

News Release

Iconic and historically important outfits worn by Baroness Thatcher gifted to the V&A

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Margaret Thatcher and husband Denis Thatcher cast their General Election votes 1987. This suit is part of the gift to the V&A. (c) Steve Back ANL REX Shutterstock

The Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A) is delighted to announce the acquisition of six ensembles and a hat worn by the late Baroness Thatcher. The collection, which includes outfits worn by the former British Prime Minister at significant moments in her public and private life, has been generously donated to the V&A by her children, Sir Mark Thatcher Bt and Hon Carol Thatcher, and her grandchildren Michael Thatcher and Amanda Thatcher. These pieces will form an important addition to the Museum's fashion collection. A selection from the gift will go on public display in December in the Museum's fashion gallery.

Throughout her life Baroness Thatcher used her wardrobe choices to reflect her role as a stateswoman. She recalled in her 1993 memoir *The Downing Street Years*, "*I took a close interest in clothes, as most women do: but it was also extremely important that the impression I gave was right for the political occasion*".

The pieces given to the V&A reflect some of the key moments of her life as one of the most important figures in 20th-century political history. As leader of the Conservative Party from 1975 to 1990, blue was a significant colour which she wore regularly. The collection includes an iconic royal blue wool suit and matching silk blouse by the British company Aquascutum, who provided her with tailored suits throughout her career. The ensemble represents quintessential 1980s fashion with statement shoulder pads. Aquascutum also designed one of the most spectacular pieces in the gift: an evening suit of pink brocade with floor length skirt and a sleeveless, iridescent

silk opera cape with sweeping train, which was made for the Lord Mayor's banquet in 1988 at London's Guildhall.

The gift also includes a caramel silk crepe day dress with a delicate floral print by Daphne Scrimgeour, the Baroness's personal dressmaker. The Prime Minister wore the dress, which featured her trademark soft neck-tie detail, for the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting in New Delhi in 1983, where she was photographed with Indira Gandhi, the Prime Minister of India. The Baroness considered her sartorial choices a form of diplomacy; a long navy blue silk dress with gold flower motifs and flower shaped belt buckle designed by Jean Muir, a former trustee of the V&A, was worn when the former prime minister met Crown Prince Akihito of Japan. The Baroness in her own words, "*made almost no concessions to formal dress*". She continued, "*I believe that the public really likes its leaders to look business-like and well turned out*".

Baroness Thatcher also patronised London based couturier Tomasz Starzewski. The gift includes a wool crepe suit in striking fuchsia-pink, a colour favoured by her husband Sir Denis Thatcher. A printed silk dress and black coat with matching lining by the same designer also forms part of the collection.

The gift includes a wide brimmed, black slub silk hat with feathers and velvet-flecked tulle. Designed by Deida Acero, London, it was worn by Baroness Thatcher at Sir Denis's funeral in 2003 as well as for the funeral of former US President Reagan the following year.

Claire Wilcox, Senior Curator of Fashion at the V&A, said: "*Baroness Thatcher was an internationally recognised political figure who used her wardrobe as a strategic tool to project power and inspire confidence. She was notable for supporting the British fashion industry, and patronised many of the leading designers of the day. Baroness Thatcher learnt to dress for the camera whilst in office, and interestingly, amended her wardrobe after the House of Commons became televised in November 1989. This gift constitutes a record of the working wardrobe of one of the most influential and powerful women of the twentieth century, and will form an important addition to the Museum's fashion collection.*"

Tim Reeve, Deputy Director of the V&A, said “*I am delighted that this important selection of outfits has been given to the V&A and will be part of the national collection of dress. These carefully selected pieces tell an important story about Margaret Thatcher as a person as well as reflecting a significant period in British political history in the late 20th century. The V&A is very grateful to the family of Baroness Thatcher for their kind donation.*”

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Notes to Editors


For further PRESS information please contact Olivia Rickman in the V&A press office on +44 (0) 20 7942 2495 or email o.rickman@vam.ac.uk (not for publication).


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About the V&A

The V&A is the world’s leading museum of art and design with collections unrivalled in their scope and diversity. It was established to make works of art available to all and to inspire British designers and manufacturers. Today, the V&A’s collections, which span over 5000 years of human creativity in virtually every medium and from many parts of the world, continue to intrigue, inspire and inform.

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