

Exhibition Highlights

Bags: Inside Out

Gallery 40, V&A

Opens September 2020

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#BagsInsideOut



Chatelaine
1863–85, probably England
Cut steel

A chatelaine is a waist-hung appendage, suspended from a hook or brooch, with multiple attachments. This example in cut steel features 13 hanging accessories, including scissors, purse, thimble, miniature notebook and magnifying glass.



Pair of pockets
1740s, England
Silk

Between the late seventeenth century and the early nineteenth century, women in England owned several pairs of detachable tie-on pockets. Worn tied around the waist and accessed through openings in the seams of petticoats and outer gowns, they were used to carry personal items such as watches, snuff boxes, money, jewellery and even food.



Burse for the Great Seal of England
1558–1603, England
Silk, silver-gilt thread, sequins, glass beads

This densely embroidered burse protected the silver matrix of Elizabeth I's Great Seal of England. Matrices were used to make wax seal impressions that were applied to decrees, charters and royal proclamations. The bag was possibly used by Sir Christopher Hatton (1540–1591), one of Elizabeth I's Keepers of the Great Seal and Lord Chancellor between 1587 and 1591. He is shown proudly displaying a similar seal burse in a portrait miniature by

Nicholas Hilliard, painted around 1588.



Lemière

Opera bag and contents

c.1910, Paris

Calf leather, silk, glass, bone, metal, plastic, swansdown

This small leather bag measures just 16cm when closed. But when opened, it reveals a spacious interior divided into compartments and pockets in which all the necessary accessories needed for a night at the opera could be neatly kept: a snap-fastening change purse at the top, a scalloped pocket containing a leather-backed mirror, a bone notecard and a pencil. There is also enough space for opera glasses and a collapsible fan of embroidered white silk and a powder puff.



Louis Vuitton

Malle Haute trunk

c.1900, Paris

Canvas, wood, metal, leather

This trunk belonged to Emilie Busbey Grigsby (1876–1964), an American socialite who moved to England in 1911 or 1912. Paper labels glued onto the trunk, and passenger lists from the early twentieth century, reveal that it accompanied her on many of the most significant ocean liners of the time, including the Lusitania and Aquitania on the Cunard Line and Titanic's sister ship the Olympic on the White Star Line.



Dowry bag (*bhujki*),

Mid 20th century, Sindh, Pakistan

Cotton, silk, sequins, gold-wrapped thread, beads, mirrors

This embellished dowry bag would have been embroidered in advance of a wedding. It is designed in the shape of an envelope, folding square when closed. The vibrant colours and intricate geometric and floral patterns are distinctive characteristics of Sindhi embroidery.



Portfolio

c.1715–18, Istanbul

Goat leather, silver, metal, gold leaf

This lavishly decorated portfolio features embroidered leather on the outside and red gilded leather on the inside. It is internally divided into three compartments and would have been used to carry documents and letters. The coat of arms depicted on the back belongs to Thomas Pelham-Holles (1693–1768), 1st Duke of Newcastle, an influential minister in the British government from 1724 and Prime Minister twice between 1754 and 1762.



Hermès
'Sac Mallette' handbag
1968, Paris
Box calf leather, metal

Hermès was established in 1837 by Thierry Hermès (1801–1878) as a horse-harness and bridle workshop in Paris. With the demise of the horse-drawn carriage in the early twentieth century, Hermès applied its leatherworking expertise to other products, including handbags. This 'Sac Mallette' handbag features two separate compartments. The top one opens via two sliding side latches and a push button, similar to a capacious doctor's bag. The lower compartment is secured with a lock and key, and once opened reveals a deep red velvet interior that could be used to keep valuables safe while travelling.



Hermès
'Kelly' handbag
2018, Paris
Box calf leather, metal

This simple trapezoid bag was first created in the 1930s by Robert Dumas-Hermès (1898–1978). Originally named Sac à dépêches, the name 'Kelly' was given in honour of Grace Kelly (1929–1982), the Hollywood star who married Prince Rainier III of Monaco (1923–2005) in 1955. Through its association with the Princess, it has become one of the most iconic and popular handbags of all time.



John Peck & Son
Despatch Box owned by Winston Churchill (1874-1965)
London, about 1921
Leather, pine, metal

The distinctive red boxes used by royalty and government have been used to hold and transport State documents safely since the 1840s. William Gladstone's box is still, famously, used by the Chancellor of the Exchequer and held aloft by him on Budget Day. This box belonged to Sir Winston Churchill when Secretary of State for the Colonies (1921 – 1922).



Fendi
'Baguette' bag worn by Sarah Jessica Parker in Sex and the City
2000, Italy
Leather, sequins, metal

The Fendi Baguette has been heralded as the first global 'It bag'. It has been reported that around 600,000 Baguette handbags were sold between 1997 and 2007. Its status was elevated by TV character Carrie Bradshaw who, while being robbed of her purple sequin version in a 1997 episode of *Sex and the City*, famously corrected the thief by saying, 'It's a Baguette'.



Marc Jacobs for Louis Vuitton
Speedy handbag
Autumn–Winter 2006, Paris
Vinyl metal

Louis Vuitton's Creative Director Marc Jacobs (b.1963) debuted his 'Monogram Miroir' collection of handbags during the brand's Autumn–Winter 2006 runway show. This example made from gold reflective vinyl is embossed with the famous monogram. Highly sought after, the mirrored bags were popularized by celebrities such as Paris Hilton and Kim Kardashian during the 'It bag' craze of the early 2000s.



Gianni Versace
'Safety-pin' handbag
Spring–Summer 1994, Italy
Leather, metal

Gianni Versace's (1946–1997) 'safety-pin' collection was one of his most iconic shows, featuring supermodels Kate Moss (b.1974), Christy Turlington (b.1969) and Naomi Campbell (b.1970). Although not included on the catwalk, this handbag was available in-store and retains the collection's eye-catching aesthetic.



Beaded purse
Mid to late 18th century, probably Paris
Silk, glass beads, silver-gilt thread

This silk purse is covered in thousands of tiny colourful glass beads using a technique known as sablé (meaning covered with sand). It is believed that only one or two Parisian workshops could have mastered such a meticulous and difficult technique, making these items so expensive they were only available to the wealthiest classes.



Tracey Emin for Longchamp
'International Woman' suitcase
2004, France
Wool, cotton, leather

Longchamp launched its foldable Le Pliage bags in 1994. To celebrate the line's tenth anniversary, the brand collaborated with British artist Tracey Emin (b.1963). Emin designed 200 suitcases for the occasion inspired by the story of an 'International Woman', travelling from one city to the other, in search of an 'International Love with an International Man'. Each suitcase carries a unique rosette, signed by Emin and inscribed with a different location, one for each place that reminds her of a moment of love.



Heart-shaped purse
1660–99, probably Nuremberg, Germany
Silver, silk

During the seventeenth century, filigree was considered a fashionable new technique, often employed in the making of gifts exchanged between aristocrats. The two sides of this heart-shaped purse are made from flattened silver wires that have been curled, twisted and soldered to achieve decorative motifs.



Letter case
c.1810, England
Silk, straw

Ornamental straw work can be traced back hundreds of years. Using similar techniques to those applied in traditional needlework, straw can be plaited, woven, couched and embroidered, providing decorative interest to flat textiles and three-dimensional objects, such as this letter case.



Judith Leiber
'Faberge Egg' evening bag
1983, United States
Rhinestones, metal

Judith Leiber's (1921-2018) whimsical evening bag designs took on a variety of forms, from animals, to fruits or in this case a Faberge egg. Highly collectable, these bags were handcrafted and often encrusted

with thousands of crystals.



Karl Lagerfeld for Chanel
'Lait de Coco' evening bag
Autumn–Winter 2014, Paris
Lambskin leather, metal

This evening bag in the shape of a milk carton was featured in Chanel's supermarket-inspired Autumn–Winter 2014 collection, designed by Karl Lagerfeld (1933–2019). The bag features many of the classic Chanel symbols such as quilting, interlocking CC motif and pearls. The text on the front of the bag reads 'lait de coco' (coconut milk) playing on Gabrielle Chanel's nickname.



Anya Hindmarch and We Are What We Do
'I'm NOT A Plastic bag' tote bag
2007, London
Cotton

This simple and cheap limited-edition tote bag was primarily sold in Sainsbury's supermarkets for £5 when it was launched in 2007. It was designed by Anya Hindmarch (b.1968) in collaboration with We Are What We Do – a global social change movement whose mission was 'to persuade people it's cool not to use plastic bags'.



Stella McCartney x Parley for the Oceans
'Ocean Legend' Falabella Go backpack
Spring–Summer 2018, London
Ocean Plastic®, metal

Ocean Plastic® is a material made from marine plastic waste. Stella McCartney (b.1971) used this fibre to make this limited-edition backpack to raise awareness of the problem of ocean plastic pollution. All proceeds were donated to Sea Shepherd, an organization established in 1977 to protect marine life.



Shoulder bag
1900–35, Myanmar, Burma
Cotton, wool, glass beads, silver

This shoulder bag (n'hpye) is part of the traditional dress of one of the ethnic groups of Kachin State, the northernmost state of Myanmar, Burma. This territory is heavily forested, and people would have worn these types of bags to transport personal items when walking long distances on foot.



Samuel Lines
Anti-slavery reticule
c.1825, England
Silk

Although Britain ended its participation in the slave trade in 1807, British banks continued to provide credit to foreign traders allowing the institution of slavery to remain intact in the British Empire. Bags such as this were produced by the Female Society for Birmingham, which campaigned for the abolition of slavery. The bags were sold with campaign materials such as pamphlets and newspaper extracts and a card explaining the purpose of the bags. When worn in public, the bags allowed women to convey their political beliefs and provided a means of disseminating antislavery messages.



Inrō* with netsuke and *ojime

c.1750–1850, Japan

Lacquer and gold foil (*inrō*); wood (*netsuke*); bone (*ojime*)

Inrō (seal-baskets) are small, tiered, containers worn suspended from the obi, a waist-sash, as part of traditional Japanese dress. They originated at the end of the sixteenth century and were worn by men to carry personal seals, ink pads and medicines. The compartments of this *inrō*, only two of which are visible here, feature inscriptions relating to the medicines kept inside: *kanryrō* (liver calmer), *saikō* (bringer of life/aphrodisiac).



Thom Browne

'Hector' bag

Autumn-Winter 2019, Italy

Leather, metal

Thom Browne immortalised his dog, a dachshund named Hector, in this life-sized handbag available in different materials and colours. Despite its unconventional shape, the bag is fully functional with a deep inside pocket and handles.



Emily Jo Gibbs

Horse chestnut bag and purse

1996, Britain

Silk, copper wire

Taking inspiration from nature, Gibbs designed this bag in the shape of a horse chestnut. The green surface acts as a shell that when opened reveals a 'conker' shaped purse. Realistic details such as copper wire points to represent the spiked surface of a horse chestnut demonstrate Gibbs care and

craftmanship.



'Frog' purse

1600s, England

Silk, metal threads, and glass beads

A number of 17th century purses survive in museum collections in the shape of fruits and small animals, including bunches of grapes, open nuts and frogs. They could have been used as 'sweet bags' and filled with scented herbs, dried flowers or sweet-smelling powders or as wrapping for a gift.