

Margaret Thatcher's iconic handbag, Winston Churchill's despatch box and a World War II gasmask bag belonging to Queen Mary all to feature in major 2020 exhibition *Bags: Inside Out* Sponsored by Mulberry

Gallery 40, V&A
25 April 2020 – 31 January 2021
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On 25 April 2020, the V&A will open *Bags: Inside Out*, the UK's most comprehensive exhibition dedicated to the ultimate accessory. From designer handbags to despatch boxes, vanity cases to military rucksacks, the exhibition will explore our longstanding fascination with the bag.

Featuring innovative designs from Mulberry to Karl Lagerfeld, statement handbags worn by Margaret Thatcher to Sarah Jessica Parker, the heritage of Hermès to the streetwear of Off-White, and an exclusive look inside the world of the factory and atelier; *Bags: Inside Out* provides an unprecedented look at this global obsession.

Often projecting bold statements to the outside world whilst concealing our most treasured belongings, the exhibition will explore the function, status and craftsmanship of bags. Examined through around 300 objects varying in scale from tiny purses held on a fingertip to luxurious travel trunks, this thematic exhibition will explore the worldwide heritage of these highly covetable objects from the 16th century to today.

The first section of the exhibition on *Function* will examine bags as practical objects designed to hold our belongings. From holiday outfits to confidential documents, make-up to money and even gas masks, the design and materials of our bags often reflect their intended purpose as functional objects. Rare exhibits on show include a large embroidered burse used to protect the silver matrix of Elizabeth I's Great Seal of England, a gas mask bag owned by HRH Queen Mary during the Second World War, Winston Churchill's red despatch box and Vivien Leigh's attaché case. A striking Louis Vuitton trunk from the early 1900s will also take centre stage. Once belonging to the American socialite Emilie Grigsby, an extensive conservation and research project helped to bring the trunk back to life with its labels and markings revealing a hidden history of its travels on the world's great ocean liners.

Entitled *Status and Identity*, the second of the three exhibition sections will look at the central role of the bag in celebrity culture as well as its notoriety amongst the political and societal elite. Featuring a Hermès 'Kelly' named in honour of Grace Kelly and a 'Lady Dior' handbag named after Princess Diana, the exhibition will explore the powerful and influential world of

celebrity endorsement. Fuelling the 'It bag' phenomenon beginning in the late 1990s and early 2000s, celebrity association has helped to drive luxury bag sales and see certain designs reach icon status in popular culture. The Fendi 'Baguette' bag worn by and stolen from Sarah Jessica Parker in one of *Sex and the City's* most famous scenes will sit alongside a gold Louis Vuitton 'Monogram Miroir' Speedy bag by Marc Jacobs popularised by Paris Hilton and Kim Kardashian. Not only highly coveted by celebrities, fashion fans and gossip pages, luxury handbags have also become synonymous with some of the most powerful and leading figures in contemporary society. The wardrobe of Margaret Thatcher acted as her suit of armour and her handbag was essential to the image of the 'Iron Lady'. Thatcher's grey Aspree handbag will be one of the leading examples of the bag as a symbol of power.

The use of bags as a blank canvas for slogans, personal statements and political messages and their role as a public platform to share beliefs and convictions will be represented through objects including an anti-slavery reticule bag from 1825, the 'I am NOT a Plastic Bag' tote by Anya Hindmarch and a 'My Body My Business' handbag by artist and activist Michele Pred.

The final section of the show will look at the *Design and Making* process from sketch to sample, sewing to selling. With material specialists stationed in different locations around the world and skills passed down within century-old fashion houses, this section will lift the lid of the ingenuity employed by leading brands. A 'maker's table' will allow visitors to get up close and personal with bag making processes and materials alongside newly commissioned interviews with designers and makers. Sketches, samples and prototypes from international fashion houses and the UK luxury brand Mulberry will show the innovative early stages of the design process. An insight into the skilled work of shaping bags will include examples of intricate craftsmanship employed on a 17th century silver filigree heart-shaped purse, a metal chainmail belt bag by Paco Rabanne and a 17th century letter case decorated with exquisite straw embroidery.

Explored through the design process, this section will examine the experimental forms created by designers and the bag's role as an object of whimsical subversion as well as an opportunity for artistic collaboration. A 17th century purse in the shape of a frog, Thom Browne's handbag in the form of his dog Hector and a Chanel bag transformed into a milk carton will explore the surrealism and humour evoked through accessories. A hotbed for collaboration, the bag offers an opportunity for experimentation and statement designs. Collaborations between fashion designers, artists and architects have resulted in innovative and often limited-edition collections such as Prada's nylon bag reinvented by Japanese architect Kazuyo Sejima, Valextra's collaboration with Bethan Laura Wood and the 'International Woman' suitcase by Tracey Emin for Longchamp.

A look to the future will finish the exhibition with designers experimenting with innovative and environmentally sustainable materials including a Stella McCartney backpack made from recycled ocean plastic waste and a bag crafted from decommissioned fire hoses by Elvis and Kresse.

Lucia Savi, curator of *Bags: Inside Out* at the V&A, said: 'From a lavish 16th century burse made for royalty to the everyday tote bag, this exhibition offers an understanding and insight into the function, status, design and making of bags across the world and throughout history. These portable, yet functional accessories have long

fascinated men and women with their dual nature that combines private and public. By exploring their continuing importance in our lives and as part of the history of design the exhibition highlights the V&A's mission to illuminate the past and inspire designers of the future.'

Thierry Andretta, Mulberry CEO said:

'As the largest luxury leather goods designer and maker in the UK, bags have always been our passion. We are pleased to support this wonderful V&A exhibition that explores the unique status of these objects in our lives. Bags can be functional and beautiful, public and private; they carry cultural and personal meaning as well as our belongings and they are iconic pieces of design, worth celebrating in their own right.'

- ENDS -

Notes to Editors

- The exhibition *Bags: Inside Out*, Sponsored by Mulberry, runs from 25 April 2020– 31 January 2021. Tickets from £12 (Available early 2020).
- The exhibition has been curated for the V&A by Lucia Savi. It will be accompanied by a richly illustrated new V&A publication.
- The exhibition is the latest in the V&A's series of revelatory fashion exhibitions and follows *Mary Quant* (2018-2019), *Christian Dior: Designer of Dreams* (2018), *Balenciaga: Shaping Fashion* (2016 – 17), *Undressed: A Brief History of Underwear* (2016 – 2017), *Shoes: Pleasure and Pain* (2015 – 2016), *Alexander McQueen: Savage Beauty* (2015) and *Club to Catwalk: London Fashion in the 1980s* (2013 – 2014)

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About Mulberry

Founded in 1971, Mulberry creates luxury fashion goods that are made to last, to be loved and passed onto the next generation. Originally a family-run business, it has grown into the largest designer and manufacturer of luxury leather bags in the UK with two Somerset factories and a design studio in London led by Creative Director Johnny Coca. Today Mulberry is a truly global lifestyle brand with collections comprising women's and men's bags, accessories, jewellery, women's ready-to-wear, shoes and luggage, available in over 120 stores worldwide and the digital flagship mulberry.com.

For further PRESS information about *Bags: Inside Out* please contact Callum Walker on c.walker@vam.ac.uk. A selection of press images is available to download free of charge from pressimages.vam.ac.uk