

V&A Academy

SCHIAPARELLI: FASHION BECOMES ART



Introduction

Elsa Schiaparelli (1890 – 1973) was one of the world's most radical fashion designers. Her couture house, the most discussed of interwar Paris, redefined standards of style and perceptions of beauty in the 20th century. At the same time, her impact extended beyond fashion and across the cities of Paris, London and New York from the late 1920s until her retirement in 1954. Operating at the centre of Europe's creative avant-garde, she positioned her work in direct dialogue with fine art, photography, graphic design, theatre and film.

This five-week course will chart the craft and cultural impact of this innovative couturier and will be taught by V&A curators, independent scholars and archivists who will draw upon their own original research. The course will cover celebrated, yet little-seen garments, accessories and jewellery from the history of fashion, including objects in the museum's own collections. You will learn about Schiaparelli's creative collaborations with artists including Salvador Dalí and Jean Cocteau as well as her costumes for stage and screen worn by performers such as Mae West and Zsa Zsa Gabor. Other sessions will spotlight the London branch of Schiaparelli and her dynamic and independent clients from Josephine Baker to Marlene Dietrich. You will also gain an exclusive insight into exhibition-making at the V&A, hearing about the creative process behind *Schiaparelli: Fashion Becomes Art*.

Information

Thursdays, 23rd April – 21st May 2026, 14.00 – 16.30. Online.

Watch session recordings on demand, until Thursday 25th June

Your Course Leaders

Sonnet Stanfill is Senior Curator of Fashion at London's Victoria and Albert Museum. Her exhibitions include *New York Fashion Now* (2007), *Ballgowns: British Glamour Since 1950* (2012), *The Glamour of Italian Fashion* (2014), *NAOMI: In Fashion* (2024-5), *Schiaparelli: Fashion Becomes Art* (2026).

Lydia Caston is Project Curator at the Victoria and Albert Museum. She was one of the curators of *Fragile Beauty: Photographs from the Sir Elton John and David Furnish Collection* and the Assistant Curator of *Tim Walker: Wonderful Things*. She is currently Project Curator on *Schiaparelli: Fashion Becomes Art*.

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

Week 1 – Thursday 23rd April

- 14.00 Introduction Talk: Elsa Schiaparelli and 1930s French Haute Couture **Sonnet Stanfill and Lydia Caston**
- 15.30 Women of Fashion: Clients of the House of Schiaparelli **Lydia Caston**

Week 2 – Thursday 30th April

- 14.00 Elsa Schiaparelli, Photography and Image-making **Susanna Brown**
- 15.30 Textiles and Materials of Haute Couture **Clare Sauro and Edwina Ehrman**

Week 3 – Thursday 7th May

- 14.00 Elsa Schiaparelli in 1930s London **Sonnet Stanfill**
- 15.30 Elsa Schiaparelli and the American Market

Week 4 – Thursday 14th May

- 14.00 Elsa Schiaparelli: Fashion on Stage and Screen **Simon Sladen**
- 15.30 Elsa Schiaparelli and Surrealism **Rosalind McKever**

Week 5 – Thursday 21st May

- 14.00 The Making of the Exhibition
- 15.30 Archiving Couture: Schiaparelli Heritage at Work