

A Fam Trip to the V&A – Sunday 21st September 2008.

Sunday morning, the very best time to visit a museum. Especially one as eclectic and diverse as the V&A.

We met, the 'we' being Mick Ratman; Leonora Sheppard; David Broder; Mark Gladwin; Tessa Crockett and Richard Godfrey, at the newly built **Sackler Centre**. This officially opens on the 30th September and will house the museum's arts education department with seminar rooms and a brand new auditorium. The space is built from polished concrete (similar to the Royal National Theatre) and is described as a 'contemporary, dynamic and semi-retro space in contrast to the Victorian design of the rest of the museum'.

A coffee or glass of apple juice later we were introduced to our hostess, **Rachel Lloyd, Manager for Filming and Location Hire** (020-7942 2841/07776 151805 or e-mail r.lloyd@vam.ac.uk) and set off on our trip.

Before we left the **Sackler Centre**, we took the time to look into the auditorium and admire the modern space, ideal for a contemporary lecture scene and a good contrast to the original Lecture Hall that we saw later.

First off were the **Dorothy & Michael Hintze Sculpture Galleries**. These beautiful galleries were refurbished in 2007 and have the original mosaic floor. It's a great space for a meeting or walk-and-talk scene. Many photos of bottoms (of the sculptures) were taken.

From here we made our way to the **roof** of the museum. There are a number of differing views and roof types, with safe walkways and reasonable access for equipment via a lift or staircase. There are also views from here down into the centre courtyard for a top-shot. The inevitable group photo was taken here, complete with Hi-Vis jackets. The stairs are a quite narrow, stone staircase with doors off and black Victorian railings – good for Victorian prison stairs.

Next we visited the **Morris, Gamble & Poynter Rooms**. These were the Museum's original refreshment rooms. Dating from the 1860's they were the first museum 'coffee shop' in the world. Now part of the V&A's rather fine restaurant, the spaces are largely as they were, showpieces of contemporary design and craftsmanship of the period, with the addition of modern chandeliers, which go well with the space. Out of hours, the main area and smaller rooms could easily be dressed for a contemporary or period restaurant.

Leading out from the restaurant is the **John Madejski Garden**, an Italianate garden which has created a wonderful focal point and refreshing space in the centre courtyard of the museum. I imagine it's especially beautiful at night when the buildings and lighting would be reflected in the lake at the centre of the courtyard.

A Trip to the **Cast Courts** was next. Here there are full-size replicas of sculptures, friezes and tombs from around the world. Unfortunately the court containing the replica of Michelangelo's 'David' was not open and remains closed until the spring of 2009, however the reproduction of Trajan's Column in the neighbouring court creates an impressive and dramatic setting. There is a top view into both courts from the **Gilbert Bayes Gallery**.

We then walked through the **Edwin & Susan Davies Galleries**, a suite of five galleries displaying works by Constable, Turner and Gainsborough. The design of these galleries is similar to the National Portrait Gallery or Tate Britain and would be worth bearing in mind as a possible alternative if filming a gallery scene.

Arriving next at the **National Art Library**, we entered a beautiful example of a mid-19th Century library and reading room. Although there are modern additions, particularly around the Librarian's

desk with photocopiers and computers, there is also plenty of original features and furniture to create a more period feel. The library's grand floor-to-ceiling windows are north facing onto the central courtyard.

On, on and tiring a little, we arrived at the original **Lecture Theatre**. This Victorian auditorium seats around 300 on a fixed tier of seats facing a stage area, which in turn is covered with a lavishly decorated domed ceiling. The space feels period-like but not particularly Victorian, however would be a good consideration for lecture hall scene for any modern period from the 50's onwards. It would work well for the university lecture hall of a red-brick university.

Now being tortured by the smells of coffee and lunch as we passed through the restaurant, we sprinted up the **Ceramic Staircase** and through the **Silver Gallery** and **Glass Gallery** to the new **Members Room**. This space has been recently refurbished and has a cool and modern retro feel. It has an upper gallery area looking down onto a comfortable coffee lounge space in the corner of the building with large windows on two sides.

We ended our visit with lunch in the restaurant before a sneak preview visit to the new 'Cold War Modern' exhibition which opens to the public on the 25th Sept and which I thoroughly recommend.

Filming at the V&A is limited in the main to out-of-hours which means before 10.00am or after 5.45pm on Monday to Thursday and weekends. They open late on Fridays until 10.00pm. It is possible to arrange some day filming in some of the areas but this depends on the individual project, crew-size and timings.

Parking is a bit of an issue. Technical parking is possible on Pay & Display bays in exhibition road (courtesy of Kensington & Chelsea Film Office 020-7 341 5133), but parking is at a premium in the area. The V&A is looking into possible parking at the Albert Hall nearby which might be an option – watch out for details.

Finally a huge thank you to **Rachel Lloyd, Filming Manager for the V&A**, who showed us round and is very keen to get productions filming in her museum.