work.

## Credits

### House of Viktor and Rolf

Teaching Resource

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