



FASHION

Schiaparelli Exhibition to Open in 2026



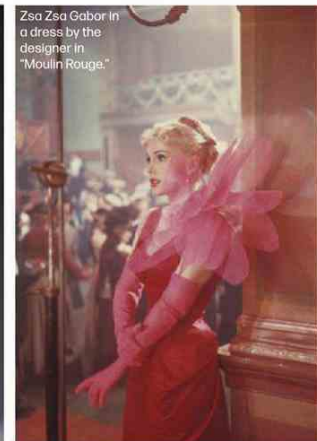
Designer Elsa Schiaparelli.



The Duchess of Windsor wearing a Schiaparelli dress.



The Tears dress.



Zsa Zsa Gabor in a dress by the designer in "Moulin Rouge."

● "Schiaparelli: Fashion Becomes Art" at the Victoria & Albert Museum will chart the Surrealist designs of its founder Elsa Schiaparelli and present day creative director Daniel Roseberry.

BY HIKMAT MOHAMMED
AND JOELLE DIDERICH

The Victoria & Albert Museum's next fashion exhibition will take a surreal turn. "Schiaparelli: Fashion Becomes Art" will be staged at the Sainsbury Gallery from March 21 to Nov. 1, 2026.

The exhibition will chart the success of its founder, Elsa Schiaparelli, from the 1920s to the present day under the current ownership of Diego Della Valle and the creative direction of Daniel Roseberry.

There will be more than 200 objects in the show that span across Paris, London and New York, as well as World Wars I and II, including garments, accessories, jewelry, paintings, photographs, sculpture, furniture, perfumes and archive material.

Delphine Bellini, chief executive officer of Schiaparelli, was joined by Daniel Slater, director of exhibitions at the V&A, and the museum's senior curator Sonnet Stanfill, at a press conference on Wednesday at the house's historic salon on Place Vendôme in Paris.

"The V&A is one of the unique museums, which has always tried to blend tradition and innovation, and this is so linked to what Schiaparelli used to do herself," Bellini said.

Five years in the making, the show will not just build on the success of previous exhibitions, including a major retrospective at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs in Paris

in 2022, but explore new areas including Schiaparelli's relationship with the U.K. and her clients, such as Wallis Simpson and Elsie de Wolfe, known as Lady Mendel.

"We're adding on to the existing scholarship, but telling the story in a very new way, in a very unique way," Stanfill said. "We like to describe ourselves as the world's leading museum of art, design and performance, and in fact, all of those elements, plus a chapter on photography, will be within the exhibition."

Slater noted that the show will also include works by some of the greatest artists of the 20th century, on loan from major institutions. Schiaparelli walked in artistic circles with the likes of Pablo Picasso, Jean Cocteau and Man Ray.

"What was so exciting for us is that with a project on Schiaparelli, you almost reverse what is the normal narrative of fashion in art museums, where you have designers being inspired by art. What we have with Elsa, which continues in the house today, is one of the greatest designers who is actually inspiring some of the greatest art of the 20th century," Slater said.

"This is not to redo something that's formulaic. This is to entirely change the way in which fashion can be experienced in a fine art museum," he added. "We're trying to constantly build the next generation of creatives. And this is just yet another opportunity for us to do that."

Special pieces on display include the Skeleton dress from 1938, which covers the entire body in a black silk crêpe. In a 1939 interview, Schiaparelli said that she believes "in a strict neatness about both day and evening clothes, their simple lines accentuated by an original touch. A neck line can make or spoil a dress; amusing pockets can add distinction to

the simplest jacket."

Another standout piece that will feature is collaboration with the Surrealist artist Salvador Dalí. Printed with a trompe-l'œil motif, it creates the illusion of strips of flesh, prefiguring the punk movement by several decades.

Born into an aristocratic family and raised in the luxurious confines of Palazzo Corsini in Rome, Schiaparelli was separated from her husband by the time she arrived in Paris from the U.S. in 1922.

Bellini noted that the designer, who was self-financed at the time, opened a London salon in Mayfair in 1933, barely six years after founding her house. "It's also important to see her, not only as an artist, but as a woman entrepreneur, and this is very inspiring also for today's women," she said.

Stanfill added that Schiaparelli was a founding member of the Fashion Group of Great Britain, the precursor of today's British Fashion Council.

"Her clothes had a hard chic about them, which were in contrast to the quiet luxury of a lot of her contemporaries. So as a disruptor and as a breaker of fashion rules, she encouraged her clients to embrace a different way of dressing," she said.

"She was the most inventive in terms of use of materials of any of her contemporaries, in the sense that she urged her textile producers to bring her their newest and their best – so that could take the guise of woven glass, cellophane,

new crinkled textures. She really loved unusual fabrics, and that will come across in the garments that we can display," Stanfill added.

Schiaparelli also designed costumes for the silver screen and stage.

She costumed Mae West in the 1937 film "Every Day's a Holiday" and borrowed the actor's curvy silhouette for one of her perfume bottle designs. In 1952, she dressed Zsa Zsa Gabor in a pink gown in the film "Moulin Rouge."

The designer is a recurring character in fashion history books. She famously feuded with Gabrielle "Coco" Chanel, but had to shut her business in 1954 after accruing large debts.

Schiaparelli was relaunched by Della Valle in 2012 and the house has spread the word about the history of its founder, starting with a book titled "Schiaparelli and the Artists," published in 2017 to mark the 90th anniversary of the brand.

The exhibition will also include a selection of designs by Roseberry.

"The couture collection that we presented on Monday is really the beautiful translation of how we can dive into the archives, but also transport them into the future and see how Schiaparelli's contribution to fashion, art and culture can continue to survive through the lens of a new creative vision with passion and actually no boundaries," Bellini said.

"The more respectful we are, and the more inventive we are, the more vibration we create outside. It's extremely rewarding, and it allows us to take new steps," she said.

The Duchess of Windsor photograph by Conda Nast via Getty Images; The Tears dress by Elsa Schiaparelli © Victoria and Albert Museum; La Zsa Zsa Gabor via Getty Images