

News Release

24 May 2017

V&A collaborates with artist Nick Veasey to build first ever mobile x-ray art studio ahead of landmark exhibition on designer Cristóbal Balenciaga

Balenciaga: Shaping Fashion

Sponsored by American Express

Gallery 40, V&A

27 May 2017 – 18 February 2018

vam.ac.uk/balenciaga | [#balenciaga](https://twitter.com/balenciaga)

Ahead of the first ever UK exhibition on the fashion designer Cristóbal Balenciaga, opening on 27 May, the V&A teamed up with x-ray artist Nick Veasey to create the world's first mobile x-ray art studio. In the studio, Veasey captured a series of beautifully crafted life-sized x-ray images revealing new and surprising details about the work of one of the 20th century's most revered couturiers. The x-ray project is one of a number of forensic techniques that the Museum has applied to Balenciaga's garments to shed new light on his exquisite craftsmanship and challenge some of the myths that have built up around the elusive designer.



Due to the fragility of the V&A's Balenciaga collection, handling and movement must be kept to a minimum. To ensure the safety of these precious objects, the V&A challenged Veasey to devise a solution to photograph the garments onsite at the Museum's archive. Veasey's ingenuity saw

him convert the back of an articulated lorry into a purpose-built mobile unit to x-ray some of Balenciaga's signature shapes.

Veasey's ghostly images uncover hidden construction details invisible to the naked eye. X-rays of Balenciaga's 1954 balloon hem dress with curious leg-ties show subtle internal hooping that supports the garment's many swathes of fabric, revealing how Balenciaga fashioned one of his most ambitious designs. An x-ray of a 1967 cape dress made from a single piece of silk gazar for socialite Gloria Guinness, unearths strategically placed weights at the front of the dress that determine its abstract, architectural hang. A light pink dress dubbed 'La Tulipe' made for Hollywood actress Ava Gardner looks simple at first glance, but x-rays reveal the complex inner workings of the garment and the use of boning and corsetry, dispelling the myth that Balenciaga did not use such structures. Stray dressmaking pins were also found inside garments – a tantalising glimpse into the hands-on nature of their creation.

Nick Veasey, said: *“X-ray is an honest process. It has integrity. It shows how well things are made or not, revealing previously hidden internal details. The collaboration with the V&A gave me access to stunning couture garments made by ‘The Master’ of fashion. The results, I am pleased to say are beguilingly beautiful as befits these iconic examples of historic fashion.”*

Cassie Davies-Strodder, curator of the V&A's *Balenciaga: Shaping Fashion*, said: *“Showing garments, that are intended to be worn and touched, on static mannequins and behind glass is always challenging. Displaying Balenciaga's work is a particular challenge as the exceptional craftsmanship is often in the details you cannot see. The beautiful x-ray images Nick has created enable us to show, at a glance, those hidden details which make his work so special. They have given us a greater understanding of these exquisite pieces in our collection, and shed new light on Balenciaga's mastery and technique.”*

Veasey's x-rays are displayed alongside Balenciaga's historic garments, as well as replica toiles created by pattern-cutting students from London College of Fashion, UAL, and digital animations to give a greater understanding of how Balenciaga created his most revolutionary designs.

Balenciaga: Shaping Fashion is the first ever UK exhibition exploring the work of Cristóbal Balenciaga and his continuing influence on modern fashion. Drawn mostly from the V&A's unrivalled fashion collections, it is the first of its kind to look at his unique approach to making. It also showcases pieces by his protégés, including Hubert Givenchy, Paco Rabanne and André Courrèges, as well as contemporary designers working in the same innovative way today, such as Demna Gvasalia, Molly Goddard and Simone Rocha. The V&A 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.

Find out more about how the X-rays were created and try the V&A's online X-ray interactive at vam.ac.uk/articles/x-raying-balenciaga

All images © Nick Veasey, 2016

- 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).
- *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.

About American Express

As a brand with a long history of supporting the fashion industry, American Express is proud to partner with the V&A. Our Card Members are increasingly passionate about art and design, so we're delighted to share this unique exhibition with them and other visitors of the V&A. We hope you enjoy this exquisite collection of work by Cristóbal Balenciaga and the contemporary designers inspired by him as much as we do.

American Express is a global service company, providing customers with access to products, insights and experiences that enrich lives and build business success.

Americanexpress.co.uk | [AmericanExpressUK](#) on Facebook | [@AmexUK](#) on Twitter

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

 victoriaandalbertmuseum

 @V_and_A

 vamuseum

 vamuseum



Sponsored by

