

Exhibition Highlights

The Glamour of Italian Fashion 1945-2014

Sponsored by Bulgari

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Evening dress, Maria Grimaldi, 1950s

Photo © Victoria and Albert Museum, London



The main source of fashionable garments for affluent Italian women before and immediately following the war was the local, traditional dressmaker. This capsule wardrobe belonging to Margaret Abegg, the American wife of a prominent textile manufacturer and art collector, was made by her Turin dressmaker Maria Grimaldi. Abegg later donated the garments to the V&A with a note that when worn in Paris and New York, they had been much admired. On display for the first time will be two formal evening gowns, a day suit and a coat, alongside several pairs of shoes and leather gloves.

Although these dresses do not carry the name of a couture house, they use the best quality textiles and feature a very high standard of technical skill and precise detailing.

Evening Gown of Embroidered Silk, Simonetta, 1952

Published in Harper's Bazaar, October 1952
Photograph by Genevieve Naylor



The exhibition will include a group of couture gowns by designers who participated in the landmark fashion shows seen by many as the birth of Italian fashion. These were hosted initially at the home of organiser Giovanni Battista Giorgini and subsequently within the glamorous setting of the Sala Bianca in Palazzo Pitti in Florence. Simonetta was one of a small number of designers, including Pucci and the Fontana Sisters, whose work featured in these early shows, attended for the first time by international influential buyers and press. Her designs, like this spectacular evening gown were

particularly popular with the American department stores from which she enjoyed great patronage.

Salvatore Ferragamo with Audrey Hepburn at Palazzo Spini Feroni in Florence, 1954

© Banca Dati dell'Archivio Storico
Foto Locchi Firenze



Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, numerous Hollywood films such as *Anthony and Cleopatra*, *War and Peace* and *Roman Holiday* were filmed on location in Italy. Directors appreciated the lower costs of the Cinecittà studios and Italy's sunny climate. In turn, film stars like Elizabeth Taylor, Ava Gardner and Claudette Colbert shopped while on location and became ambassadors of Italian style. Designers benefited greatly from the related publicity and became adept at ensuring store visits were well publicised, such as this 1954 photograph of Audrey Hepburn visiting Salvatore Ferragamo. Ferragamo began his career in the United States working for a shoe factory and after developing a roster of celebrity clients, moved back to Florence to open his own store in the American model to great success.

Elizabeth Taylor wearing Bulgari jewellery, Venice, 1967



The exuberance of Italian style of this period was exemplified by this spectacular Bulgari jewellery once owned by Elizabeth Taylor. Given to the actress as an engagement gift by Richard Burton and worn on their wedding day, the necklace set in platinum with diamonds and emeralds was a favourite of the actress who also wore it to the masked ball in Hotel Ca' Rezzonico, Venice in 1967. These jewels are rarely seen on public display.

Silver sequin evening dress and matelasse coat, Mila Schön, 1966

Courtesy Watson Mila Schön
Photo © Victoria and Albert Museum, London



At the legendary Black and White Ball held by writer Truman Capote in New York, described by *Vogue* as 'Party of the Decade,' Mila Schön was chosen above designers from Paris or London to create eveningwear for Maria Agnelli and Princess Lee Radziwill, who won the titles of best and third best dressed guests. Radziwill wore this ensemble consisting of an embroidered silver sleeveless dress with undulating stripes of silver sequins and bugle beads with a white silk coat accessorised with sequin collar and cuffs. Invited to show at the Sala Bianca from 1965, Schön was a Milanese couturier known for her elegant, simple yet classical designs.

Tailoring by Rubinacci

Photo © Victoria and Albert Museum, London



Expert tailoring became one of Italy's first fashion exports. Italian tailoring was perceived to be sleeker and more daring in the finer details such as slimmer lapels, sharper lines and lighter fabrics. Enthusiasm for the Italian tailored suit flourished after the war, even in London which already had Savile Row to offer. Bespoke suits and stylish examples of ready-to-wear from the 1950s and 1960s will be on display including an example from Rubinacci, the family-run menswear atelier from Naples known for its skilful tailoring, in particular the pocket shaped like a *pignata*.

Women's knitted ensemble, Missoni, 1972



Missoni / Fashion in Motion at the V&A
Photo © Victoria and Albert Museum, London

The exhibition will explore how luxurious materials and artisanal skills have long been synonymous with couture production in Italy, spanning leather, textiles and knitwear. Known for colourful designs and variety of woven, knitted and embroidered patterns, Missoni embodies the significant role in the international appeal played by Italy's textile industry. The fashion house also typifies the family-owned business so prevalent in the Italian fashion industry. Adept at making machine knitwear with a handmade feel, the classic Missoni weave has long been an instantly recognisable look.

London press release, Walter Albini, S/S 1973



The emergence of the professional figure of the 'Lo Stilista' had significant impact on the industry during this period. A combination of designer, stylist and mediator between buyers, public and press, pioneers such as Walter Albini were instrumental in shaking up the industry and opening up new ways of showing and consuming fashion. Trained initially as a fashion illustrator, Albini aimed not to create the perfect outfit, but to create the perfect style and his far-ranging inspirations and playful reinterpretations anticipated many future trends. He designed for many different brands whose links with factory production helped moved the elite consumer towards a new type of fashion - designer read-to-wear. Now largely forgotten, Albini's groundbreaking legacy in shaping modern Italian fashion will be looked at alongside other innovators of the time like Fiorucci.

Suit, Gianni Versace, 1985



Photo © Victoria and Albert Museum, London

The exhibition will consider how the entrepreneurial flair of Italian ready-to-wear fashion designers such as Gianni Versace as well as Armani, Krizia, Moschino and many others led to the term 'Made in Italy' becoming the sign of good taste. The loose, unstructured drape and bold juxtaposition of pattern and weave of this black and white cotton jacket and trouser suit from Versace's S/S 1985 collection was an unlikely alliance of material and concept. Versace's fashion empire is another example of the family-run business, so unique to Italian fashion.

Evening dress of silk, Roberto Capucci, 1987-88



Courtesy Roberto Capucci Foundation
Photo © Victoria and Albert Museum, London

Known for his sculptural silhouettes and masterful use of form, colour and material, Roberto Capucci's career has spanned many decades. From opening his first couture salon in 1950, he was soon lauded by the international press as Italy's best designer and early in his career he designed for the family of Giovanni Battista Giorgini, organiser of the seminal Sala Bianca. This dramatic evening dress of green and pink silk is an excellent example of Capucci's dramatic, individualist and gravity-defying later work that fuses art and fashion.

Advertisement, Gianfranco Ferre, F/W 1991

©GIANPAOLO BARBIERI



The evolution of Italian design houses into international luxury brands and the relationship between fashion, image and advertising will be considered. This signature sophisticated white shirt by Gianfranco Ferre, known as 'the architect of fashion,' is shown in an advertising campaign photographed by Gianpaolo Barbieri. The original art photography, recently donated to the V&A, will be shown alongside other examples of advertising including Benetton's provocative campaigns which famously stimulated debate and raised the brand's profile.

Ankle boots, Dolce & Gabbana, 2000

Photo © Victoria and Albert Museum, London



The exhibition shows a number of examples of Italian accessories, including handbags, shoes and gloves. In recent years, Italy's fine leatherwork has become one way for the fashion consumer to buy into a designer's look through a single, considered purchase. This pair of Dolce & Gabbana black leather stiletto ankle boots are typically ostentatious in their style and feature gold, white and pink embroidery with crystals and sequins. They draw on the many artisanal skills for which Italy is renowned such as leathermaking techniques.

Ensemble, Fausto Puglisi, S/S 2014

Photo © Filippo Fior



Work by new designers based in Italy and Italians designing in international fashion capitals will be shown in the exhibition. Looks from Valentino's new designer duo Maria Grazia Chiuri and Pier Paolo Piccioli as well as pieces from established designers adapting to new markets such as Dolce & Gabbana's recent couture line will be displayed. Puglisi, a favourite of Madonna and Anna della Russo, is a young Italian designer acclaimed by press and international buyers alike and the exhibition will include a bold ready-to-wear piece from his S/S 2014 show.

For further PRESS information about the exhibition, contact Zoë Franklin or Lucy Hawes on 020 7942 2497 / 2500 or z.franklin@vam.ac.uk / l.hawes@vam.ac.uk

A selection of high resolution images are available to download at pressimages.vam.ac.uk

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