

Josep Font

Beauty and Restlessness

Exhibition

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CRISTÓBAL BALENCIAGA MUSEOA

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“Behind beauty, there is always restlessness” is the motto that accompanied Josep Font’s entire career. Indeed beauty, in all its splendour, often produces restlessness, even uneasiness. But this may be precisely what drove the designer’s relentless pursuit of it.

He is widely acknowledged as one of the most personal and talented Spanish designers from the period around the turn of the millennium.

He received the National Fashion Design Award from the Ministry of Culture in 2014, adding to an already long list of Spanish and international accolades.

Font studied Architecture at the Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya and went on eventually to graduate with a degree in Fashion Design from the Escola de Disseny i Moda Felicidad Duce in Barcelona.

An introvert by nature and currently disengaged from the world of high fashion, he projects an unattainable and enigmatic image, to which his atypical career trajectory undoubtedly contributed.

At its peak, when Font was regularly presenting collections at Paris’s Haute Couture Week, his eponymous brand was taken over. After seven years of ongoing success at Delpozo — the brand he remodelled and relaunched on the international stage with enormous fanfare — he retired without giving a single interview and has lived in seclusion ever since, a choice which has turned him into a figure of legend.

Produced by the Cristóbal Balenciaga Museum and curated by the director of the Fundació Antoni de Montpalau, Josep Casamartina i Parassols, in close collaboration with the designer, the exhibition *Josep Font. Beauty and Restlessness* is the first ever retrospective on the Catalan designer. As befits the venue, it also seeks to shine a light on the many parallels between the Catalan designer and the Getaria native and master couturier, Cristóbal Balenciaga.

FW 2015, *Vibrant paintings of Rhys Lee, and Andrey Remnev*
contemporary reimaginings of Pre-Raphaelite works, New York
Private collection



The exhibition takes visitors on an aesthetic journey through Josep Font's work from the first two decades of the twenty-first century and includes some of his best work from the Josep Font haute couture and *prêt-à-porter* collections presented in Barcelona, Tokyo, Madrid, and Paris, and from the collections he designed for Delpozo and presented in New York and London.

Josep Font. Beauty and Restlessness comprises a total of 54 garments, featuring coats, daywear, and cocktail, evening and bridal gowns from the Antoni de Montpalau foundation — which owns the largest collection of items by the Catalan designer — and from several private Spanish and North American collections.

The exhibition also features accessories by the two brands, including shoes, perfumes and millinery, and a selection of iconic photographs by Joseph Hunwick, Javier Biosca and Ernesto Artillo, as well as an interview Font gave at London's Victoria & Albert Museum.

Directed by Josep Casamartina i Parassols with the assistance of Ismael Núñez Muñoz, the Fundació Antoni de Montpalau boasts a collection of over 17,500 items of clothing and is considered one of the most important collections of this type in Spain. For the last few years, the foundation has been documenting and compiling the work of Josep Font, with a particular focus on the period 1987 to 2011, and has collected over 200 items so far, making it the most comprehensive collection of the Catalan designer's work to date. "The project, which was carried out in close collaboration with Font and others who worked with him, provided the seed for the exhibition series at the Cristóbal Balenciaga Museum," explained Casamartina.

Beauty, in all its splendour, undoubtedly aroused a sense of restlessness and unease in Font, which may well be what drove his ceaseless quest to achieve it. His work is renowned for its highly architectural construction, masterful use of volume, and intricate ornamentation. He is also known for his relentless pursuit of a very personal and constantly evolving feminine ideal that was characteristically ethereal, refined, elegant and highly sensitive, but never showy or provocative.

The designer believes this exhibition is important in order to appreciate his work more fully: "Lots of people have seen Delpozo clothing in fashion shows or on celebrities. The really interesting thing is to see how they're made, what they're made of, how the colours and fabrics are combined, how they fall ... To appreciate this, you have to see it up close," says Font.

His prolific thirty-year career in fashion can be divided into three major periods which coincide almost exactly with the three decades that his work spans.

From the beginning to the consolidation of his career

Josep Font consolidated his own label while working with Luz Díaz, particularly from 1987 on, although, by then, they had already been well-known in the fashion world for several years. They had both studied under Pedro Rodríguez at the Escola Superior de Disseny i Moda Felicidad Duce in Barcelona. Together, Díaz and Font created a pared-down, sober aesthetic in subdued colours. Drawing inspiration from traditional, everyday clothing, they crafted meticulously constructed patterns and used natural fibres such as silk, wool, and cotton. However, in 1995, Font decided to embark on a solo career, developing towards the end of the decade a magical, hypersensitive style featuring colourful, lavish, and sophisticated fabrics, and bold, spectacular embroideries. This new direction earned him international recognition, particularly with the three ready-to-wear collections he presented in Paris and the four haute couture collections he designed between 2008 and 2009, which were all received with wide acclaim in the French capital. The heretofore sombre shades gave way to bold yet refined colours, which, together with the use of lace, exquisite embroidery, velvet, devoré, cloqué and other ornate fabrics, brought back all the splendour of couture.

The relaunch of Delpozo

After losing his own brand in 2011 and designing anonymously for other labels for a year, Josep Font was tasked with remodelling and relaunching the late Madrid designer Jesus del Pozo's label. Under the name Delpozo and with a new structure and updated facilities, Font oversaw every aspect of the new brand including its stores in Madrid, Miami, London, Moscow, and Dubai. With these new collections, he developed what he had started in haute couture, creating — with the utmost rigour — a truly characteristic, impeccably exquisite and innovative line of prêt-à-porter. It is during this era that the influence of Cristóbal Balenciaga can be seen, as well as that of the refined Viennese dressmaker and close companion of Gustav Klimt, Emilie Flöge. The imprint of the enchanting and fantastical world of Russian painter Andrey Remnev, and the colours of German artist Josef Albers are also reflected in Font's work from this period.

Maturity and international acclaim

The zenith of Josep Font's career came at Delpozo, where he created an impressive 19 collections between 2012 and 2018. It was during this period that the influence of Cristóbal Balenciaga became most apparent in his work. The Catalan designer reached maturity and gained global recognition with his collections in Madrid, New York, Paris, and London, successfully turning the Delpozo brand into a favourite on the red carpet and with celebrities including Keira Knightley, Cate Blanchett, Julianne Moore, Elle Fanning, Rihanna and Zendaya, setting trends and marking a milestone in fashion.

SS 2015, *Josef Albers*, New York
AdM 15493. Fundació Antoni de Montpalau



SS 2017, *Soo Sunny Park*, New York
Private collection



With this exhibition, the Cristóbal Balenciaga Museum launches a new series of exhibits which explores the great master's influence on contemporary fashion by showcasing the work of contemporary international designers.

Josep Font: Beauty and Restlessness is the first in the series and serves as a testament to the ongoing influence of Cristóbal Balenciaga's legacy. 'With this initiative, it is the Museum's mission to develop a conversation around Balenciaga's work, inspire new ideas and encourage further research into his collections, as this helps to reinforce the importance of his legacy, particularly nowadays and going forward,' explains Miren Vives, director of the Cristóbal Balenciaga Museum.

As the curator has pointed out "Josep Font's approach to the work of Cristóbal Balenciaga was never mimetic, it was a personal interpretation based on the study of volume as something autonomous and independent of the female body which Font — like Balenciaga — felt possessed a silent and sublime sensuality."

Font achieved a technical perfection which can be seen in his simple yet powerful use of fabric, in the architectural construction of his garments and in his use of exquisite embroidery, all of which resemble to some degree the legacy of the master from Getaria. Perhaps more than any other contemporary Spanish designer, Font embodied Balenciaga's famous saying that "a couturier must be an architect for design, a sculptor for shape, a painter for colour, a musician for harmony, and a philosopher for temperance."

FW 2013, *Arquitectura Orgánica*, New York
Private collection

© Cristóbal Balenciaga Museo / Alex Iturralde



SS 2009, *Mirando al mar*, Haute Couture, Paris
AdM 15772. Fundació Antoni de Montpalau



© Javier Biosca



Josep Font

Josep Font Calvet was born in Santa Perpètua de la Mogoda, Barcelona, in 1965. After attending school in Sabadell and La Garriga, he went on to study architecture at the Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya. However, he soon became interested in the world of sewing and fashion and turned to fashion design, studying under Pedro Rodriguez at the Escola Superior de Disseny i Moda Felicidad Duce in Barcelona where he received a diploma in 1983. His background in architecture contributed greatly to his mastery of form and structure, which was a characteristic feature of his designs throughout his career. It was not long before his talent was recognised. Still a student, at the age of twenty-one, he won the Air France Mode Prix and had his work displayed at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs in Paris. Having met at college where they studied fashion together, Font and the designer Luz Díaz went on to co-found the brand Mapamundi, producing a very successful range of white poplin shirts. Eventually, they started showing collections at Barcelona's Pasarela Gaudí and, by 1987, their simple, refined style — which contrasted sharply with the brash styles that dominated the eighties — began to attract the attention of the fashion press.

In 1989, they won the Prix Fil d'Argent and were nominated for the Prix Fil d'Or in Monaco. The same year, they returned to Barcelona's Pasarela

Gaudí fashion week and, for the first time, their models graced Madrid's Pasarela Cibeles catwalk and Milan's Salone della Moda fashion week. They founded a new brand, Gabriela, and opened its first store in Barcelona (on Passeig de Gràcia) in 1991, followed by one in Bilbao the following year. In 1993, they took the brand to the Igodo Fashion Fair in Dusseldorf and launched it in Germany. Following a takeover by an investor in 1995, Josep Font went out on his own and started presenting his own collections. In the second half of the 1990s, Font's sober aesthetic gradually became more sensual and creative, reaching a peak in the noughties. In 1997, the high-end international Japanese clothing brand, Itokin, signed a deal to launch and distribute the Josep Font label on the Southwest Asian market, and a chain of Josep Font stores which also sold furniture by the designer was opened in Japan. The same year, Font also presented a collection at Tokyo's Japan Fashion Week. In 1998, he co-designed the Cliper Sofa for Enrico Astori's Italian brand Driade with architect Òscar Tusquets.

At the beginning of the millennium, the Catalan designer opened a store in Madrid and won the L'Oréal Award for the best autumn-winter collection 2000-2001, adding to a list of prestigious accolades that year. In 2001, Font was featured in the Le Laboratoire des Créateurs space at the Paris department store Galeries Lafayette. The following year, he moved his Barcelona store to Carrer de Provença and began presenting at the Paris fashion shows. He also presented his second line "2 by Josep Font" at the Barcelona's Circuit fair / show.

In 2004, Font opened a store on Rue de la Sourdière (off Rue Saint Honoré) in Paris, and was invited to take part in the Swarovski-runway rocks- exhibition at London's Victoria and Albert Museum. In 2005, he joined leading international designers Yohji Yamamoto and John Galiano at several charity auctions in Paris. In 2006, he was appointed art director of the Vassari jewellery catalogue. Having presented three hugely successful collections at the Paris Fashion Week between 2006 and 2007, the Fédération Française de la Couture invited Font back to Paris to show four haute couture collections in 2008 and 2009, which were also received with great enthusiasm.

In 2010, Font showed a selection of his haute couture designs at La Pedrera in Barcelona, as part of the exhibition dedicated to Mariano

Fortuny y Madrazo. At the height of his career, he ran into trouble at the company and lost the brand, like other leading designers including Romeo Gigli, Jill Sander, Antonio Miro and Christian Lacroix. After two years designing for other brands, he was approached by Perfumes y Diseño who asked him to relaunch the Jesús del Pozo label following the designer's passing in 2011. Font set to with a complete overhaul of the label, renaming it Delpozo. He was now the creative director and, working with a team, he was also in charge of positioning and creating a corporate image for the new brand and distributing the product. He redesigned and defined a completely new corporate identity and opened new boutiques in Madrid, Miami, London, Dubai and Moscow. He repositioned Delpozo in the ready-to-wear sector by combining artisanal skills and haute couture expertise with innovative techniques to create an exquisite, modern *prêt-à-porter* clothing range. Font conceived the new brand values, focusing on creative research, the reinterpretation of craftsmanship, and the use of highly innovative, never-before-seen embroidery. He also emphasized that the brand's fervent commitment to attention to detail and quality would be its defining factor. The national and international projection of the brand made it an iconic red-carpet label and favourite among celebrities and other prominent figures. Moda Operandi and Net-a-Porter would be the first two clients to believe in the brand. Font presented a total of 19 runway collections for Delpozo in Madrid, New York, Paris, and London, surpassing by far all his other undeniably successful previous achievements.

In 2014, he was awarded the National Prize for Fashion Design from the Spanish Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport. In the autumn of 2018, however, Font resigned from Delpozo and retired from the world of fashion.

Josep Casamartina

Josep Casamartina i Parassols (Sabadell, 1956) is a historian and an architecture, fashion and art critic. Director and vice-president of the Fundació Antoni de Montapalau — a foundation created in 2004 for the study and promotion of historical fashion — he has been collecting the work of Josep Font for many years and currently safeguards over 200 items by the Catalan designer.

As an independent curator, Casamartina has curated numerous art, fashion, design, architecture, and photography exhibitions. Some exhibition highlights include *Joana Biarnés, Madrid / Moda a pie de calle*, at Sala Canal de Isabel II, Madrid, 2023; *Santa Eulalia 180 años de moda*, at Palau Robert, Barcelona, 2022-2023; *Ismael Smith, la belleza y los monstruos*, at Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya, Barcelona, 2017; *Pedro Rovira, de la alta costura al prêt-à-porter*, at Museo del Traje, Madrid, 2017; *Catalunya és Moda*, at Espai Catalunya Europa, Brussels, 2014; *Balenciaga y la alta costura en Barcelona*, at The Cristóbal Balenciaga Museum, Getaria, 2013-2014; *Togores, clasicismo y renovación*, at Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, 1997; *Serge Charchoune, entre el Dadá y la abstracción*, 2004, and *Amazonas del Arte Nuevo*, 2008, at Fundación MAPFRE; *Ángeles Santos, un mundo insólito en Valladolid*, at Museo Patio Herreriano, 2003, among numerous others.

Josep Font. Beauty and Restlessness

Associate collaborator



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The Cristóbal Balenciaga Museum, inaugurated on 7 June 2011, is located in Getaria, the designer's hometown 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 4,500 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
Head of Communication

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@cristobalbalenciagamuseoa.com
www.cristobalbalenciagamuseoa.com

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