

TREND SETTERS

Glass does a deep dive into five landmark exhibitions celebrating era-defining fashion and those who made it happen

Writer CHARLIE NEWMAN

Fashion designers and artists often interchange jobs or collaborate. During the lockdown, Christopher Kane leapt to paint, collage and glitter for respite, Henry Holland transferred his colourful joie de vivre from clothing onto ceramics; Nicole Farhi swapped fashion for sculpture back in 2012 and earlier this autumn Jonathan Anderson curated On Foot for the Offer Waterman gallery depicting a love story to London. And yet it's not often we see the art world jumping on the fashion band wagon. Until now, that is. London's most esteemed art establishments are bursting at the seams (pardon the pun) with fashion in all of its many guises. Try these on for size.



Colour Explosion room. Photo Andy Stagg. © the Design Museum.



Nensi Dojaka, Spring/Summer 2023 collection, Look 39. Photo imax



Harry Styles wearing SS Daley trousers in his "Golden" video, 2021. Photo Harry Lambert



Alexander McQueen: The Story of Taxi Driver room. Photo Andy Stagg. © the Design Museum.

Rebel: 30 Years of London Fashion at the Design Museum until February 11, 2024

London has long been the epicentre of creativity within the fashion world, for, as Erdem Moralioglu points out, "Where else do you have so many designers at the start of your career?" *Rebel* highlights the jarring symbiotic relationship between austerity and creativity, and the melting point of diversity that London celebrates.

When unemployment rates rose above 10 per cent in 1993, when Al-Qaeda attacked the Twin Towers and the Pentagon in 2001, when the US and UK joined forces to invade Iraq in 2003, and when the Conservative government removed maintenance grants for lower income students in 2012, creativity was simultaneously and somewhat jarringly blossoming.

During this period, MySpace, Facebook and Instagram were launched, transforming the media world as we know it. Through the 2000s, the Frieze art fair was founded, e-commerce crashed onto the scene changing the way we shop forever, and Greta Thunberg started her School Strike for Climate in 2018.

Sponsored by Alexander McQueen, *Rebel* celebrates London's up-and-coming designers who have distilled the ongoing dichotomy into their clothes, for it's in the friction that magic lies. Curators Sarah Mower and Rebecca Lewin guide us through university collections, designers' studios, club scenes, catwalks and an interactive back stage where you can try on avant garde make-up looks yourself. Of course, London's experimental fashion scene would be on its knees if it weren't for exhibitor collaborators, the British Fashion Council and its NEWGEN programme – "an initiative that supports the best emerging fashion design talent and aims to build global, high-end brands of the future". The BFC and NEWGEN's funding and support are evident in the countless success stories found in London and in the show: Mary Katrantzou, Ashish Gupta, Grace Wales Bonner, Christopher Kane, SS Daley, Roksanda Ilincic, Simone Rocha and many more.

It's impossible to ignore the ferocious energy beaming from the almost 100 looks housed within *Rebel*. Find inspiration on the mannequins and the museum-goers themselves, for London's fashion always rises from the streets.



Nicholas Daley, Spring/Summer 2020 collection Astro Black. Photo Piczo



Change-Makers room. Photo Andy Stagg. © the Design Museum.



The Show room. Photo Andy Stagg. © the Design Museum.

Photography credit: REBEL: 30 Years of London Fashion Sponsored by Alexander McQueen. Photo Andy Stagg. © the Design Museum.



Ahluwalia, Spring/Summer 2022 collection. © Creative Director Priya Ahluwalia. Photo Laurence Ellis



Archivio



Archivio



Portals



Eden



Ancora



Cabinet Of Wonders



Cabinet Of Wonders



Carousel

Gucci Cosmos at 180 Strand until December 31, 2023

180 Strand is never shy of a whopping production housed within its iconic Brutalist residence and *Gucci Cosmos* doesn't disappoint. Just a stone's throw from Somerset House, *Gucci Cosmos* encapsulates the past, present and future of the intoxicating Gucci legacy. Upon arrival, a Gucci-clad guide leads you into a lacquered lift that whispers on Guccio Gucci's upbringing in Florence and early job as a porter in London's nearby Savoy Hotel. Spinning through revolving doors and falling further into Gucci's high-octane rabbit hole, you are led through nine awe-inspiring rooms, spanning Gucci themes, including its iconic travel accompaniments, equestrian roots and the Garden of Eden (a motif established through the house's relationship with the Princess of Monaco). *Gucci Cosmos* is a heady cocktail, an assault on all of the senses, concocted and designed by celebrated British contemporary artist Es Devlin and curated by the prestigious Italian fashion theorist and critic, Maria Luisa Frisa.

Multidisciplinary artist Polina Zakharova and her Hard Feelings Studio partner Sveta Yermolayeva led the creative direction behind the show. Polina says that their greatest challenge was "to create a piece that spoke to the essence of time, to the beauty of today's Gucci, while giving a subtle nod to its illustrious past ... In this project, the dance between the timeless and the contemporary was where my creativity truly took flight."

Highlights from the show include the ever opening and closing Cabinet of Wonders and the hall of mirrors-esque Archivio, housing accessories and campaigns through the decades. Polina's highlight was the show's "celebration of female leadership, a facet still relatively uncommon in large-scale creative endeavours. Gucci's decision to invite a cadre of talented women ... underscored a shift in recognising and amplifying female voices in design."

It's no secret that the house's new Creative Director, Sabato De Sarno, has large shoes to fill after Alessandro Michele's dazzling eight-year tenure, but this show consolidates Sarno's arrival. Embossed onto a blood red wall before you leave are Sabato's final words: "It's a story about being alive. And I want all of you with me." Whether you're an original fan, a Tom Ford, Frida Giannini, Alessandro or Sabato follower, the show must go on.



Polina Zakharova

Gabrielle Chanel Fashion Manifesto at the Victoria and Albert Museum until February 25, 2024

The V&A's royal roots is the perfect home for the sold-out retrospective of fashion's grande dame, Gabrielle 'Coco' Chanel. Re-imagined from the Palais Galliera's previous show, *Fashion Manifesto* guides us through Chanel's adventurous life, from her challenging upbringing in a 12th century Cistercian abbey, the opening of her first Parisian millinery boutique in 1910, her perseverance throughout both world wars (and great friendship with Sir Winston Churchill), all the way up to her final celebrated collection in 1971.

With more than 200 looks on show, *Fashion Manifesto* conveys Chanel's vim and vigour. When the majority of women were banished to the home, Chanel was carving out a new narrative for women across the globe, freeing the shackles and the restrictive clothing that went with them. While her design contemporary Christian Dior was fastening women into impossible contortions with his New Look, Chanel was lowering waistlines and loosening fits, evidence of what women really wanted to wear. She was also the first female designer to venture into perfume and it's still her wildest success to date – Chanel No.5 is consistently the highest selling perfume in the world, famously worn by the late Queen Elizabeth II, Marilyn Monroe and probably by the matriarch of your own family, too.

"Chanel is an unreliable narrator," says curator Connie Karol Burkes, "She mythologised much of her past, obscuring certain elements and fabricating others." Chanel biographer and esteemed fashion editor, Justine Picardie, explains, "Chanel's aesthetic may be black and white, but her life is filled with shades of grey." For such a recognisable figure, her mystique remains to this day. Find glimpses of the truth and revel in her mastery of modernity at the V&A.



Gabrielle Chanel, 31 rue Cambon, Paris, 1937 Photo: Roger Schall/ Condé Nast/Shutterstock



Gabrielle Chanel, 31 rue Cambon, Paris, 1937 Photo: Roger Schall/ Condé Nast/Shutterstock





Saul Nash AW23 'Ritual' BTS Shot by Ollie Trenchard



Nicholas Daley working on his commission for The Missing Thread: Untold Stories of Black British Fashion at his Somerset House studio. Photo by Anne Tetzlaff



Christine Checinska's Empire Waistcoat, 2002, The Morgan Stanley Exhibition - The Missing Thread. PA, David Parry



Vanley Burke, Young Men on See-Saw, Handsworth Park, Birmingham, 1984 © Vanley Burke



Eileen Perrier's Untitled, Afro Hair and Beauty Show, The Morgan Stanley Exhibition - The Missing Thread. PA, David Parry



Eileen Perrier, Untitled 1, Afro Hair and Beauty 1998 © Eileen Perrier

The Missing Thread: Untold Stories of Black British Fashion at Somerset House until January 7, 2024

Tucked into the East Wing galleries of Somerset House lies an important and long overdue exhibition devoted to Black creativity and its enduring influence on the fashion industry, politics, music and art. A Morgan Stanley exhibition curated by Andrew Ibi, Jason Jules and Harris Elliot of the Black Orientated Legacy Development Agency (BOLD), *The Missing Thread* guides you through four themes – home, tailoring, performance and nightlife, each room pulsing with vibrancy, urgency and edge. Ibi explains, "*The Missing Thread* is a vehicle to examine past, present and future – to contextualise Black fashion culture with authority. Retrospective acknowledgement and recognition of Black cultural contribution is key to this exhibition."

Elliot kicks off the show with a new commission, *Fragile House*, a home-like structure made of steel and overlain with colourful measuring tape, nodding to the insecurity felt by Caribbean "arrivants" in the UK. The tailoring chapter emits an overwhelming sense of strength, for suits are worn as armour and used as a tool for self-expression, challenging the traditional connotations that come with the suit. We see the marriage of craftsmanship and boundary-pushing in Savile Row tailor Oswald Boateng's designs during his tenure as Givenchy's creative director in the early 2000s, and third generation tailor Charlie Allen's 2009 football kit. We also witness the dazzling power of couturier Bruce Oldfield's designs for Princess Diana, whose relationship first began after working together at Barnado's. The royal link continues to this day, with Queen Camilla commissioning Oldfield for her coronation gown earlier this year. Rotimi Fani-Kayode's powerful portraiture of gay Black men in 1980s south London further casts a light on a different perspective of Black masculinity.

The nightlife rooms effuse a sense of playfulness and freedom where you'll find pulsing speakers, iconic music videos and a nail salon set among a burgeoning street style, all celebrating the power and ritual of dressing up. The show climaxes in the final room where the late great Joe Casely-Hayford's extensive four-decade-long archival collections are showcased, including a look worn by U2's Bono.

The fashion industry's championing of diversity unquestionably still has a long way to go, but *The Missing Thread* puts Black creatives from the 1970s onwards onto the praised stage they much deserve. Look on in rapture.



Bianca Saunders 'YELLOW' SS20 campaign. Shot and Styled by Ronan McKenzie



Saul Nash working on his commission for The Missing Thread: Untold Stories of Black British Fashion at his Somerset House studio. Photo by Anne Tetzlaff



Pieces from Joe Casely-Hayford OBE's archive, The Morgan Stanley Exhibition - The Missing Thread. PA, David Parry



12. Bianca Saunders' new commission on view at The Morgan Stanley Exhibition - The Missing Thread. PA, David Parry

Fashion City: How Jewish Londoners shaped globe style at The Museum of London Docklands until April 14, 2024

Between 1881-1914 and 1933-1939, thousands of Jews fled to Britain to escape persecution. Due to being banned from professions like law and medicine in 16th and 17th century Britain, many Jews worked in banking, commerce and the garment trade. *Fashion City* states, "Of the around 100,000 Jewish migrants who came to London between 1881 and 1914, an estimated 60 per cent found employment in the clothing or accessories trades."

From shoe repair and tailoring to umbrella-making and couture, there isn't a stylish stone left unturned in *Fashion City*. Generational Jewish companies (some of whose founders were saved and transported on the Kindertransport during World War II) are still thriving and transforming the English high street today, include Moss Bros, Marks & Spencer (founded by Jewish migrant Michael Marks in 1884 from his stall in Leeds' Kirkgate market) and Angels Costumes in Covent Garden, the oldest supplier of costumes in the world, founded by German tailor Daniel Angel.

Prior to the opening of Oxford Circus tube station that links the East with the West End, Spitalfields had long been the heart of migrant communities. Before the Jews it was the Huguenots fleeing persecution in 1600s France, later came the Bangladeshis in search of a better life. From the 1940s onwards Turkish, Greek, Cypriot and Caribbean migrants also found a home and opportunity in London's thriving fashion industry.

Among the classic designs on display at *Fashion City*, you'll find David Sassoon's ebullient and elegant outfits for Princess Diana and Michael Fish's (aka Mr Fish) flamboyant pieces worn by countless stars throughout the '70s and '80s, including Michael Caine, Muhammad Ali, Pablo Picasso, the Beatles, Sammy Davis Junior, Mick Jagger, David Bowie and Jimi Hendrix.

When persecution is rife across the world, there is no more pressing time to display a minority group's strength, sense of community and perspective. Fashion historian and curator Lucie White and design historian Bethan Bide have together expertly crafted a deeply moving show that reminds us to think "about who we credit with building a city's reputation". At the end of the show you are faced with a wall covered in countless names and a book underneath to add your own personal generational story. White and Bide "wanted visitors to have an outlet" after the emotional journey they have just embarked on, for we are all "learning from it too".



Schneiders Garment Factory, Stepney, c. 1917 © Museum of London



Wedding dress made by Neymar, 1971-2 © Museum of London



Kipper tie designed by Mr Fish, c. 1968-9 © Museum of London



Conservators preparing for Fashion City exhibition at Museum of London Docklands © Museum of London



Fashion City West End © Museum of London



Fashion City East End © Museum of London