



Ballgowns: British Glamour Since 1950

Sponsored by Coutts

19 May 2012 – 6 January 2013

A spectacular exhibition of more than 60 ballgowns from 1950 to the present day will go on display at the V&A next May. *Ballgowns: British Glamour Since 1950* will be the first exhibition in the newly renovated V&A Fashion Galleries and will feature beautiful ballgowns, red carpet evening gowns and catwalk showstoppers.

There is a strong British design tradition of creating sumptuous ballgowns, one that has been upheld in the late 20th and 21st centuries through the work of designers such as Vivienne Westwood, John Galliano and Alexander McQueen. The exhibition will cover more than 60 years of a tradition that continues to flourish.

Displayed over two floors, Ballgowns will show specially made designs for social events such as private parties, royal state occasions, debutante balls, opening nights and red carpet events. Tour de force eveningwear from the V&A's vast collection by designers such as Norman Hartnell, Victor Stiebel, Zandra Rhodes, Catherine Walker, Jonathan Saunders and Hussein Chalayan will be on show, as well as dresses fresh from the catwalk shows of Alexander McQueen, Giles, Erdem, Roksanda Illincic, Mark Fast and Jenny Packham. Innovative designer Gareth Pugh has created a stunning metallic leather dress especially for the exhibition.

Royal gowns, with their luxurious fabrics and exquisite embellishments, always make headlines. A selection of royal ballgowns will be displayed, including a Norman Hartnell gown designed for Elizabeth the Queen Mother, Princess Diana's 'Elvis Dress' designed by Catherine Walker and gowns worn by today's young royals. Dresses worn by actresses and celebrities including Sandra Bullock, Daphne Guinness, Elizabeth Hurley and Bianca Jagger will also be shown.

From Country House to red carpet

Since the 1950s, occasions for wearing formal attire have evolved from the private event to the public parade. In the post-war period, as Europe struggled toward recovery, extravagant, exclusive balls provided glittering backdrops for splendid couture gowns, so helping to stimulate sartorial consumption and aspiration in Britain. Coming out balls, where young women were formally introduced to society, were often the first occasion on which to wear a grand gown.

The emergence of the charity ball in the 1980s provided a new platform for a wider society to dress to impress. Couture influenced the high street and dressing up for events was no longer the prerogative of the wealthy.

More recently it is the red carpet that acts as the most important site of fashionable splendour. From the 1990s, couturiers have competed to dress stars for red carpet events which garner worldwide press interest. Moreover what the stars of a film wear to a premiere can sometimes deliver as many column inches as the film itself.

Preparing for the ball

The ground floor of the exhibition will feature over 30 ballgowns from the Museum's permanent collection. Designs from 1950 to the early 2000s will be shown, including gowns by Hardy Amies, Ossie Clark, Bill Gibb, Belleville Sassoon, Murray Arbeid, Bruce Oldfield and Julien MacDonald. The space will be designed and styled to evoke the excitement of preparing for a ball in a grand country house. The display will include film as well as contextual images and accessories such as elegant evening bags, gloves and shoes.

Ballgowns will continue from the ground floor onto the mezzanine, taking full advantage of the newly lit and restored Octagon Court, one of the most architecturally dramatic of the V&A's galleries.

Contemporary opulence

The mezzanine level will feature a stylised 'ballroom' space, with around 30 evening gowns designed by contemporary UK-based makers on open display. It will evoke the glamour of the red carpet or a couture presentation. The gowns will stand under dramatic pavilions surrounded by oversized pearls. This display will show how ballgowns continue to be the ultimate fashion statement for contemporary designers, and will include unexpected interpretations such as a latex gown by Atsuko Kudo.

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Notes to Editors

- *Ballgowns: British Glamour Since 1950* is curated by Oriole Cullen and Sonnet Stanfill
- The exhibition takes place in the V&A's fashion gallery 19 May 2012 – 6 January 2013
- It is open daily 10.00 – 17.45 and until 22.00 every Friday
- Ballgowns will feature on the V&A website www.vam.ac.uk/ballgowns

Ticket information

Tickets: £10 (concessions available)

V&A Members go free

For advance bookings visit www.vam.ac.uk (booking fee applies)

Exhibition publication

To coincide with the exhibition the V&A will publish *Ballgowns: British Glamour Since 1950* with essays by Oriole Cullen and Sonnet Stanfill. It will feature specially commissioned images of a diverse selection of gowns from the exhibition by fashion photographer David Hughes. These dynamic images will also be projected into the alcoves of the gallery's vast domed ceiling, creating an arresting backdrop to the show.

Exhibition Sponsor

Coutts is the wealth division of Royal Bank of Scotland Group. Coutts serves clients from over 40 offices across the world offering tailored wealth management, banking, trust and tax services. Coutts is headquartered at 440 Strand, London with offices in other key international financial centres in Zurich, Geneva, Hong Kong, Singapore and Dubai. Coutts has a long history of championing the fashion industry and looks after the financial affairs of a number of famous clients connected with fashion. Over the years Coutts has established long standing links with the world of fashion and contemporary creative talent, supporting our continued commitment to celebrating British design excellence.

Corporate support for the V&A is more vital than ever. Please help us by acknowledging the exhibition sponsor Coutts.

Ballgowns: British Glamour Since 1950 is part of Fashion 2012. Fashion 2012 is the official fashion industry activity for the Olympic year. Created by the British Fashion Council (BFC), it is a central platform under which the industry is able to showcase and celebrate British fashion. It will provide a core focus for the industry and a schedule for the major fashion events and activities throughout London's Olympic year.

For further press information please contact Rebecca Ward for the V&A Press Office on 020 7613 3306 or email press@rebeccaward.co.uk. Alternatively contact Amelia MacGregor on 020 7942 2502 or email a.macgregor@vam.ac.uk.

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