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CRISTÓBAL BALENCIAGA MUSEOA

Fabiola
of Belgium
Wedding Dress

Fabiola of Belgium. Wedding Dress

EXHIBITION
OCTOBER 25 — DECEMBER 15 / 2019
cristobalbalenciagamuseoa.com

Retrato de Fabiola y Balduino de Bélgica, 1960.
© Fotos Gar. Zarautz



Fabiola of Belgium Wedding Dress

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Having featured in the exhibition *Balenciaga and Spanish painting*, organised by the Thyssen-Bornemisza Museum between June 18 and September 22, and prior to its rest for conservation purposes in the Museum warehouses, the exhibition *Fabiola of Belgium. Wedding Dress* extends an invitation to explore the history and specific context of this iconic piece, the wedding dress worn by Fabiola de Mora y Aragón.



The current exhibition, *Cristóbal Balenciaga. Fashion and Heritage*, looks at the Contexts which offer us the chance to understand where and how Cristóbal Balenciaga's creation developed. Some of these contexts are concealed and belong to the haute couture trade and knowhow, while others are absolutely public and are related to the sociocultural environments and historical facts which marked the moment of the creations and the processes of disseminating and adopting 20th century innovations in culture, art, design and fashion. In these latter contexts, the media play a fundamental role, reflecting them for us, and, in the precise case of fashion, even creating them and turning them into a landmark within the collective imaginary.

This is the case of the wedding dress worn by Fabiola de Mora y Aragón, queen consort to Baudouin of Belgium. The production of this dress was all of an event at the Maison Balenciaga, both for the proximity of the client (her great grandmother was the Marquess of Casa Torres), and for the expectation generated by the royal wedding in its day.

Fotografía del enlace. Bruselas, 1960.
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Context

The nuptials of King of the Belgians, Baudouin I to Spanish aristocrat, Fabiola de Mora y Aragón was one of the most important events covered by the press in the mid-20th century.

From the couple's history of love, and their engagement - relentlessly analysed by the press since the publication of the official communiqué by the Belgian Royal House- to the rumours about the ceremony or the design of the wedding dress, everything surrounding the event awakened the passion of an increasingly devoted public, transcending the borders of Belgium and Spain.

The image of the Balenciaga royal bridal gown was finally indelibly engraved in the memory of thousands of spectators at the first royal wedding to be transmitted live on television on 15 December 1960, making it one of the most iconic pieces of the Getaria designer, thanks to this unprecedented associative impact.

Secrets and Rumours

The discretion of the Balenciaga communication policy was a marker of identity of the fashion house, something respected in all its salons. This discretion was stepped up for the royal nuptials, with the design of the dress kept in absolute secrecy, where the media reflecting on the different meetings held between the master and the de Mora family made assumptions and spread rumours about the line and the aesthetics of the final model, exacerbating the public's curiosity.

The press speculated on and published different sketches, consistently reflecting simplicity, based on the unofficial comments, alongside single-layer majesty. One of the main rumours was attributed to Fabiola herself, who turned down three designs for being "too regal", to which Balenciaga responded: "Please bear in mind that this is to be worn by a queen".



Fabiola y Balduino de Bélgica paseando por el puerto de Getaria. Verano de 1961.

© Fotos Gar. Zarautz

Fashion and Heritage

Beyond its value as a material creation devised by Cristóbal Balenciaga, its historical and communicative significance, this dress is one of the fashion icons of the 20th century combining this fashion designer's creative journey with the socio-political reality of the time. And this is how it was received by the Cristóbal Balenciaga Foundation in 2003 as a personal donation from her Highness Fabiola of Belgium, involved in the museum's project from the very start.

Tras la desaparición del modisto, muchas de las exposiciones sobre Balenciaga que se organizaron incluyeron este vestido, dando visibilidad a una pieza icónica que aún la trayectoria creativa del modisto con la realidad socio-política de su tiempo. Entre otras, el vestido ha estado presente en las siguientes exposiciones:

- *Homenaje internacional a Cristóbal Balenciaga*
Palacio de Miramar
Donostia/San Sebastián, 1987
- *Mona Bismarck, Cristóbal Balenciaga : perfection partagée*
Fondation Mona Bismarck
Paris, 2006
- *Balenciaga. Givenchy. Venet*
Château d'Haroué
2010
- *Cristóbal Balenciaga Museoa*
Exposición inaugural
Getaria, 2011-2012
- *Balenciaga y la pintura española*
Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza
Madrid, 2019



Reportaje de boda publicado en *Paris Match*, 1960.

The Dress

CBM 2003.08

Dress with a tapered body and ample, gathered skirt. The mink decorating the neckline flatters the neck and gives the impression of supporting the long train with white mink trim. The light pleats of the skirt obscured by the mink highlight a refined elegance as well as a timeless outline. The rectangular train, with its magisterial folds around the neckline, emphasizes the bride's regal appearance.

The dress is on display in the exhibition galleries of the Aldamar Palace, former summer residence of the Marquises of Casa Torres, and accompanied with documentation (photographs, magazines and press, sketches from the time) to give a better idea of the importance of the historic event and the relevance of the piece within the Museum collection.

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INFORMATION SHEET

FABRIC

- Fabric manufacturer: Sederías Jorge Fábregas, Mollet del Vallès, Barcelona.
- Date of delivery of the fabric: 11 November 1960
- Linear metres provided: 30 metres.
24 metres for the dress and 6 meters for the queue.
- Price (pesetas/meter): 1,500 pesetas
- Fabric weave: Double layered satin. Matte satin on the underside. Twill on the outer side)
- Weavers: María Domínguez and María Sáez.
- Comments on the fabric: Woven at the same time in order to avoid any issue that would impede its production.
- Date of delivery of the fabric: 11 November 1960

MANUFACTURE

- Label: EISA.
- Salon: Madrid (Gran Vía, 9).
- Workshop: Fantasía.
- Mistress: Felisa Irigoyen.
- Clerk: Carmen Carriches.
- Assistants: Socorro Martínez and Natividad González.
- Production time: One and a half months.
- Testing location: The couturier's home (Calle Álvarez de Baena).
- Release date: Dawn on 8 December 1960.

DELIVER

- Delivered by: Ramón Esparza, Felisa Irigoyen and Carmen Carriches.
- Delivery location: Laeken Palace in Brussels.
- Last-minute touches: 12 December 1960.
(Placing the cape onto the dress).

SUBSEQUENT INTERVENTIONS

- In 2002, the Furriers Association of Spain donated the mink that currently adorns the dress. This intervention took place at Lorenzo Caprile's workshop, under the supervision of the Carriches sisters.

FABIOLA OF BELGIUM. WEDDING DRESS

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The Cristóbal Balenciaga Museum



Exterior view of the Cristóbal Balenciaga Museum in Getaria.
© Cristóbal Balenciaga Museoa

The Cristóbal Balenciaga Museum, opened on 7 June 2011, is located in the town where the couturier was born, in commemoration of those early years of his professional training and maturing in order to understand his contributions to the world of fashion.

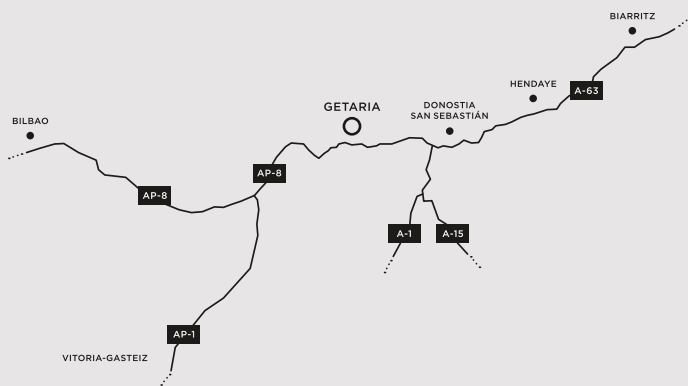
With the aim of explaining Balenciaga's life and work, his relevance in the history of fashion and design, and the contemporaneity of his legacy, the Museum houses a unique collection. Its large size – almost 3,000 pieces which continue to rise in number thanks to loans and donations – and its wide-ranging formal and chronical extension – including, for example, the earliest existing models by the couturier – make this one of the most complete, consistent and interesting of its kind.

Another of the collection's exceptional values lies in the origin of the pieces. It goes without saying that Balenciaga's major international clients were outstanding social figures in the central decades of the 20th century: Mona Von Bismarck, Rachel L. Mellon, Patricia López Wilshaw, Barbara Hutton, Lilian Bael, Grace Kelly and Madame Bricard all wore some of the models now featuring in the Archives.

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Biarritz — 71km
Bilbao — 81km
Donostia/San Sebastián — 25km
Iruña-Pamplona — 97km
Vitoria-Gasteiz — 83km

GPS
43° 18' 6.92" N
2° 12' 18.77" W

