

Tom Kublin for Balenciaga

An Unusual Collaboration

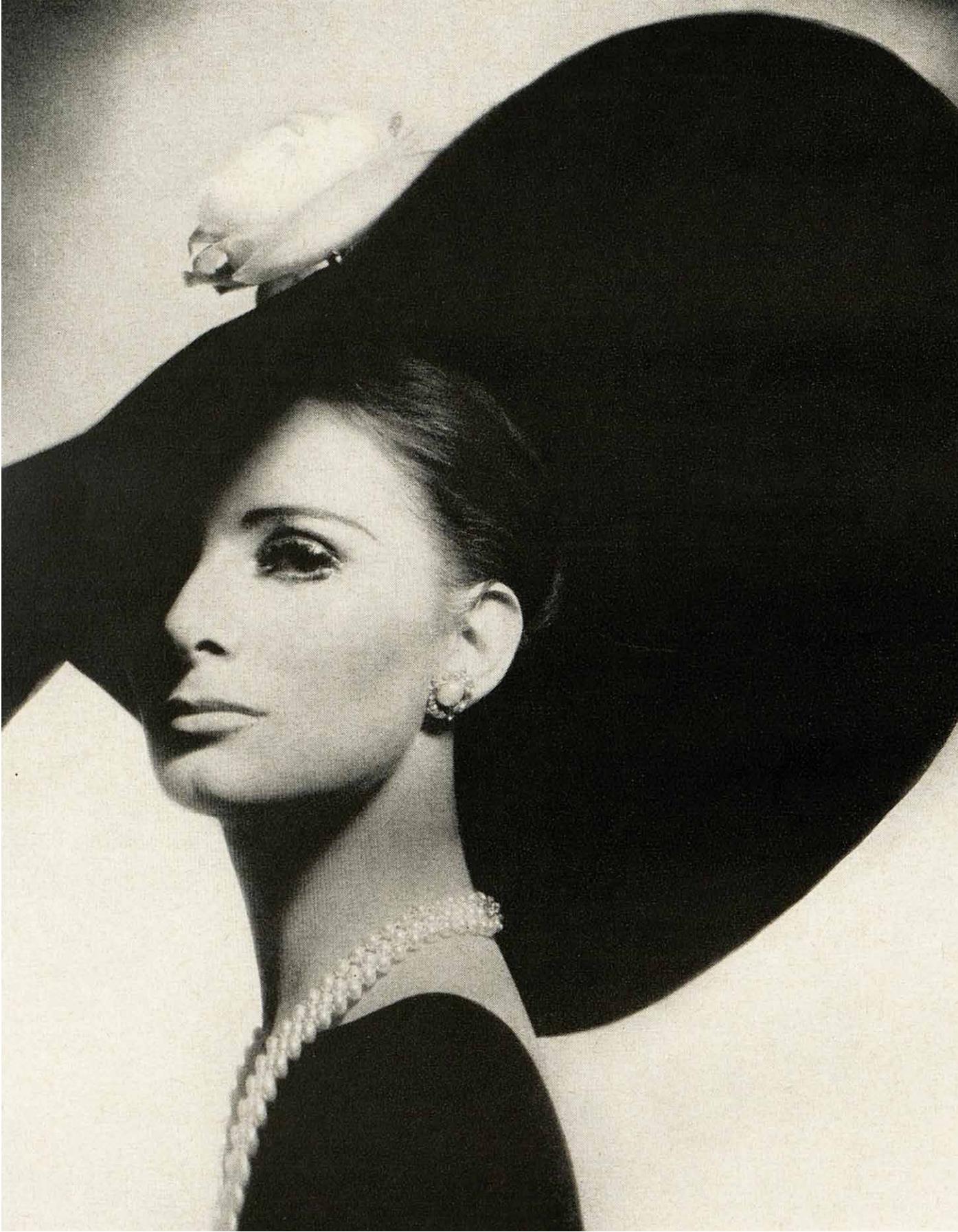
CRISTÓBAL BALENCIAGA MUSEOA

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Tom Kublin for Balenciaga. An Unusual Collaboration

Katinka wearing a Balenciaga hat. *Harper's Bazaar* June 1965



Tom Kublin had a short but intense professional life in fashion photography. At the end of World War II, given the precarious situation generated by the Soviet invasion of Hungary, the country of his birth, Kublin fled to Zurich, where he opened a photographic studio. The context of this Swiss city, with its historical ties to the textile industry, led to his connection with the Abraham silk company, for which he worked during more than two decades. This association with Abraham, supplier of the leading haute couture maisons, prompted his meeting with Cristóbal Balenciaga in the mid-1950s.

In those years, photographic art had started to depict fashion in the pages of magazines from angles and compositions that would on occasions detract from the importance of the art of fashion design, in other words, from its innovative and technical capacity. In this context, working for a number of prestigious fashion publications, Tom Kublin took pictures of Balenciaga's designs that plainly displayed the designer's taste and expertise.

Furthermore, as per the norm in the Parisian haute couture sector, the Balenciaga maison would use photographs to document the designs in their collections to protect their copyright. Tom Kublin was also commissioned by the designer to take this type of pictures. As from the early 1960s, this documenting work increased to include filming of Balenciaga's collections. Kublin was therefore able to improve his filming technique and experiment with ways of portraying Balenciaga's fashion, in movement, on the screen. At the time of his death, his legacy included the filming of an advert for Balenciaga's perfume *Le Dix*.

The Cristóbal Balenciaga Museum presents
Tom Kublin for Balenciaga. An Unusual Collaboration,
an exhibition exploring and celebrating the professional
relationship between Cristóbal Balenciaga
(Getaria, 1895–Valencia, 1972) and photographer
Tom Kublin (Zalaszentgrot 1924–Locarno 1966).

THE EXHIBITION

The exhibition, with more than 100 photographs and 5 film excerpts, presents a selection of Kublin's extensive production on the subject of Balenciaga, from all of these perspectives. It includes photographs of designs made in Abraham silk on commission by the Swiss maison, artistic photographs published by *Harper's Bazaar*, *Jardin des Modes* and *Town & Country*, and his work created internally for the Balenciaga maison. It also includes photographs on show for the first time, belonging to the collection of the photographer's daughter, Maria Kublin.

The show, curated by Ana Balda and Maria Kublin, enjoys the collaboration of the Balenciaga Archives in Paris, the Swiss National Museum and the Zurich Museum of Design. With this exhibition, the Cristóbal Balenciaga Museum highlights the importance of Tom Kublin's documentary and artistic work for Balenciaga, as well as the importance of his photographic and film work in creating the image of the Balenciaga brand.

Balenciaga. 1958



ZURICH AND PARIS

Tom Kublin's career as a fashion photographer began after the Second World War, at a time when Zurich produced the luxury fabrics that supplied French haute couture. He opened his first studio in Zurich and his second in Paris in 1951. In all his body work, his photographs of Balenciaga's creations stand out. This room contains a collection of photographs of the couturier's designs, made with Abraham's Swiss silks, which were commissioned by the company to document their contribution to Parisian haute couture.

Also on display are photographs published in the press which, from 1956 onwards, followed an unusual pattern. Contrary to the usual practice, which consisted of fashion editors selecting the designs from the collections they wanted to publish as well as the photographers who were to do the shoot, Balenciaga provided, except in exceptional cases, photographs of the designs he was interested in publicising. Tom Kublin was commissioned to take these photographs.

Balenciaga design made with Abraham silk. 1961



© Archives Balenciaga, Paris



Balenciaga. 1958

DOCUMENTING BALENCIAGA

Fashion piracy was already a concern for couturiers in the early 20th century, but by the mid-20th century the problem had worsened, especially in the United States, and it seriously affected Balenciaga. In order to protect his copyright, the couturier kept photographs of his designs for documentary purposes. Tom Kublin took such photographs of Balenciaga's collections from 1955 onwards. In the photos, the models pose from the front, back and sometimes profile, holding the number of the design in their hands. In this way the details of each creation were recorded and, if necessary, Balenciaga's authorship could be demonstrated.

Tom Kublin also took artistic photographs of the designs that Balenciaga wanted to share with the press. These were usually the designs that he had sold with a license for reproduction, and which were to be on sale in various luxury establishments. He was at once promoting his licence buyers, while protecting his most exclusive designs from being pirated.

Balenciaga design made with Abraham silk. 1958





PRODUCING BALENCIAGA "FASHION FILMS"

Tom Kublin began filming Balenciaga presentations, again for documentary purposes, in 1960. The first films were shot in black and white and with a static camera. From the 1965 winter collection onwards, he began to edit them and included an introduction with close-ups of hats and background music, even though Balenciaga presentations were carried out in silence. His last films for the House, now available in colour, introduced choreography for several models in the same sequence; they were no longer strictly archival and began to resemble advertisements.

In the mid-1960s, the crisis in the haute couture sector worsened. Balenciaga, who was also affected by the crisis and was beginning to suffer from the lack of licence buyers for his fashion shows, asked Kublin to produce these last edited versions. In doing so he had what he wanted to show in his collections at his disposal, and could make this available to potential buyers without them needing to travel to Paris.

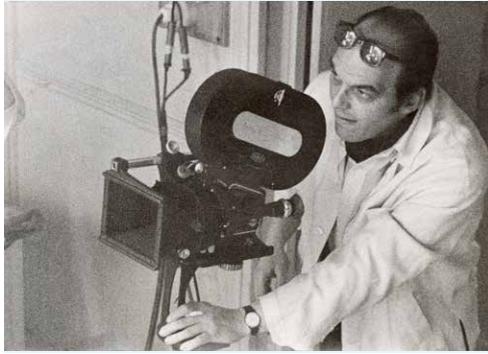
The 1960s was also the decade of the emergence of fashion brand's perfume and accessories advertisements on television, as well as of programmes that dealt with trends. In this context, Tom Kublin made the advertisement for Balenciaga's *Le Dix* perfume, which is shown in this room.

Additionally, another valuable short film on display is of Kublin filming Cristóbal Balenciaga, in which the couturier can be seen working on the final touches to his 1966 summer collection before its presentation.

Tom Kublin's films for Balenciaga allowed him to grow as a fashion filmmaker, and to position himself as an expert in the field. At the time of his death, he was filming a documentary for American television which, sadly, never came to fruition.

The image that has come to us from the Balenciaga brand is due, in large part, to the production of Tom Kublin

Maria Kublin



1924

He is born on 4th March in Zalaszentgrot (Hungary) into a middle-class family.

1937

At the age of thirteen, he tells his parents that he wants to become a photographer. He manages to challenge their initial disapproval with his insistence and interest.

1944-45

He serves in the Hungarian army as a photographer. At the end of the war, he is commissioned to photograph the damage caused by Soviet bombing raids in Budapest.

1946

He moves to Zurich where he opens a photography studio specialising in advertising. He discovers the world of fashion at a Fath fashion show in Saint Moritz.

1951-52

He opens another studio in Paris, and then joins forces with another photographer, surnamed Matter, in Zurich. The year of the first fashion reports signed Matter-Kublin are published in in Annabelle and Textile Suisses.

1952

First photographs advertising Hermès signed by him alone.

1953

He meets Gustav Zumsteg, managing director for Europe of the Zurich-based silk company Abraham & Cie. He begins to take photographs for this fabric company, supplier to Parisian haute couture houses.

1953

First photographs for the French magazine *Jardin des Modes*.

1954

First reports for *Harper's Bazaar*. First photographs of Balenciaga designs published in the September issue of the British edition.

1954-55

He begins photographing for the house of Balenciaga and establishes a friendship with the couturier. Balenciaga, Zumsteg and Kublin were part of the Maeght couple's inner circle as representatives of avant-garde artists.

1960

He begins filming Balenciaga's collections.

1962-64

He hires Moritz de Halden, the future filmmaker and director of the Berlinale and the Venice Film Festival, as his assistant.

1963

He meets model Katinka Bleeker, who would become his muse.

1965

He hires Paolo Barbieri, a future renowned fashion photographer, as his assistant. He embarks on a documentary project on fashion for American television.

1966

He suddenly dies of a stroke in Lucerne on 30th May. Abraham & Cie. and Balenciaga hire his brother Jean to continue Tom's production at both houses Abraham et Cie.

Harper's Bazaar. July 1964



The Cristóbal Balenciaga Museum, inaugurated on 7 June 2011, is located in Getaria, the couturier's birthplace and the scene of his formative years and professional maturity, essential for understanding his contribution to the world of fashion.

In order to share Balenciaga's life and works, his relevance in the history of fashion and design and the contemporary nature of his legacy, the museum holds a unique collection. Its vast nature (over 3,000 pieces in a collection that only continues to grow, thanks to loans and donations) and its formal, chronological extension (including, for example, the designer's earliest models conserved) make it one of the most complete, coherent and interesting collections in existence today.

Another of the collections' exceptional values is the origin of the pieces. Balenciaga's great international clients were prominent social figures from the mid-20th century, such as Mona Von Bismarck, Bunny Mellon, Patricia López Wilshaw, Barbara Hutton, Princess Rethy, Grace Kelly and Madame Bricard, who wore some of the models held in the Archive.

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INFORMATION

Zuriñe Abasolo Izarra
Responsable de Comunicación

zurine.abasolo@fbalenciaga.com

T +34 943 004 777

M +34 647 410 775

Aldamar Parkea 6
20808 Getaria
T +34 943 008 840
info@crislobalbalenciagamuseoa.com
www.crislobalbalenciagamuseoa.com

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