



News Release

Balenciaga: Shaping Fashion

27 May 2017 – 18 February 2018

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'Haute Couture is like an orchestra whose conductor is Balenciaga. We other couturiers are the musicians and we follow the direction he gives.'

Christian Dior



This May, the V&A will open the first ever UK exhibition exploring the work of Cristóbal Balenciaga and his profound and continuing influence on modern fashion. It will be the first of its kind to look at his unique approach to making and will showcase pieces by his protégés and contemporary designers working in the same innovative way today. The exhibition marks the centenary of the opening of Balenciaga's first fashion house in San Sebastian and the 80th anniversary of the opening of his famous fashion

house in Paris.

Rather than a retrospective, *Balenciaga: Shaping Fashion* will focus in detail on the latter part of Balenciaga's long career in the 1950s and 1960s, arguably one of his most creative periods as 'the master' of haute couture. It was during these years that he not only dressed some of the most iconic women of the time, but also introduced revolutionary shapes including the tunic, the sack, 'baby doll' and shift dress – all of which remain style staples today. Highlights will include ensembles made by Balenciaga for Hollywood actress Ava Gardner, dresses and hats belonging to socialite and 1960s fashion icon Gloria Guinness, and pieces worn by one of the world's wealthiest women, Mona von Bismarck, who commissioned everything from ball-gowns to gardening shorts from the couturier.

On display will be over 100 garments and 20 hats, many of which have never been on public display before. These will be accompanied by archive sketches, patterns, photographs, fabric samples and catwalk footage revealing Balenciaga's uncompromising creativity. In addition x-rays, animated patterns and short films on couture-making processes will uncover the hidden details that made his work so exceptional. The exhibition will draw mostly on the V&A's

fashion holdings – the largest collection of Balenciaga in the UK. The collection was initiated for the Museum by Cecil Beaton in the 1970s.

Cassie Davies-Strodder, V&A exhibition curator, said: *“Cristóbal Balenciaga was one of the most influential fashion designers of the 20th century. Revered by his contemporaries, including Coco Chanel and Hubert de Givenchy, his exquisite craftsmanship, pioneering use of fabric and innovative cutting set the tone for the modernity of the late 20th century fashion. At the height of his success in the 1950s when Christian Dior’s ‘New Look’ was the dominant force in fashion, Balenciaga went against the grain to revolutionise the female silhouette, creating a more modern, architectural aesthetic that stood away from the body rather than restricting it. For the first time, this exhibition will take a forensic look at Balenciaga’s most iconic ensembles from the V&A’s collections to reveal what made his designs so exceptional. His lasting impact on fashion will be explored through the work of those who trained with him and through recent garments by designers including Molly Goddard, Demna Gvasalia and J.W. Anderson who reflect the legacy of his vision today.”*

Two unique collaborations have helped the V&A to reveal the secrets of Balenciaga’s ingenuity, and will feature in the exhibition. For the first time the V&A has used x-ray technology to take a forensic look at the hidden details inside Cristóbal Balenciaga’s garments. These x-rays, made with x-ray artist Nick Veasey, show structures invisible to the naked eye, including dress weights strategically placed to determine the exact hang of the skirt in one of Balenciaga’s most minimal designs, and boning in dress bodices, dispelling the myth that he did not use such structures. In partnership with the London College of Fashion, pattern cutting students have taken patterns from some of the most iconic Balenciaga garments in the V&A’s collection. These have been digitised and animated to show how these building blocks come together to form the finished piece. In a number of cases, the patterns reveal that the main body of the garment has been crafted from one single piece of fabric, demonstrating Balenciaga’s mastery of materials. Three of these animations will be displayed alongside Balenciaga’s original garments to give a deeper understanding of each.

Balenciaga: Shaping Fashion will be organised around three main sections: ‘Front of House’, including Balenciaga’s salons, behind the scenes in Balenciaga’s ‘Workrooms’ and the lasting impact of ‘Balenciaga’s Legacy’. The Balenciaga brand still references its founder today, yet his influence spreads far wider. The ‘Legacy’ section will feature the work of over 30 designers of the last 50 years tracing the influence of this most revered figure in fashion right up to the present day. Themes include an exploration of his minimalist aesthetic reflected in the work of his former apprentices André Courrèges and Emanuel Ungaro, and more recently revived by designers such as Phoebe Philo for Celine and in the strong lines of J.W. Anderson. Balenciaga’s perfectionism and attention to detail are reflected in the work of Hubert de Givenchy and

Erdem. His pattern cutting and explorations of volume can be seen in the work of Molly Goddard and Demna Gvasalia, while his creative use of new materials is referenced in the work of former Balenciaga creative director Nicolas Ghesquière.

Balenciaga: Shaping Fashion opens on 27 May 2017 and will be accompanied by a new V&A publication and a series of related events, courses and creative workshops.

- ENDS -

Notes to Editors

- The exhibition *Balenciaga: Shaping Fashion* runs from 27 May 2017 - 18 February 2018. Admission £12 (concessions available). V&A Members go free. Advance booking is advised – this can be done in person at the V&A; online at vam.ac.uk/balenciaga; or by calling 0800 912 6961 (booking fee applies).
- Tickets are on-sale from 1 February 2017.
- *Balenciaga: Shaping Fashion* is curated by the V&A's Cassie Davies-Strodder and is accompanied by a new V&A publication.
- The exhibition is the latest in the V&A's series of revelatory fashion exhibitions and follows *Undressed: A Brief History of Underwear* (2016 – 2017), *Shoes: Pleasure and Pain* (2015 – 2016) and *Club to Catwalk: London Fashion in the 1980s* (2013 – 2014).
- The V&A's fashion collection is designated as the UK's National Collection and is one of the largest and most comprehensive collections of dress in the world.

For further PRESS information about *Balenciaga: Shaping Fashion* please contact Laura Mitchell in the V&A press office on +44 (0) 20 7942 2503 or email l.mitchell@vam.ac.uk (not for publication).

A selection of press images are available to download free of charge from pressimages.vam.ac.uk

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