

Colour me Pink! Being inspired by the Zandra Rhodes Digital Study Collection

About the Zandra Rhodes' Colourful Heritage project

Thanks to National Lottery players and the National Lottery Heritage Fund, University for the Creative Arts (UCA) and The Zandra Rhodes Foundation received funding to collaborate on the Zandra Rhodes' Colourful Heritage project (2024-2025). This project has several parts: digitally photographing and archiving the Zandra Rhodes Archive; 6 video interviews with Zandra Rhodes, her friends, colleagues and artistic collaborators (UCA and Zandra Rhodes Studio, 2024); employability and training opportunities through 5 student internships; workshops with 16-to-17-year-olds across Medway, Kent; an exhibition of student work in Medway; a Continuing Professional Development opportunity for school teachers around Medway; and a toolkit to encourage improved access to the Digital Study Collection for non-traditional learners. This paper focusses on the updates and additions to The Zandra Rhodes Digital Study Collection, but information about other areas of the project will be available on the website (UCA, 2025).

The Zandra Rhodes Digital Study Collection in VADS

The Zandra Rhodes Digital Study Collection was launched in March 2013 following a project funded by Jisc (UCA, 2013). This project was managed by UCA's Digital Curation Manager, who is also responsible for managing VADS. VADS is an online database of over 140,000 images from more than 300 art and design collections in the UK, which are made available free for use in education. This includes the Zandra Rhodes Digital Study Collection. The VADS in-house system was transferred across to OCLC's CONTENTdm digital collection management system in 2020 (VADS, n.d.). This ongoing maintenance of the Digital Study Collection in VADS provided a strong foundation to request funding. We were also able to save time and money by revisiting the protocols originally set-up for cataloguing and photography of the Zandra Rhodes Archive (Gramstadt, 2012).

The Zandra Rhodes Foundation

In 2020, Dame Zandra Rhodes established The Zandra Rhodes Foundation "to inspire current and future generations of designers, artists, researchers, students and educators". The Foundation is led by Piers Atkinson, milliner, collaborator and friend of Zandra Rhodes. At the time, Piers Atkinson was also a Senior Lecturer at UCA, and led a project with UCA students in which they uncovered a plethora of garments, dresses, accessories and head pieces in the Zandra Rhodes Archive. Each item was photographed and accessioned in the form of a fashion lookbook. This meant that when we started the National Lottery Heritage Fund project, Zandra Rhodes and Piers Atkinson were able to select from the lookbook and choose the items that would be digitally archived in VADS.

Accessing the Zandra Rhodes Digital Study Collection

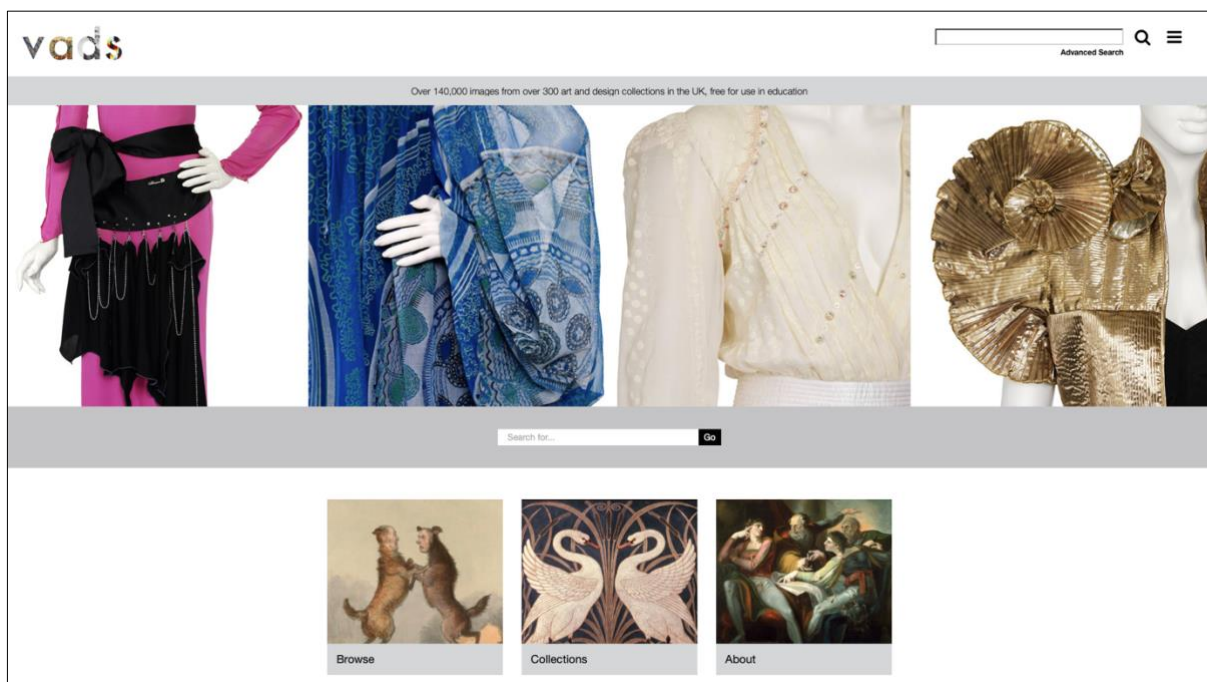


Fig. 1. vads.ac.uk home page

The vads.ac.uk home page features a changing banner image - if the user clicks on the Zandra Rhodes banner (Fig. 1.) this leads directly into the Zandra Rhodes Digital Study Collection (Fig. 2.).

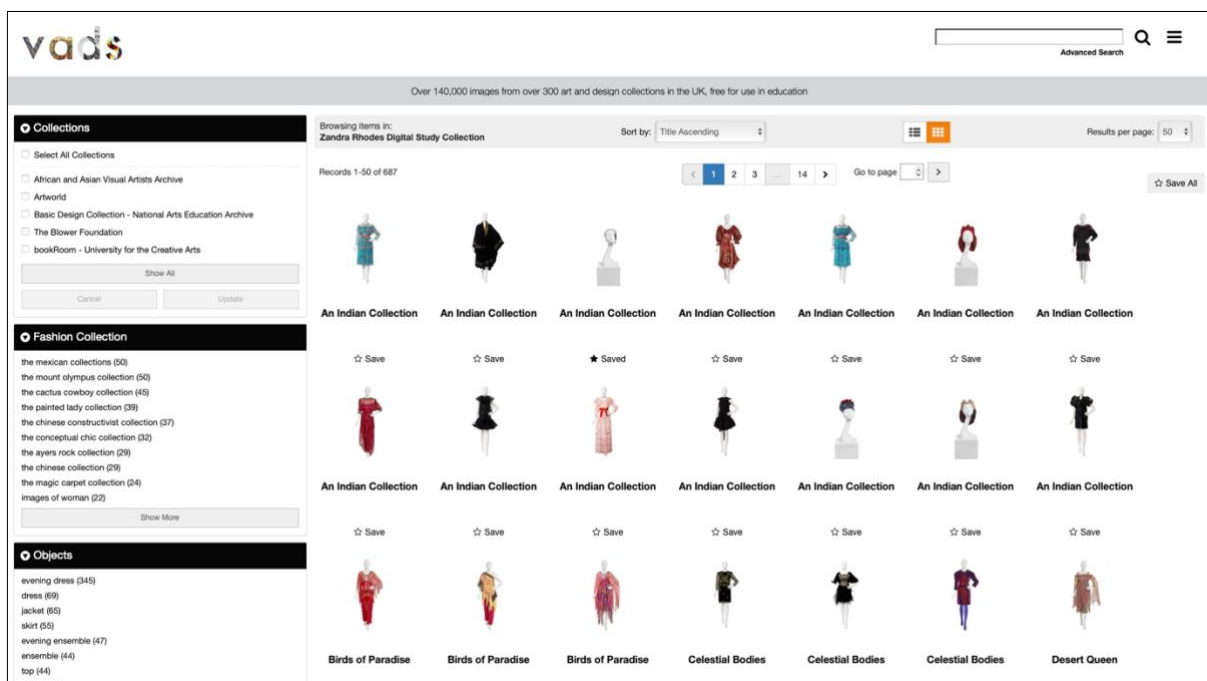


Fig. 2. The Zandra Rhodes Digital Study Collection in VADS

Controlled Lists

On the left-hand side of the screen (Fig. 2.) are the following controlled lists:

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1. **Collections** – a list of all the collections available in VADS;
2. **Fashion Collection** – this is sorted by the number of records available (it is not currently possible to change this to an A-Z list or to sort by year);
3. **Objects** – from the evening dresses that Zandra Rhodes is famous for, to a range of accessories and other garments;
4. **Techniques** – several of these techniques are in-house terms, and are supported with technique demonstration videos (UCA and Zandra Rhodes Studio, 2013);
5. **Textile Print Design Name** – these are referenced through the Zandra Rhodes Textile Design Bible, which is also available to search on VADS (Rhodes, 2024);
6. **Main Fabric** – Zandra Rhodes is internationally known for her colourful silk chiffon dresses, but there are also some unexpected other fabric types in this category. These were informed by work with the Metadata Researcher in the first Jisc-funded project, who was also Zandra Rhodes' Production Manager so knew the exact fabric specifications.

Hyperlinked Vocabulary



Fig. 3.a. Hat by Zandra Rhodes, Paris, Frills and Button Flowers, Autumn/Winter 1971. © Zandra Rhodes 2024. Available from:

<https://vads.ac.uk/digital/collection/ZR/id/5496/rec/1>

Object Description	
Title	Paris, Frills and Button Flowers
Collection	Zandra Rhodes Digital Study Collection
Designer	Zandra Rhodes (British, born 1940)
Season	Autumn/Winter 1971
Description	Hat formed from layers of Ivory wool underfelt with Button Flower screen-printed and appliquéd on top and pinked edges around the brim.
Place of Origin	London
Objects	hat
Main Fabric	wool underfelt
Techniques	screen printed appliquéd pinked edges formed
Textile Print Design Name	Button Flower
Colourway	Ivory printed with yellow, red, blue
Keywords	zig-zag, buttons, flowers, pop art
Notes	Accession number: ZR/2024/H1. Modelled by Zandra Rhodes and photographed by Bishin Jumonji for the Japanese womens' lifestyle magazine Anan (The Art of Zandra Rhodes, p. 76; Lifelong Love Affair p. 73; 50 Fabulous Years in Fashion, p. 33). Worn with Butterfly No. 57 (71/19) known as the Dinosaur coat.
Location	Zandra Rhodes' Personal Collection
Copyright	© Zandra Rhodes 2024.
Terms of Use	This work is licensed for use in learning, teaching, and research, under the non-commercial Creative Commons Licence CC BY NC SA 4.0 Licence.
Fashion Collection	Paris, Frills and Button Flowers
Project	Zandra Rhodes' Colourful Heritage
Funder	Digitisation funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund.

Fig. 3.b. Object Description Record

From the controlled lists sidebar (**Fig. 2.**) if the user selects 'pinked edges' under Technique for example, this search term is highlighted within the Object Description of each record (example at **Fig. 3.b.**). Additionally the controlled list fields are hyperlinked across records, so in the example above the user could select 'Paris, Frills and Button Flowers' to retrieve all the images in that Fashion Collection. Or under Main Fabric, the user could select 'wool underfelt', which has been used by Zandra Rhodes to create sculptural pieces such as the hat's matching coat (Rhodes, 2013).

Social History

The Notes field contains information about who may have worn a garment, for example at first glance Style Number 72/47 is a frilly woman's blouse (Rhodes, 2024), but a similar version of this jersey top was worn by glam rock musician Marc Bolan (Bonhams, 2013). At the time it was considered shocking to have outside seams and for a man to wear something frilly and feminine.

The search phrase 'the art of Zandra Rhodes' (quotes not needed) will retrieve results from 'The Art of Zandra Rhodes' book (Rhodes, Z. and Knight, A., 1984), which covers from The Fulham Road Clothes Shop, opened in 1968 with Sylvia Ayton, to Zandra Rhodes' first solo collection featured in American Vogue up until The African Collection of Spring/Summer 1981.

Using the search phrase 'lifelong love affair' will retrieve images found in the book 'Zandra Rhodes: A Lifelong Love Affair with Textiles', which includes the Style Number

73/44 described as Zandra Rhodes' best-selling garment that has "graced celebrities, royalty, models and women around the world" (Monsef, G. et al, 2005, pp. 90-91).

Originally trained as a Textile Designer, Zandra Rhodes is known for revisiting and reusing her textile prints in different ways. The book '*Zandra Rhodes: Textiles Revolution: medals, wiggles, and pop 1961-1971*' (Safer, S.E., 2010) offers another approach to accessing the Digital Study Collection. A search for the textile print 'Mr Man' (no quotes needed) brings back results from 1968, 1976, 1978 and a new example from the National Lottery Heritage Fund project in which the 'Mr Man' print has been used for a velvet dress and leggings from 1993 (**Fig. 4.**).

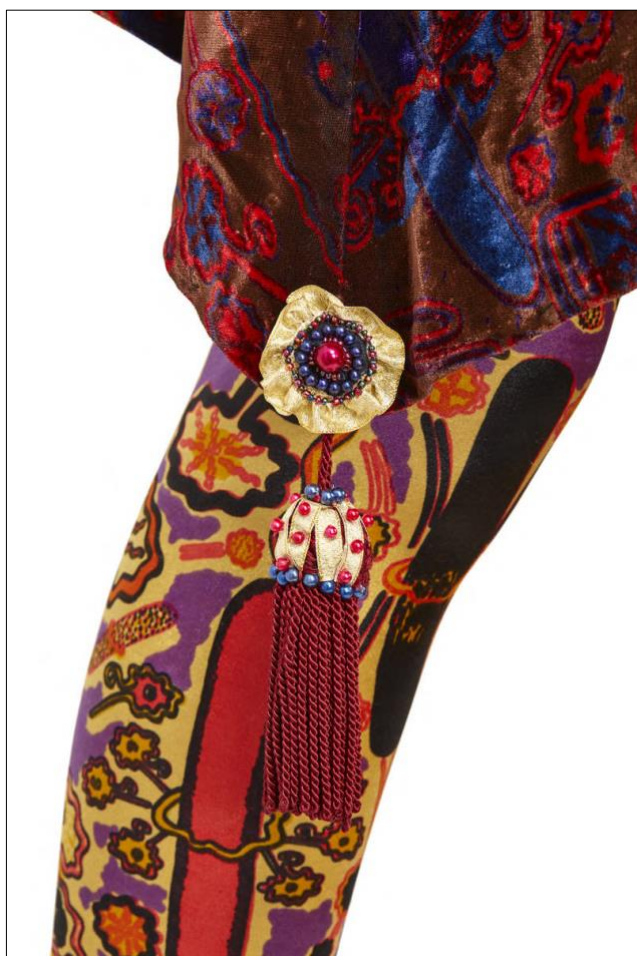


Fig. 4. Detail view of velvet dress and leggings printed with 'Mr Man' textile design by Zandra Rhodes, The Neo Fantasy Look, Autumn/Winter 1993. © Zandra Rhodes 2024. Available from: <https://vads.ac.uk/digital/collection/ZR/id/6391/rec/4>

The book '*Zandra Rhodes: 50 Fabulous Years in Fashion*' (Rhodes, Z. and Nothdruff, D., 2019) includes many photographs from the first Jisc-funded project, but also provides fashion show images of some of the accessories and headpieces photographed for the first time for the National Lottery Heritage Fund project (**Fig. 5.**).



Fig. 5. Turban designed by milliner Stephen Jones, with textile print by Zandra Rhodes, The Mount Olympus Collection, Spring/Summer 1983. © Zandra Rhodes 2024. Available from: <https://vads.ac.uk/digital/collection/ZR/id/5462/rec/5>

Finally, a search for 'Iconic' within the simple search box, retrieves results from Zandra Rhodes' autobiography. Zandra Rhodes recounts how Brian May and Freddie Mercury visited her Bayswater Studio, and Freddie tried on a woman's bridal top (Rhodes, Z., 2024), which led to Zandra Rhodes designing stage costumes for the rock band Queen. In another chapter, Zandra Rhodes describes visiting Kensington Palace to meet Diana, Princess of Wales.

Style Name Bibles and Textile Design Bible

The Textile Design Bible and the Style Bibles are a really important working resource that continue to be used by the Zandra Rhodes Studio. The Zandra Rhodes' Colourful Heritage project has provided an opportunity to update these records to the present day. From the main page for the Zandra Rhodes Digital Study Collection, the default sort order is 'Title Ascending' – so to access the 'Bibles' the user needs to select the last page which will show the 17 Style Bibles and one Textile Design Bible at the end of the results. Each record takes the user to the front cover image for each 'Bible', and then the user can either click through page-by-page, or select the icon (**Fig. 6.**) to use the page-turning technology.

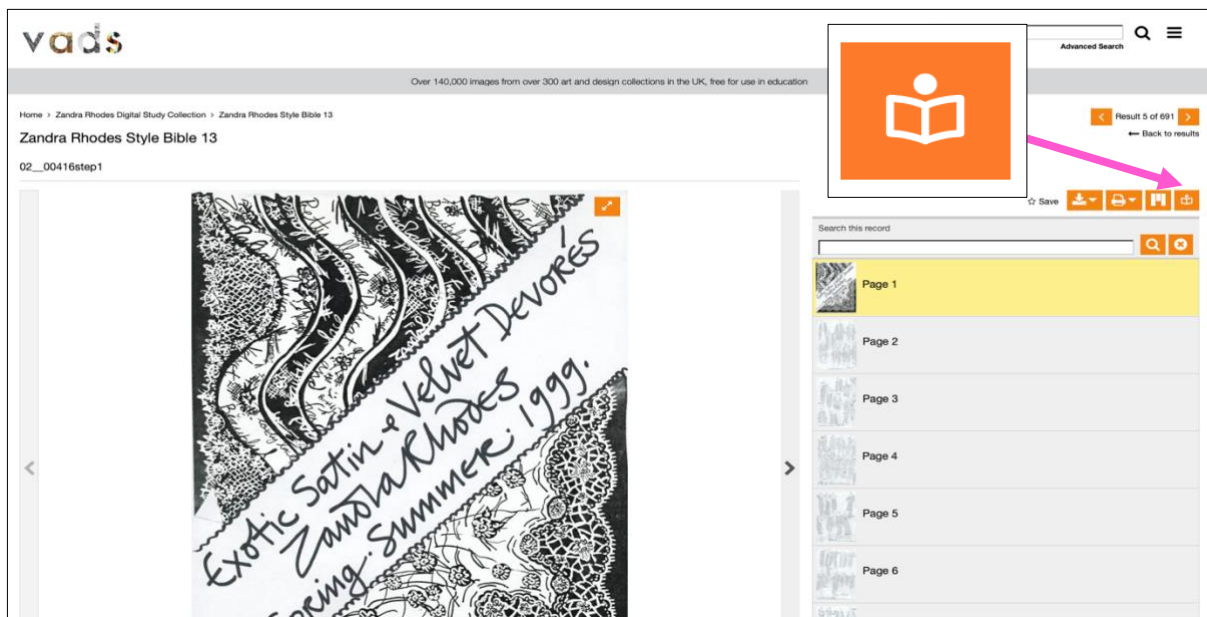


Fig. 6. Icon to view the Style Bible in Page-turning mode.

Using the Images

Zandra Rhodes retains the copyright as Textile and Fashion Designer, and as a commissioner or employer for the accessories created for her fashion shows. However she has granted a licence for the digital images made available through VADS, which is Creative Commons Attribution Non-Commercial Share-alike International Licence 4.0 (Creative Commons, n.d.). Examples of how to credit the images are shown in Figs. 3.a., 4. and 5.

As well as downloading the images one-by-one, the Digital Curation Manager has created a short video explanation of collecting and downloading multiple images on VADS, both with and without a login (Robinson, A., n.d.).

Improving Access to the Zandra Rhodes Digital Study Collection

Ellen Brown, Project Manager (Education & Outreach) has been working to improve access to the Zandra Rhodes Digital Study Collection for non-traditional learners and for 16-to-17-year-olds in Medway. This work will be published in the form of a toolkit, made available on the project website: <https://mylibrary.uca.ac.uk/colourfulheritage>. The toolkit and ongoing work will be shared via the project's Instagram account: <https://www.instagram.com/colourfulheritage>.

Zandra Rhodes' Colourful Heritage is funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund until the end of August 2025.

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