

V&A Academy

GUCCI TO PRADA: 20TH CENTURY ITALIAN FASHION



Introduction

Everybody loves Italian fashion! But do they really know how it became so famous? This 5 week, 10 lecture course aims to unpack some of that history and to tell the story of some of the most iconic fashion houses of all time. Gucci, Prada, Armani, Dolce Gabbana, to name but a few. These are some of the key topics that will be covered: The culture of fashion manufacturing, from its artisanal roots to the highest levels of industrial production. Italian style and its representation in fashion magazines. The creation of world-famous fashion brands. The geography of Italian fashion. Internationalizing Italian fashion brands in the later 1900s. Heritage and modernity of Italian fashion in the 21st century. The future of Italian fashion.

The lectures will be given by a dynamic mix of academics, journalists, fashion business experts all currently involved in some aspect of Italian fashion research. Students will be encouraged to ask questions and make comments. There will be a brief reading list available for each lecture. The recording and the slides from the lectures will be available to the students after the lecture and for several weeks following the end of the course.

Complementary extra material related to Italian fashion will be uploaded on our course space during the course. This might be brief videos of fashion shows, past interviews with famous designers, images, links to online material and useful websites. The V&A museum holds a substantial amount of Italian fashion in the form of designer garments, accessories, printed visual and text material. Some of this will be shown during lectures.

The course is aimed at an audience with an interest in the history of fashion, Italian fashion houses or more generally, Italian 20th Century culture. No prior knowledge of the topic is needed, and a comprehensive reading list will be provided well in advance of the start of the course.

Thursdays, 22 January - 19 February, 14.00–16.30. Online.

Watch lecture recordings on demand, available at the end of each day, until 26 March 2026

Your course leader

Virginia Arabella Hill is an anglo-italian dress historian based in Milan, Italy. She gained her BA degree in History of Art from East Anglia University, Norwich and her MA degree in History of Dress from the Courtauld Institute of Art, London. Her extensive experience in the world of dress and fashion includes training as a textile conservator in Florence and working in fashion in Milan over several years.

From 2006 Virginia became a full-time lecturer of History of Dress and Fashion. She has taught at fashion colleges (Istituto Marangoni, Milan and Florence campuses and Accademia del Costume e della Moda in Rome) and universities (Università di Bergamo and IULM University, Milan). From 2018 she has also been active in the field of dress/fashion curation: in 2019 co-curated the major exhibition “Giovanni Boldini e la moda” at Palazzo dei Diamanti, Ferrara. Her current curatorial project is a dress section in the exhibition “Lo stile ‘liberty’ nell’arte Italiana” at Palazzo Martinengo, Brescia, opening January 2026 until June 2026.

Notes:

Note: V&A Academy programmes are subject to change without notice.

Week 1 – 22 January

- 13.50 Welcome
- 14.00 Establishing an Italian fashion identity at the turn of the century **Virginia Arabella Hill**
- 15.30 Fashion and Politics in Fascist Italy 1922-1943, **Isabella Campagnol**

Week 2 – 29 January

- 14.00 The Relationship between Textile and Fashion in Italy from 1945 to 1985”, **Dr Lucia Savi**
- 15.30 Biki and others. Sartorial dressing in Milan before the ready-to-wear boom of the 70s **Dr Simona Segre-Reinach**

Week 3 – 5 February

- 14.00 Language of Fashion and Language of Art: the case of MISSONI between the 50’ and today **Alessandro Castiglioni**
- 15.30 From the 70s into the 80s: Milan the new Fashion capital of Italy **Virginia Arabella Hill**

Week 4 – 12 February

- 14.00 From the 80s into the 90s: new perspectives in Italian fashion
Virginia Arabella Hill
- 15.30 Italian power brands of the late 20th Century: selling Italian
style globally **Adriana Saralvo**

Week 5 – 19 February

- 14.00 Italian fashion in the 21st Century **Antonio Mancinelli**
- 15.30 Closing lecture **Virginia Arabella Hill**