



Press Release

***Cristóbal Balenciaga: A Timeless Legacy.
COLLECTION III — a new exhibition on the
collection at the Cristóbal Balenciaga Museum***

**The exhibition offers a new insight into the Cristóbal
Balenciaga Foundation collection**

**62 (sixty-two) models and a selection of films and infographics
are featured in this new interpretation of the collection**

**The show, which opens tomorrow, has been organised in
association with the Balenciaga house**

Getaria, 25 April 2013. The new exhibition on the collection explores the hallmarks of Cristóbal Balenciaga's work, his creative evolution and the inestimable value of his contributions to sewing techniques. Commissioned by Miren Arzalluz, the curator and head of collections at the Cristóbal Balenciaga Museum, the show has been organised in association with the Balenciaga house.

Due to the strict safety and conservation conditions required to exhibit the collection properly, the models on display are carefully rotated. This also helps to make the presentation of the collection more dynamic, thus avoiding the somewhat static effect that often characterises permanent exhibitions. The new selection will be on display until spring 2014 and features 62 (sixty-two) models, a selection of films about the great couturier-creator at work at the *maison*, and nine infographics that show how some of the iconic models were made and demonstrate Cristóbal Balenciaga's technical expertise.

New Exhibition Discourse

Cristóbal Balenciaga: A Timeless Legacy. COLLECTION III aims to provide visitors with an insight into the principal characteristics of Cristóbal Balenciaga's work and demonstrate his crucial contribution to the history of fashion and design. Comprising three chronologically arranged rooms, the show examines the career of the Getaria-born couturier, from his beginnings in San Sebastian to his

reign in Paris. It concludes with an analysis of his extraordinary technical legacy, which to this day continues to influence the work of the leading contemporary creators.

The exhibition discourse has changed in relation to the previous show and offers visitors an enhanced experience and more meaningful insight into the contents. In addition to exploring the hallmarks of Cristóbal Balenciaga's work, the new approach also analyses the principal underlying artistic and aesthetic influences, as well as the couturier's technical and artistic contributions to the history of fashion.

The result is a more coherent and comprehensive view of the evolution of Cristóbal Balenciaga's work and a unique perspective on the new collection on display.

Iconic Models

The collection features a number of iconic models in terms of their chronological coherence and provenance. For example, there is a dress from 1925 (very few items from this period have survived, and all of them belong to the museum's collection) and four dresses on loan from the Archives Balenciaga dating from the couturier's early years in Paris (1937-1941).

The exhibition also features some of his innovative creations from the 1950s. The tunic dress, sack line and "baby doll" dress—all milestones in the history of western fashion—reflect Balenciaga's indisputable supremacy. The show ends with his gradual evolution towards a constructive minimalism that reached its pinnacle in the final collections of 1967 and 1968.

Another extraordinary merit of the collection is the provenance of the pieces. Eminent celebrities of the 20th century, including Rachel L. Mellon, Patricia López Wilshaw, Madeline Dittenhofer, Elisabeth Horcher, Meye Allende, Margarita Mendivil, and Sonsoles Díez de Rivera, wore some of the models on display in the new exhibition, while other donations have come from illustrious figures such as Hubert de Givenchy, the Foundation's chairman.

Strategic Collaborations

The *maison* Balenciaga

The Museum has an open channel of collaboration with the archives belonging to the *maison* Balenciaga in Paris, whereby both institutions work hand-in-hand to promote, disseminate and reinforce the impact and importance of the life and work of the genius couturier in artistic creation in general and the world of fashion and haute couture in particular.

The Balenciaga house has collaborated on this occasion by loaning eight models from its archives. Four will be shown now and the other four later. This is for reasons of conservation, as one of the pieces is currently being restored by

the Museum's Conservation and Restoration Department.

Nardín Grant

The company Nardín, based in Zumaia (Basque Country), has collaborated with the Museum since its inauguration by providing an annual conservation grant. The Nardín Grant covers the costs of restoring a key piece in the collection owned by the Cristóbal Balenciaga Foundation. The model chosen on this occasion is an evening dress from 1958, worn by Madeline Dittenhofer.

The Rooms and Their Contents

Room1

From the Early Days to Consolidation

Balenciaga opened his first haute couture atelier in 1917, when he was just 22 years old. This marked the beginning of an intense period during which he opened houses in San Sebastian, Madrid and Barcelona before moving to Paris in 1936. His first Parisian collection in August 1937 met with immediate and overwhelming success. After 20 years working as a couturier in San Sebastian, he was a well-established creator, poised to conquer the world of international haute couture.

Balenciaga's creations made an immediate impact. As well as their simplicity and impeccable cut, the daring colour combinations and traditional inspirations behind his models were regarded as both novel and exotic by the discerning Parisian public. In his collections of the late 1930s and the following decade, Balenciaga introduced some of the elements, influences and devices that would become hallmarks of his work until the end of his career. Lavish embroidery and the use of historicist details are already evident in his creations from this period.

Highlights from this period:

Afternoon dress in black gauze and silk satin. Cristóbal Balenciaga, San Sebastian. Ca. 1925

The front has a plunging V-neck with a dinner-jacket turndown collar, and is decorated with oriental-style floral motifs embroidered with silk thread in the same colour.

The dress is embroidered with floral motifs and decorated with long fringes that evoke the Manila shawls that were the height of fashion in the 1920s. The billowing volume at the back recalls the fall of the traditional Japanese kimono as interpreted by the great fashion innovators of the early 20th century, such as Paul Poiret. These two influences continued to inspire Balenciaga's creations until he retired in 1968.

**Evening ensemble comprising bodice and skirt in aquamarine silk satin with silk thread embroidery.
Balenciaga Paris, 1939.**

The focal point of the ensemble is the large turndown collar on the bodice, which is in the style of a mantelet. The model is reminiscent of the courtesan style of the 18th and 19th centuries that Balenciaga knew so well.

The couturier's arrival in Paris coincided with a marked tendency among the great creators of the day to reinvent historical models. Around the same time, a major exhibition organised in 1939 by the League of Nations in Geneva showcased the work of the grand masters of Spanish painting with selected works rescued from the Prado Museum during the Spanish Civil War. The show became the international cultural event of the year. All of this provided Balenciaga with the opportunity to demonstrate his particular interpretation of fashion, forged by his own cultural and aesthetic baggage.

**Short jacket in black silk velvet, decorated with jet black beads and fringes.
Balenciaga Paris, 1946.**

This piece is an elegant interpretation of the influence of traditional Spanish clothing. In specific items of this type of clothing, Balenciaga found a strength and exotic quality that delighted the international public. These costumes were inspired in turn by the outfits of 18th-century *majos*, which the couturier knew well from Goya's genre paintings of contemporary customs. In addition to short "bullfighter"-style jackets, and in the 1940s in particular, he frequently used braids and lace, or offered an unusual take on the traditional mantilla.

**Room2
Balenciaga Reigns Supreme**

The 1950s and 60s were the golden age of Cristóbal Balenciaga. After the resounding successes of the Forties, Balenciaga felt he had the authority and recognition to embark on a new period of extraordinary experiments with form and aesthetics, which were ultimately translated into some of the landmark creations in the history of western fashion.

The dresses on display in this room showcase the hallmarks that characterised Balenciaga's designs during this time. His predilection for adornment is plainly evident in the use of exquisite embroidery inspired by various sources, consistently balanced by silhouettes with extremely simple forms. Balenciaga's preoccupation with silhouettes commenced in the late 1940s and gave rise to his innovative creations of the 50s: from the tunic dress and sack line to the "baby doll" dress. In all of these creations, Balenciaga opted for fluid lines that caressed rather than constrained the body, thus guaranteeing comfort and freedom of movement for the user. His experiments with form culminated in the 1960s, with the abstraction of the female body, which was either blurred by large floral or geometric prints, or enveloped in unprecedented volumes. Meanwhile, his profound knowledge of materials and his collaboration with the Swiss manufacturer Gustav Zumsteg in the creation of new fabrics with

sculptural qualities, such as gazar, allowed him to develop truly extraordinary forms.

Themes highlighted in this itinerary:

Embroidery

Cristóbal Balenciaga covered many of his most stunning creations with exquisitely embroidered motifs, the work of the finest craftsmen in Paris. Historic masters of embroidery such as Lesage, Mesrine and Rébé habitually supplied the Balenciaga house.

Balenciaga Paris, 1960.

Déshabillé in yellow faille with floral-motif embroidery in purple chenille thread.

Evening dress in lilac silk satin with floral-motif embroidery in lilac, yellow and black.

Balenciaga Paris, 1960.

The Tunic

Balenciaga was particularly fond of this classic silhouette, which embodied the ideal of timeless, enduring beauty that he sought in his creations. He interpreted the tunic in many different ways, playing with colour and ornament to counteract the formal simplicity of this style.

Tunic dress in black silk satin and machine-made tulle in the same colour, embroidered with sequins and glass-paste beads.

EISA Madrid, 1964.

Tunic dress in silk crepe with a white floral print on a fuchsia background.

EISA Madrid, 1968.

The Sack Silhouette

Balenciaga first presented the sack silhouette in his 1957 winter collection. After introducing the semi-fitted line in 1951, he had gained a reputation for his innovative alternatives to the cinched-waist New Look, in which he sought to provide women with a more natural beauty and greater freedom of movement. The sack dress is characterised by its fluid lines, curved at the back, which caress rather than constrain the body.

Balenciaga Paris, 1965.

Cocktail dress in white silk with an abstract print in fuchsia.

Balenciaga Paris, 1966.

Cocktail dress in black silk crepe.

Prints

Balenciaga returned to printed fabrics time and time again, especially for his day and cocktail models. Conceived by the finest textile designers of the day and produced by the most celebrated manufacturers in Europe, the prints used

by Balenciaga were characterised by large graphic motifs and semi-abstract floral designs.

EISA San Sebastian, 1959.

Cocktail ensemble comprising dress and jacket in black and white damask.

Balenciaga Paris, 1965.

Cocktail ensemble in white silk with a black geometric print.

Lace

Lace was one of Balenciaga's favourite fabrics. Passionate about historical fashions, he used lace to reinvent some of the most sumptuous styles from bygone eras, and in his formal innovations it allowed him to suggest the female body without flaunting it.

EISA Madrid, 1961.

Cocktail dress in purple lace.

Balenciaga Paris, 1958.

Evening dress in silk satin and embroidered machine-made tulle, both in magenta.

Volume

The extraordinary volumes created by Balenciaga in some of his designs from the 1950s and 60s are one of the hallmarks of his legacy. His creations acquired a certain autonomy with regard to the body they covered, resembling a structure or architectural construction rather than a dress. Due to this particular vision of sewing, Balenciaga came to be known as the “architect of haute couture”.

Balenciaga Paris, 1958.

Evening dress in black silk satin and lace, with pink taffeta frills.

Dress restored courtesy of the Nardín conservation grant.

Balenciaga Paris, 1966.

Evening dress in ecru gazar.

Room3

The Balenciaga Technique: The Legacy

Cristóbal Balenciaga was admired and respected in his lifetime, achieving the status of a cult couturier. His command of technique, his consistency and his vision earned him the recognition of his most discerning colleagues, while the enduring relevance of his legacy continues to impress and inspire 21st-century creators.

From his formative years to the end of his career, Cristóbal Balenciaga dedicated himself with perseverance and diligence to developing a technique so perfect that it has yet to be surpassed. Profoundly influenced by the revolutionary sartorial innovations of the 1920s and 30s, Balenciaga gradually evolved towards a constructive minimalism that reached its pinnacle in the final

collections of 1967 and 1968. In addition to his superior command of technique, Balenciaga never stopped experimenting with textiles or searching for aesthetic balance and harmony, guided consistently by his own concept of elegance as the synthesis of simplicity and audacity. Carefully chosen and minutely examined fabrics gave form to his refined creations, inspired by various historical and cultural sources.

Coco Chanel described Balenciaga as the only authentic *couturier*, because, unlike his contemporaries, he was capable of designing, cutting out, assembling and sewing a dress from start to finish. Christian Dior called him "the master of us all", and Hubert de Givenchy still refers to him as the "architect of haute couture". His enduring legacy demonstrates that these testimonies remain as valid today as when they were first pronounced.

Highlights from this period:

**Cocktail dress in white wild silk, with a floral print in different shades of green.
EISA Madrid, 1961.**

The front of the dress has a cut at the waistline, straight at the front and curved at the sides. However, the focal point of the dress is the voluminous drape at the back.

Balenciaga borrowed different elements from bygone fashions to achieve this effect at the back. In this case, the drape on the back of the dress recalls the darts characteristically found in the housecoat or *robe à la française* that dominated women's fashion in 18th-century Europe.

**Straight day coat in orange rayon twill, with a jewel neckline and turndown collar.
EISA Madrid, 1964.**

The focal points are the double row of buttons at the front and the precise cut below the chest. The vertical seams at the front conceal the pockets, a device frequently found in Balenciaga's coats. At the back, it has a strap with two buttons and a slit in the hem.

The sleeves, which were an obsession with the couturier, are tight-fitting and cut with rigorous precision, to guarantee total freedom of movement to the wearer. Balenciaga commonly used these and kimono sleeves in his coat designs. In the case of the kimono sleeve, he would adapt it to the shape of the arm by inserting a triangular piece in the underarm area.

**Yellow wool cape with mandarin collar and yoke at both front and back.
Balenciaga Paris, 1967.**

This model belongs to the last collection Balenciaga presented in Paris in August 1967, and clearly illustrates the minimalist, architectural quality that his creations

acquired at the end of his career.

The cape is close-fitting and has no apertures for the arms, which are held straight inside the garment. It fastens with one button at the neck and another at the yoke. It was originally conceived to be worn over a tartan suit. Balenciaga had a marked taste for capes and mantelets, which he used to transform the appearance of his designs.

This exhibition, which opens to the public on 26 April, will be replaced with new pieces from the foundation collection in spring 2014.

The Museum and the Collection: The Museum opened on 7 June 2011.

The Cristóbal Balenciaga Foundation boasts a unique collection —the only one of its kind in the world— of the brilliant couturier-designer's work. Comprising more than 1,400 pieces and still growing, the collection is renowned for its rich diversity in terms of both the items on display and the time period covered, which ranges from Balenciaga's earliest creations to his final ones, making it complete, coherent and truly world-class.

Further information:

Zuriñe Abasolo

@ zurine.abasolo@fbalenciaga.com

Tel.: +34 664512483 / +34 943 004 77