



THE GOLDEN AGE OF COUTURE: PARIS AND LONDON 1947-1957

22 September 2007 – 6 January 2008

'A golden age seemed to have come again'. Christian Dior, 1948

The V&A's autumn exhibition, *The Golden Age of Couture: Paris and London 1947-1957*, will explore one of the most glamorous and remarkable decades in fashion history. Starting with the impact of Christian Dior's *New Look* after the Second World War, it will look at the work of Dior and his contemporaries during the period when haute couture was at its height.

Coinciding with the 60th anniversary of the launch of the *New Look* in 1947, the exhibition will show how Dior's ballerina-skirted dresses signalled the return to luxury and elegance after wartime austerity. It will examine the world of couture, highlighting the work of Dior, Cristóbal Balenciaga, Hubert de Givenchy and Pierre Balmain in Paris and their London counterparts Norman Hartnell and Hardy Amies. Other successful designers of the time - such as Fath, Griffe, Stiebel, and Michael of London - will feature in a broad survey of the decade.

More than 100 dresses will be on display including daywear, cocktail and evening dresses made for society and royalty alongside photographs by Cecil Beaton and Richard Avedon and original Hollywood and documentary film. There will be audio recordings, textiles and archival material such as bills of sales and letters. More than 95 per cent of the dresses are from the V&A's own fashion collections.

In a decade when Dior set the popular style, with couture's ripple effect influencing women's fashion at every level, the exhibition will trace how Dior created the most

successful fashion business model of the 20th century through advertising, licensing, perfume and publicity. It will reflect the sense of pride in Parisian couture that emerged in France after the war and examine the world of haute couture: designers, the history of couture, the houses, practices, clients, workshops and dissemination into popular fashion. A section will focus on handcraft and techniques, with undergarments and the insides of dresses on display.

The exhibition will show the distinct characteristics of the London couture houses, their strengths in tailoring and the formality of court and debutante gowns. Several dresses made for the Queen and Princess Margaret and other aristocratic clients by British designers will be on display.

The V&A has tracked down and purchased several couture gowns for the exhibition. One is a Givenchy blue cape (1957), identical to the one worn by Audrey Hepburn in *Funny Face*. Another is a Givenchy black wool dress suit (1955) worn by Leslie Caron. An exciting find is a red version of Dior's glamorous *Zemire* (1954), a full length skirt, bodice and long jacket discovered in a cellar near the Seine in Paris, and previously known only through archive photographs. Other purchases include a red silk Dior *Ecarlate* cocktail dress (Autumn/Winter 1955-56), a Givenchy two-piece print day dress (1956) and a rare Jacques Griffe halter-neck evening dress (1950). New research has been carried out on many of the dresses for the exhibition, and around 70 have been especially conserved.

Mark Jones, Director of the V&A, said: "The exhibition celebrates an important decade in fashion history which had a huge influence on the way women dressed and the way the fashion industry evolved. The V&A is lucky to have a superb collection of dresses from this period. This exhibition has been an exceptional opportunity to research the V&A collections and to tell the story of the couture industry after the war."

The exhibition will finish with a small selection of pieces of contemporary haute couture taken from the Autumn/Winter 2005/06 collection of designer John Galliano for Christian Dior in Paris, a collection which was an homage to the skills of Dior.

ENDS

Notes to Editors

- *The Golden Age of Couture: Paris and London 1947-1957* is at the V&A from Saturday 22 September 2007 – Sunday 6 January 2008
- The V&A is holding a conference alongside this exhibition on 15 and 16 November 2007
- For further information on the books accompanying the exhibition, please contact Claire Sawford on 020 7722 4114 or email cs@cspr.uk.net
- For further information on the Golden Age of Couture merchandise accompanying the exhibition, please contact Lee Kendall on 020 7942 2681 or email l.kendall@vam.ac.uk
- General enquiries 020 7942 2000 or visit www.vam.ac.uk

Ticket Information

- Tickets in person at the V&A – in advance or on day of visit – £9 (concessions: senior citizens £7; students, 12-17 year olds, ES-40 holders £5)
Joint ticket with *The Art of Lee Miller* £12, £9, £7
- For advance telephone and online bookings (booking fee applies) call 0870 906 3883 or visit www.vam.ac.uk

For further press information please contact Rebecca Ward for the V&A press office on 020 7613 3306 or email press@rebeccaward.co.uk or Olivia Colling in the V&A press office on 020 7942 2725 or email press.office@vam.ac.uk

A selection of high-resolution press images are available to download from www.image.net