



News Release

V&A reveals more detail about first UK exhibition dedicated to the work of Pioneering Fashion Designer Gabrielle ‘Coco’ Chanel **A limited release of tickets are on sale today**

Gabrielle Chanel. Fashion Manifesto

Exhibition presented in partnership with Palais Galliera, Fashion Museum of the City of Paris, Paris Musées

With the support of CHANEL

The Sainsbury Gallery

16 September 2023 – 25 February 2024

vam.ac.uk/chanel | [@V_and_A](https://twitter.com/V_and_A)



The V&A has released more detail on the first UK exhibition dedicated to the work of French couturière, Gabrielle ‘Coco’ Chanel, charting the evolution of her iconic design style and the establishment of the House of CHANEL, from the opening of her first millinery boutique in Paris in 1910 to the showing of her final collection in 1971. A limited number of tickets will be released today for the first few weeks of the exhibition, with more tickets being released in June 2023.

Featuring over 200 looks seen together for the first time, as well as accessories, perfumes and jewellery, the exhibition will explore Chanel’s pioneering approach to fashion design, which paved the way for a new elegance and continues to influence the way women dress today.

Based upon the *Gabrielle Chanel. Fashion Manifesto* exhibition organised by the Palais Galliera, Fashion Museum of the City of Paris, the exhibition will be re-imagined by the V&A. It will feature rarely seen pieces from the V&A’s collection, alongside looks from Palais Galliera and the Patrimoine de CHANEL, the heritage collections of the fashion House in Paris. Highlights will include one of the earliest surviving Chanel garments from 1916; original costumes designed by Chanel for the Ballets Russes production of *Le Train Bleu* in 1924; outfits created for Hollywood stars Lauren Bacall and Marlene Dietrich; an early example of Chanel’s ground-breaking evening trousers and ensembles from Chanel’s final collection of 1971.

Chanel designed first and foremost for herself. By creating clothes fit for an independent and active lifestyle, she anticipated the needs and wants of the modern woman. Through ten themed sections, the exhibition will explore Chanel’s innovative approach to fabric, silhouette and construction, and will examine how she drafted a new framework for fashion in the twentieth century. Showcasing a stunning array of some of Chanel’s most notable designs

from her sixty years in fashion, the exhibition analyses her professional career, the emergence and the development of her style, and her contribution to the history of fashion. The exhibition will also highlight Chanel's British inspirations, such as her adoption of tweed, partnerships with British textile firms and textile factory in Huddersfield.

Tristram Hunt, Director of the V&A, said: *"As one of the most successful fashion houses in existence, CHANEL owes much to the templates first laid down by its founder Gabrielle Chanel, over a century ago. We are delighted to be partnering with CHANEL and the Palais Galliera on this exhibition, which provides us with the opportunity to explore the origins and elements of this enduring style and to display little-known historic Chanel garments from the V&A collection."*

Director of the Palais Galliera, Miren Arzalluz said: *"Gabrielle Chanel devoted her long life to creating, perfecting and promoting a new kind of elegance based on freedom of movement, a natural and casual pose, a subtle elegance that shuns all extravagances, a timeless style for a new kind of woman. That was her fashion manifesto, a legacy that has never gone out of style." "Her success was based not only on the functionality, comfort and chic elegance of her designs, but also on her ability to grasp and interpret the needs and desires of the women of her time."*

Bruno Pavlovsky, President of CHANEL SAS and President of CHANEL Fashion, said: *"We are happy and honored that the first exhibition dedicated to Gabrielle Chanel to be held in the UK, will be presented at the V&A, one of the most prestigious museums in the world. Gabrielle Chanel was a legend in her own lifetime. This exhibition will analyze her contribution to fashion and her radical vision of a style that created modernity and reflected the aspirations of women and the evolution of their place in society."*

"CHANEL is delighted to contribute to this project, providing access to the Patrimoine de CHANEL, and thanks the V&A for hosting this exceptional exhibition."

Across ten sections, *Gabrielle Chanel. Fashion Manifesto* will showcase the exquisite skill and innovation from the founder of the House of CHANEL:

- ***Towards A New Elegance*** offers an introduction to the beginning of Gabrielle Chanel's career as a milliner, opening her first boutique on the rue Cambon in Paris in 1910, and further boutiques in the fashionable coastal resorts of Deauville and Biarritz. The section outlines how the success of this business enabled her expansion into clothing. It will feature one of the earliest surviving Chanel garments, characterised by minimalism and precision – a streamlined way of dressing that contrasted with the excessively decorative fashions of the day, and would lay the foundations of her design principles.
- ***The Emergence of a Style*** focuses on how Chanel developed an immediately identifiable signature style in the 1920s and 1930s. With clean lines, fluid materials and a simplistic colour palette, her understated designs were radical in their practicality yet displayed a refined elegance. Several sub-sections will also examine the role of textiles and manufacturing, her use of embroidery in her designs and spotlight Chanel's famous little black dress. This section also includes Chanel's British influences and

business ventures, and her creations being worn on the theatre stage and silver screen.

- ***The Invisible Accessory*** showcases the creation and impact of Gabrielle Chanel's debut perfume *N°5* which became the world's best-selling fragrance. Designed as an extension of her clothing and echoing her vision of modernity, Chanel made *N°5* the signature of her fashion house. This section will also explore the launch of Chanel's range of make-up in 1924 and skincare in 1927.
- ***Luxury and Line*** focuses on how Chanel's eveningwear demonstrated a refined mix of inventiveness and classicism which subtly accentuated the female form. She harmonised proportions and materials aiming to create garments which expressed elegance, freedom and simplicity. The resulting designs conveyed the tension between garment and body, described in French as 'the *'allure'*'. This section will also look at "*Bijoux de Diamants*", her first and only 1932 collection of fine jewellery commissioned by the International Diamond Corporation of London.
- ***Closing the House*** will outline the impact of the outbreak of war in 1939 on her personal and professional life. The exhibition will continue with Chanel's official ***Return to Fashion*** on 5 February 1954, with the relaunch of her couture house at the age of seventy-one. Chanel's return collection featured the signature hallmarks that she had so successfully introduced during the 1920s and 30s, representing her updated vision of the modern woman's wardrobe.
- ***The Suit*** will spotlight the defining garment of Gabrielle Chanel's post-war contribution to fashion, with over fifty ensembles on display. A declaration of her vision of modern femininity, the Chanel suit combined ease and comfort with simplicity and style. Described by *Vogue* in 1964 as "the world's prettiest uniform," the Chanel suit, which has since become a timeless classic, remains a staple reference for fashion today.
- ***Chanel Codes*** will focus on how accessories were fundamental to Chanel's conception of a harmonious silhouette. They reflected her pragmatic vision of fashion and provided recognisable codes which underlined the unity of her style. Since the 1950s, the Chanel 2.55 handbag and two-tone slingback shoes have become two of the most enduring accessories in the world of fashion.
- ***Into the Evening*** showcases eveningwear as an important part of Chanel's couture collections in the latter part of her career. From the late 1950s onwards, she adapted her suits to include a range to be worn into the evening. These cocktail suits followed the same form as her day suits, realised in a plethora of richly decorative fabrics such as gold and silver lamés, textured weaves and intricately patterned silks.
- ***Costume Jewellery*** will explore this essential part of Gabrielle Chanel's distinct style. Rejecting the conventions of fine jewels, Chanel gave costume jewellery a new status. From the beginning of the 1920s, Chanel's boutiques offered a dazzling range of costume jewellery to wear with her sleek fashionable garments. The *couturière's* costume jewellery drew inspiration from many places and historical epochs.

- ***A Timeless Allure*** – the exhibition finale – celebrates the evening dress as Chanel’s exercise in style. She proposed a relaxed version of the formal dress that was both discreet and refined, revisiting the foundations that had governed her aesthetic and punctuated her career. This section will showcase that right up until her final collection of Spring-Summer 1971, Gabrielle Chanel reinterpreted, updated and perfected her rules and principles, continuously refining her quintessential style.

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For further PRESS information about *Gabrielle Chanel. Fashion Manifesto* please contact Callum Walker on c.walker@vam.ac.uk / +44 (0)20 3949 4509 (not for publication). A selection of press images is available to download free of charge from pressimages.vam.ac.uk

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With the support of

CHANEL

Notes to Editors

- The exhibition *Gabrielle Chanel. Fashion Manifesto* runs from 16 September 2023 – 25 February 2024. Tickets from £24. Concessions: £16. Tickets are on sale at vam.ac.uk/chanel
- The exhibition is presented in partnership with Palais Galliera, Fashion Museum of the City of Paris, Paris Musées.
- The exhibition has been curated by Miren Arzalluz and Véronique Belloir and adapted by V&A curators for the London iteration. It 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 *Africa Fashion (July 2022-March 2023)*; *Fashioning Masculinities: The Art of Menswear (2022)*; *Christian Dior: Designer of Dreams (2019)*; *Mary Quant (2019-2020)*, *Fashioned from Nature (2018-2019)*, *Balenciaga: Shaping Fashion (2017 – 2018)*, *Undressed: A Brief History of Underwear (2016 – 2017)* and *Alexander McQueen: Savage Beauty (2015)*.
- 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.

Social Media

Twitter: @Chanel @V_and_A

Instagram: @Chanel @vamuseum

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About the V&A

The Victoria and Albert Museum, London (V&A) is the world's leading museum of art, design and performance with collections unrivalled in their scope and diversity, spanning 5000 years of human creativity. It was established in 1852 to make works of art available to all and to inspire British designers and manufacturers. Today, its purpose is to champion creative industry, inspire the next generation, and spark everyone's imagination.

vam.ac.uk

About Chanel

CHANEL is a private company and a world leader in creating, developing, manufacturing, and distributing luxury products. Founded by Gabrielle Chanel at the beginning of the last century, CHANEL offers a broad range of high-end creations, including Ready-to-Wear, Leather Goods, Fashion Accessories, Eyewear, Fragrances, Makeup, Skincare, Jewellery and Watches. CHANEL is also renowned for its Haute Couture collections, presented twice yearly in Paris, and for having acquired a large number of specialised suppliers, collectively known as the Métiers d'art. CHANEL is dedicated to ultimate luxury and to the highest level of craftsmanship. It is a brand whose core values remain historically grounded on exceptional creation. As such, CHANEL promotes culture, art, creativity, and "savoir-faire" throughout the world, and invests significantly in people, R&D, sustainable development and innovation. At the end of 2021, CHANEL employed close to 28,500 people worldwide.

About Palais Galliera

The Palais Galliera is a permanent fashion museum in Paris, established in 1977 in the nineteenth century building commissioned by Duchesse de Galliera. The museum displays exhibitions of fashion design and costume from the eighteenth-century to the present day and has a collection of over 200,000 items, including garments, accessories, fashion illustration and photography. Collection highlights include creations owned by Marie-Antoinette, Louis XVII and the Empress Joséphine, as well as important pieces by such renowned designers as Paul Poiret, Madame Grès, Cristóbal Balenciaga, Christian Dior, Hubert de Givenchy, Martin Margiela and Comme des Garçons.

Exhibition Highlights

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Gabrielle Chanel, Marinière Blouse, Spring/Summer 1916

This blouse, made from fine-gauge silk jersey, is one of the earliest surviving Chanel garments. Jersey made Chanel's name a force to be reckoned with in the world of French fashion. The practical fabric was previously a textile for underwear and stockings, but Chanel was the first to demonstrate its appeal for outer clothes. This blouse shows inspiration from the collared pullovers of fisherman.

Silk jersey

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris



Gabrielle Chanel, Hat, 1917

Gabrielle Chanel began her career as a milliner. She opened her first salon in 1909, selling hats from an apartment on the boulevard Malesherbes in Paris and relocated to the rue Cambon the following year. This hat, with its relaxed crown and small brim, is made of looped braid that can be collapsed. Chanel was photographed modelling her own hats in the magazine *Comoedia Illustré* in the October 1st 1910 issue.

Silk

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris



Gabrielle Chanel, Dress and jacket Suit, Spring/Summer 1926

Inspired by male dress, Chanel composed sober yet refined women's daywear in the 1920s. This ensemble is typical of her designs in this period. It features a low, belted waist, pleated dress and loose jacket. A generous bow of black silk taffeta contrasts with the cream silk – the couturier's classic colour combination. For Chanel, elegance resided in the details. Crenellated edges, executed with astonishing precision, feature on the turned-back cuffs and collar of this jacket and the hem of the bodice.

Silk taffeta

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris



Gabrielle Chanel, Dress, 1935

When creating this evening dress of 1935, Chanel aligned each pattern piece carefully on the silk organza to ensure a perfectly symmetrical placement of the floral print. Printed fabrics were a key part of both Chanel's daywear and evening ensembles in the 1920s and 30s, many of which had been designed and produced in her own textile factories. Chanel often favoured floral patterns and utilised these printed motifs further by employing an unusual appliqué technique whereby the individual floral motifs in a print were cut out and the edges carefully hand-finished. These printed chiffon flowers were then re-applied as three-dimensional decoration of the dress. The technique was used repeatedly by Chanel in the late 1920s and 30s. The technique is seen on the back of this dress, and on the sleeves, giving added volume to the ruffled edges.

Printed silk organza
Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris



Tricots Chanel textile samples, 1929

In February 1929, Chanel registered these printed textile designs in various colourways. They were the only designs that she ever registered in Britain. Later, Chanel would form the short-lived British Chanel Ltd of 1932–33 which would include an initial 9 firms including Ferguson Brothers Ltd, a noted textile manufacturer based in the north of England. The 1933 British Industries Fair had a special stand dedicated to Chanel fabrics. The press noted that visiting the exhibition, Queen Mary “expressed interest and pleasure in the Fergusons collaborations with Mademoiselle Chanel”. She selected for herself “a dress length, in a quality named Fersyl in a Chanel design.”

Printed silk and wool crêpe
V&A

Given by the Manchester Design Registry



Gabrielle Chanel, Dress, 1935

Chanel used permutations of knitted jersey throughout her career, continually updating and adapting it. Removable cuffs and collars, which allowed for easier laundering, are also elements that Chanel used repeatedly, often in white and especially for her suits. British debutante Lady Pamela Smith wears a similar dress to this one in a photograph taken in London in 1932. Smith stands beside Gabrielle Chanel, who is sitting among a group of young society women chosen as models for the Chanel London fashion show. In 1932 Chanel established British Chanel Ltd, an umbrella under which several British textile manufacturers would produce Chanel designs. To mark the venture, Chanel presented a special collection of 130 garments made from British textiles. Society women such as Lady Pamela Smith, the Countess de La Falaise and Princess Dmitri modelled the designs. The show took place over a fortnight at 39 Grosvenor Square, one of the Duke of Westminster's properties. The press applauded: “Paris has shown us how to wear British.”

Wool jersey, rib-knit albene and metal
Palais Galliera, Paris
Gift of the heirs of Mr Henry Viguiier



Gabrielle Chanel, Costumes for *Le Train Bleu*, 1924

In 1924, Chanel designed the costumes for a production in Paris by the celebrated Ballets Russes. The ballet-operetta *Le Train Bleu* (“The Blue Train”) premiered at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées on 20 June 1924. Chanel was one of many notable contributors. The libretto was by Jean Cocteau, the score by Darius Milhaud, and the choreography by Bronislava Nijinska. The cubist sculptor Henri Laurens designed the set and Pablo Picasso painted the programme and theatre curtain. The banded pink suit represented the latest in bathing wear. Chanel created it for the character of La Perlouse. The costume was not easy

for Lydia Sokolova to dance in, as it was worn with a suede skull cap, rubber bathing shoes and heavy pearl-effect earrings. Sokolova recalled that when she was thrown into the air and caught by her partner Leon Woizikovsky (The Golfer), the smooth finish of the wool made it almost impossible for him to grip her as she landed.

Hand-knitted wool

V&A

Given by the Friends of the Museum of Performance



Gabrielle Chanel, Evening dress, 1926

As early as 1910s Chanel recast black as a stylish wardrobe option, freeing it for her clientele from its associations with service, shop assistants and mourning dress. Chanel promoted black as a chic symbol of modernity. Stripped of ornament, the colour drew attention to the clothing’s simple line. The October 1st 1926 issue of American *Vogue* declared Chanel’s crepe de Chine day dress ‘a sort of uniform for all women of taste from all backgrounds’. Dubbed “the CHANEL Ford, the frock that all the world will wear” after the popular American car,

Chanel’s little black dress, as it became known, was a global hit, as universal in its appeal as it was transformative. This classic black Chanel evening dress belonged to Grace Curzon. The Marchionness ordered numerous dresses from Chanel in 1926. This dress features asymmetric flared panels falling from the right shoulder and the left hip. At each shoulder, a looped streamer falls over the back like a decorative necklace, with a black chiffon flower at the front giving a final flourish. Chanel often used fabric flowers to embellish the necklines of her garments, punctuating the pared-back modernity of her designs in this period.

Silk chiffon

Pickford’s House, Derby Museums

Gift of Curzon family



CHANEL N°5 Bottle, 1921

Launched in 1921, Gabrielle Chanel’s debut perfume, N°5, went on to become the world’s best-selling fragrance. Chanel’s perfumer Ernest Beaux crafted the unique scent from over eighty ingredients including Grasse jasmine, ylang-ylang, sandalwood, May rose and neroli. His innovative use of aldehydes, an organic chemical compound, created a scent so blended it is hard to decipher the individual components. With its square bottle and unflowery name, N°5 was a distinct and incredibly novel fragrance. It became the signature scent of Chanel’s fashion house. By

1952, Marilyn Monroe could draw on the global fame of the perfume to tease her fans.

Answering the question “What do you wear to bed?”, she replied “Chanel N°5.”

Glass, wax, cotton thread

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris



Gabrielle Chanel, Dress, 1926

The mid-1920s saw Chanel using silk fringing extensively in her eveningwear. This striking dress featured in American *Vogue*, which drew attention to “the graceful way in which the deep shaded fringe is treated.” Chanel wore a version of this dress at the Duke of Westminster’s country house Eaton Hall in Cheshire. It must have been a favourite of the designer as she reportedly had versions of the dress in three different colours.

Silk georgette crepe and silk fringing

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris



Gabrielle Chanel, Dress, Spring/Summer 1926

In 1926, when Hollywood actor Ina Claire was photographed by Edward Steichen in a version of this dress, *Vogue* called it a “glittering gown.” The dress has a streamer of black chiffon flaring out from the hip. This swathe of lightweight fabric was a typical Chanel touch at the time, which added drama and movement to her narrow evening silhouettes. Chanel would continue to use all-over sequin embroidery in the following decade, although usually in monochrome.

Silk, chiffon, tulle and sequins

Pickford’s House, Derby Museums

Gift of Curzon family



Gabrielle Chanel, Dress, 1932

While Chanel was celebrated for her subdued monochrome colour palette, from the 1920s ‘Chanel red’ and ‘Chanel blue’ garments feature frequently in the fashion press.

In August 1932, the *Times* reported that “cotton velvet specially made in Manchester for Chanel” was being used in her collections. Traditionally, haute couture used silk velvet, a softer fabric that draped more easily. Cotton velvets or velours were seen as more humble materials. Once again, Chanel demonstrated that she was unafraid to challenge the rules, subverting preconceptions about textiles in her approach.

Cotton velvet

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

Madame Lucile de Chaudenay’s dress, née Lucile Eonnet (1914-1974)



Gabrielle Chanel, Trouser suit, 1937-38

"I loved my clothes from Chanel," recalled loyal client Diana Vreeland. The fashion editor wore this sequinned trouser suit for entertaining at home. The lightest of tulle grounds supports the embroidered sequins, adhering to Chanel's principle that chic clothes should also be comfortable. Although the couturière advocated trousers for casual and sportswear, they did not feature regularly in her collections until the 1960s.

Silk tulle, sequins, chiffon and lace

V&A

Given by Mrs Diana Vreeland



Gabrielle Chanel, Suit, Autumn/Winter 1964

The defining garment of Gabrielle Chanel's post-war contribution to fashion was the suit. A declaration of modern femininity, the Chanel suit for women combined ease and comfort with chic simplicity. Rejecting padding and stiffening, Chanel chose supple fabrics that allowed for greater freedom of movement. Adopting a cardigan-like cut for her jackets and a simple skirt that sat on the upper-hip, she constructed her suits with the natural motion of a woman's body in mind. While trimmings in contrasting colours and unexpected

materials added to the distinctiveness of each design, the garment's precise silhouette remained its essential focus. Refinements such as custom buttons and hidden details such as a chain stitched inside the jacket's hem would also become signature features. Described by American *Vogue* in September 1964 as "the world's prettiest uniform," the Chanel suit remains a staple reference in fashion. It has become a timeless classic. Chanel debuted this design, trimmed with red and blue braid, in 1962 and reprised it for her Autumn-Winter 1964 collection. Around this time, she was regularly photographed wearing a version and the *New York Times* declared it "her favourite suit of the moment."

Wool tweed, braid, silk and metal

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris



Gabrielle Chanel, Suit, Spring/Summer 1959

Actor Lauren Bacall ordered this suit from Chanel's Spring-Summer 1959 collection. Bacall was photographed wearing it that July at London Airport (now Heathrow) alongside her two children, about to board a plane to Biarritz for their family holiday. Bacall paired it with a flower in her top buttonhole and a pair of white gloves. The expectation for women in the public eye to be immaculately well-presented and photo-ready at any moment meant that even on personal errands,

Hollywood's stars had to live up to their glamorous personas. Chanel's coveted suits proved to be the outfit of choice for many, offering comfort and chic in equal measure. It appears to have been a favourite of Bacall's when she was travelling in this period – she was photographed at the same airport just two months earlier, on return from shooting her latest film, wearing a similar Chanel suit in a checked tweed.

Wool tweed, printed silk and metal

V&A

Given by the Educational Foundation for the Fashion Industries, New York



Gabrielle Chanel, 2.55 Handbag 1955–71

Accessories were fundamental to Chanel's concept of a harmonious silhouette. They reflected her pragmatic vision of fashion and provided recognisable codes which underlined the unity of her style. From the start, Chanel knew the importance of a handbag and shoes, jewellery and gloves. As early as 1927, French *Vogue* praised Chanel for understanding that "accessories carry the mark of personality." The Chanel handbag and shoes have become two of the most enduring accessories in the world of fashion. Launched in February 1955, the 2.55 bag (named after the month and year it was created) could be carried by hand or over the shoulder. Its chain-link strap was sometimes intertwined with leather to prevent the metal jangling. With numerous pockets and a special lipstick compartment, the practical bag came in three sizes in lambskin, jersey or silk satin.

Quilted lambskin and gilded metal
Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris



CHANEL design made by Gripoix, Brooch, 1937

From the 1930s, Chanel and the House of Gripoix produced costume jewellery inspired by nature. Flowers, leaves, acorns and other motifs were executed in multicoloured glass paste (*pâte de verre*). Soldering the molten glass directly into the setting, rather than kiln-firing the material first, yielded a greater clarity of colour and iridescence. The camellia, a flower favoured by Chanel since the 1910s, remains a lasting symbol for the House today.

Gilt metal and glass paste
Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris



Gabrielle Chanel, Dress, Spring/Summer 1971

Gabrielle Chanel's final collection was presented two weeks after her death on 26 January 1971. According to the *Times*, "It was a beautiful collection... Chanel at her best." Fashion writer Alison Adburgham declared "the look of Chanel, casual but elegant, could be the answer to the modern woman's dilemma" – a fitting tribute to a woman who had spent the last sixty years designing garments to be exactly that.

Lamé organza
Palais Galliera, Paris
Given by CHANEL



Gabrielle Chanel, Suit, Autumn/Winter 1969

Chanel, so often photographed wearing black and white, is inevitably associated with those colours. The suit shown here, which is reputed to be one of Chanel's own, was purchased by the Victoria and Albert Museum in 1978 at a Christie's auction of Chanel's "personal collection." Although each auction garment has a special label stitched inside the lining recording the sale, no pictures exist of Chanel wearing this suit, so it is difficult to confirm or deny its provenance. Nevertheless, it remains as relevant and wearable today as it was when first created over fifty years ago.

Wool and silk
V&A

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