V&A Academy

CHANEL TO WESTWOOD – WOMEN, FASHION, INNOVATION

Thursdays

12 November 2026 – 10 December 2026

V&A

Introduction

This short course will look at how women designers and artisans have shaped female appearances in the 20th Century. It will be bookended by examinations of Gabrielle Chanel and Vivienne Westwood, each of whom proposed radical revisions to female appearances and to the concept of femininity. There will be an investigation of Elsa Schiaparelli, Chanel's great rival, who worked with artists to create garments that were Surrealist works of art; and of Mary Quant, who took Chanel's pared-down look into the 1960s. Alongside these will be discussions of lesser-known women whose influence on fashion was just as important: Paris couture houses run by the Boué, Callot, and Poiret Sisters; 1960s London boutique designer/proprietors; the 'fashion artists' who drew the latest styles for magazines and catalogues; and the skilled artisans who embellished garments. There will also be sessions devoted to the male couturiers Christian Dior and Yves St Laurent, whose designs led radical shifts in female style between 1947 and 1967. The speakers will be international experts including V&A curators responsible for major fashion exhibitions.

Information

Thursdays, 12 November 2026 – 10 December 2026 Online

Watch lecture recordings on demand, available at the end of each day, until 14 January, 2027.

Your course leader

Clare Rose is a curator, writer and lecturer who has led courses at the V&A since 2009, including Study Weekends for the Dior and Handbags exhibitions. Her research investigates the links between actual garments, the documents used to sell them, and images of fashionable people. Her books include 'Art Nouveau Fashion 1890-1914' (V&A Publishing, 2014).

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

Week 1 – 12 November

13.50 Course Welcome, **Clare Rose**
14.00 Gabrielle Chanel: Fashion Manifesto,
Oriole Cullen, Curator of Modern Textiles & Fashion, V&A
15.30 Sister Acts: women as fashion designers, artists and artisans before 1920, **Clare Rose**

Week 2 – 19 November

14.00 Schiaparelli: Fashion Becomes Art,
Sonnet Stanfill, Senior Curator, Fashion, V&A
15.30 Women, Fashion and Politics 1933-45, **Clare Rose**

Week 3 – 26 November

14.00 Christian Dior and the 'femme fleur', **Clare Rose**
15.30 Yves St Laurent and women in trouser suits, **Clare Rose**

Week 4 – 3 December

14.00 Mary Quant, Revolutionary Fashion Designer, **Jenny Lister, Curator, Textiles and Fashion 1800-1900, V&A**
15.30 Barbara Hulanicki and women as boutique entrepreneurs, **Clare Rose**

Week 5 – 10 December

14.00 Vivienne Westwood: Kings Road to Couture, **NJ Stevenson, Member of the Centre for Fashion Curation at London College of Fashion**
15.30 Women Dressing Women: Exhibiting A Lineage of Female Fashion Design at The Costume Institute, **Mellissa Huber, Associate Curator in The Costume Institute at the Metropolitan Museum of Art**