

# Kimbell Education Programs

## BALENCIAGA | IN B L A C K

Balenciaga, dress in silk taffeta (detail), summer 1956. Palais Galliera, Paris. Gift of Miss Aubert. Photo © Pierre Even

Kimbell Art Museum

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## PREPARING STUDENTS IN ADVANCE

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We look forward to welcoming your school group to the Museum. Here are a few suggestions for teachers to help to ensure a successful, productive learning experience at the Museum.

### LOOK, DISCUSS, CREATE

Use this resource to lead classroom discussions and related activities prior to the visit. (Suggested activities may also be used after the visit.)

### REVIEW MUSEUM GUIDELINES

#### For students:

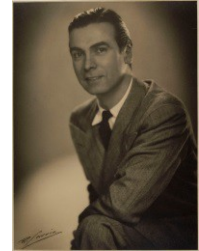
- Touch the works of art only with your eyes, never with your hands.
- Walk in the museum—do not run.
- Use a quiet voice when sharing your ideas.
- No flash photography is permitted in special exhibitions or permanent collection galleries.
- Write and draw only with pencils—no pens or markers, please.

#### Additional information for teachers:

- Please review the bus parking information provided with your tour confirmation.
- Backpacks, umbrellas, or other bulky items are not allowed in the galleries. Free parcel check is available.
- Seeing-eye dogs and other service animals assisting people with disabilities are the only animals allowed in the Museum.
- Unscheduled lecturing to groups is not permitted.
- No food, drinks, or water bottles are allowed in any galleries.
- Cell phones should be turned to silent mode while in the Museum.
- Tobacco use, including cigarettes, cigars, pipes, electronic cigarettes, snuff, and chewing tobacco, is not permitted in the Museum or anywhere on the Museum's grounds.



# BALENCIAGA IN BLACK



Cristóbal Balenciaga (Spanish, 1895–1972) is often called “the couturier’s couturier”—the artist most revered by other fashion designers. From his first runway collection in 1937 through the closure of his Paris salon in 1968, Balenciaga had as his clients some of the most influential trendsetters of the day. *Balenciaga in Black* features more than one hundred pieces from the collections of the Palais Galliera, the City of Paris’s museum of fashion, and from the Archives Balenciaga.

The carefully selected costumes and accessories, all made by hand in the haute-couture ateliers of this fashion genius, share one major feature: they are all black. Black, because Balenciaga’s sources of inspiration, the spiritual underpinnings of his work, were the folklore and traditions of his native Spain. The aim of the exhibition is to suggest a reassessment of the great couturier’s work and to convey an understanding of Balenciaga’s artistry in manipulating black fabrics, embroideries, and lace—magically transforming these materials into exquisite garments.

For Balenciaga, black was more than a color or even a noncolor; it was a vibrant matter, by turns opaque or transparent, matte or shiny—a dazzling interplay of light, showcased as much through the luxurious quality of the fabrics as through the simplicity of a garment’s cut. From the never-before-seen black prototypes to the most abstract forms from his later collections, Balenciaga’s use of infinite shades of black emphasizes the essential shapes, dense volumes, and astonishing silhouettes of his unique creations. His timeless and expertly executed clothes, with impeccably composed adornments of lace, embroidery, silk, satin, fringes, beads, and sequins, continue to inspire modern fashion.

The exhibition is organized by the Palais Galliera, Fashion Museum of the City of Paris, Paris Musées.

## THEMES FOR DISCUSSION

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### The Choice of Black

*Balenciaga's use of infinite shades of black emphasizes the essential shapes, dense volumes, and astonishing silhouettes of his unique creations. Black is also connected to the folklore and traditions of his native Spain, which were important sources of inspiration.*

- What ideas or feelings do you associate with the color black? What cultural activities or traditions relate to the color?
- How does focusing on a single color in Balenciaga's body of work highlight other important qualities or details in his designs?
- How does light interact with Balenciaga's choice of black materials?
- How do the variations of black or pops of color affect the way your eye travels across garments?

### Attention to Detail

*Balenciaga was an expert in cutting fabric and knew how to construct garments to achieve specific shapes, proportions, movement, and balance. His research and experiments gradually led him towards a deconstruction of traditional forms and the invention and elaboration of increasingly abstract figures. The garment became more than an envelope and grew to be independent of the body.*

- Compare the different shapes of Balenciaga's designs. Where do silhouettes reveal his tendency towards geometry and abstraction?
- How do garments interact with the human figure—are they loose or formfitting, where do they accentuate or conceal?
- How might a garment change shape with movement? Which parts move more independently from the body? Which parts stay put?

### Materials

*In order to get the best out of a fabric, Balenciaga would adapt his technique to its qualities. The weight, thickness, hang, and feel of a fabric would determine how he would cut, mold, or drape it.*

- Consider differences in the material—such as sheen, texture, transparency, and weight. Does the fabric hold interesting shapes due to its thickness and weight? Conversely, can you spot materials that are soft and lightweight that billow out or move more freely from the body?
- Where does Balenciaga juxtapose materials for dramatic effects?
- How do transparent elements (especially lace) affect your ability to take in the overall shape of the garment? Do they soften, disguise, or accentuate the figure of the person wearing it?
- What other textural elements does Balenciaga employ to suggest movement or to emphasize a shape?

## BALENCIAGA'S DESIGN AND CONSTRUCTION PROCESS

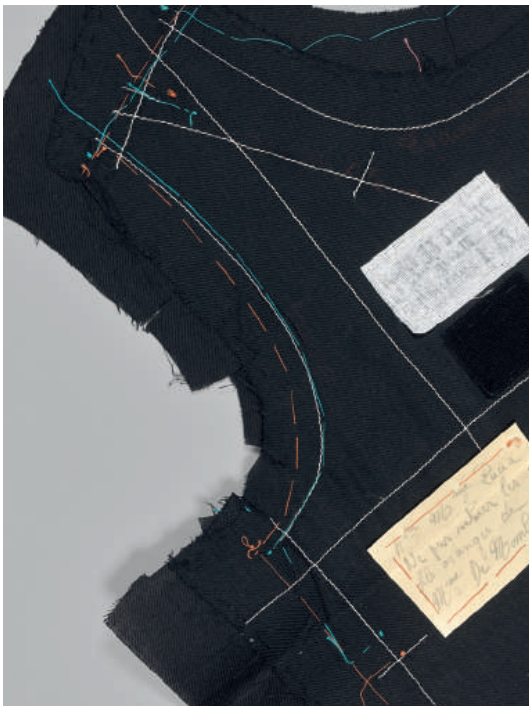
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Toile for a leather coat with a print on a white ground  
*Tailleur atelier Monsieur Salvador*  
Summer 1962

Polished cotton twill (serge), straight-grain cut. White machine stitching

Balenciaga Archives, Paris. Photo © Pierre Even



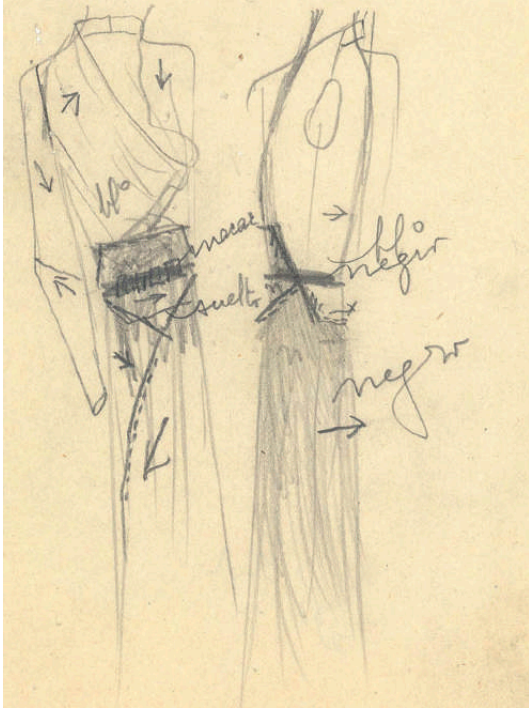
© Balenciaga Archives Paris / Studio Sébert

In many respects, couture's objectives are similar to those of sculpture or painting: to achieve harmony and a sense of movement through balanced proportions and carefully chosen materials. In French, the vocabulary of these disciplines sometimes reveals a common approach. For example, the first stage of Balenciaga's process, which involved draping fabric onto a dress form, produced what is known as a "toile," the French term for "canvas." The designer would manipulate and adjust this three-dimensional sketch until he had worked out a perfect version of his draft.

While toiles were traditionally created in muslin, an ecru-colored cotton, Balenciaga's were black in hue and cut in light but firm percale, in heavier twill, or sometimes in stiff tarlatan, depending on the fabric to be used for the ultimate piece. Whether cut on the bias or along the grain, each section was annotated with markings and crossed with lines whose position, direction, and overlapping points defined the structure and the construction of the garment.

White machine stitches indicated the seams and the fitting and mounting notches. Basting in colored thread defined the height of the hemline. Taken together, they were a map of the forthcoming volume, with its edges and its joins. Between these lines, which reveal how methodical and rigorous Balenciaga was, handwritten notes preserve the intentions and the working methods of this great couturier.

With Balenciaga, ideas could take shape on the page of a sketchbook or on a sheet of hotel notepaper. Fragments of dresses—the construction of a bodice, a single sleeve, or the arrangement of a yoke—would be penciled in here and there. Arrows indicated the direction of



Research sketch by Cristóbal Balenciaga, 1931  
Balenciaga Archives, Paris

the fabric, while a few words in Spanish specified the color—*negra* or *rojo* (black or red)—or offered additional explanations: “*eos solo en este lado*” or “*de la misma tela*” (“only on this side” or “in the same fabric”).

In the studio, Balenciaga’s assistants translated his suggestions into sketches for the workshops, where the seamstresses made the first toiles, or patterns—the early prototypes. A back view, a detail, and a sample of fabric completed this working document, which included the name of the *première d’atelier* (head seamstress). The name of the model who would wear the dress, from the fittings of the toile to the completed garment, was also noted.

The model would pose in front view, back view, and in profile for the photographs taken in the House of Balenciaga’s salon on the Avenue George V or in the workshops. These pictures, which included no décor or special staging, were taken, from 1957 on, by photographer Thomas Kublin. The local police station would then stamp the albums of the collection to verify the atelier’s design rights to the works. The fashion photographs would go to the press, while an illustrator was commissioned to create drawings for the clients.



Collection photograph, Thomas Kublin  
Winter 1967, model no. 128  
Balenciaga Archives, Paris



Collection illustration  
Winter 1967, model no.  
128  
Graphite pencil  
Balenciaga Archives,  
Paris

## SELECTED OBJECTS WITH DESCRIPTIONS

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Redingote  
Winter 1949

Rayon cannelé. Plastic buttons. Buttonhole piping. Viscose taffeta lining. Ecrú-colored linen canvas backing  
Palais Galliera, gift of Maurice Pineau. Photo © Julien Vidal / Galleria / Roger-Viollet

Balenciaga was an expert in cutting fabric, having trained as a tailor with Casa Gomez and worked as head of the ladies' tailoring department of the Au Louvre department stores in San Sebastián. The cut of the fabric defines a garment's contours and creates the desired shape. With proportions calculated to the nearest millimeter, Balenciaga's coats and structured suits hug the figure.

In this fitted coat, the front seams follow the vertical cut from the shoulder, preserving the volume of the chest while narrowing the waist, accentuating the shape of the body. Under the lining, interlining inserts at hip level hold the fabric while emphasizing the volume of the characteristic late-1940s silhouette. The originality and balance of this coat lie in overlaying collars—three notched lapels that open in a V—and in the extension of three shiny black buttons, placed at waist level.





Dress  
Winter 1967

Bias-cut gazar. Straps embroidered with pronged rhinestones and pearlescent beads.  
Trimmed and hemmed with crin mesh ribbon  
Balenciaga Archives, Paris. Photo © Pierre Even

Balenciaga's research and experiments gradually led him towards a deconstruction of traditional forms and the invention and elaboration of increasingly abstract figures. This angular form is constructed with gazar. Created in 1958 by the Swiss textile company Abraham, gazar is a lightweight silk fabric with great ability to hold its shape. Balenciaga worked this innovative material with strength yet sensitivity to design unprecedented shapes that moved increasingly towards abstraction.

This dress, which dates from the couturier's penultimate collection, is composed quite simply of four bias-cut panels and a few strips of organza to support the pleats. Unlined, this truncated cone hangs like a form suspended in space, seemingly independent of the body, anatomy completely forgotten. It conveys a particular idea of femininity and elegance specific to this architectural couturier. The jeweled shoulder straps are apparent only from behind.



Dress

Designed with Elsa, summer 1956

Ruffled silk taffeta. Crin petticoat lined in organza-covered silk taffeta

Palais Galliera, gift of Miss Aubert. Photo © Julien Vidal / Galleria / Roger-Viollet

In order to get the best out of a fabric, Balenciaga would adapt his technique to its qualities. The weight, thickness, hang, and feel of a fabric would determine how he would cut, mold, or drape it. He used black textures to accentuate the play of shadows or to emphasize a shape.

This cocktail dress is made from taffeta, a light yet crisp fabric. Balenciaga takes advantage of its soft sheen and texture to create changing reliefs sculpted by the black of the shadows and the mother-of-pearl reflections. The skirt, worked with undulating shirring—decorative gathering held at regular intervals by parallel rows of stitching—is partially covered by a tail draped at the side, ending in the belt. These moving volumes, supported by a crin petticoat, contrast with the sharpness of the bodice emerging from this whirl of fabric.



Evening gown  
1965–66

Silk velvet bodice. Dyed and sequined rooster-feather collar. Silk taffeta skirt.  
Bodice lined in silk crêpe and skirt lined in organza

Palais Galliera, gift of the Fondation Josée et René de Chambrun. Photo © Julien Vidal / Galleria / Roger-Viollet

The duality of light and shadow is a fundamental aspect of artistic expression in Spain. Inspired by this tradition, Balenciaga arranged elements of his garments to showcase the opposition between the two essential qualities of black, designated by the Latin words *niger*—“brilliant black,” the black of elegance and ceremony—and *ater*—“matte black,” the color of darkness and mourning.

Balenciaga often arranged contrasting black materials to create subtle nuances, as in the three registers of this dress. The fitted bodice is cut from black velvet, the darkest, most light-absorbent of fabrics. Below, just beneath the waist, the bronze and overdyed black feather fringe does not obstruct the silhouette but rather adds movement to the garment through the feathers’ natural iridescence, enhanced by sequined edges. The skirt is made of silk taffeta with a fine, crisp organza lining, which lends greater fluidity and a lightweight feel to its blackness with an almost mother-of-pearl sheen.



Dress

Winter 1964

Machine-made lace. Silk satin ribbon. Silk organza  
Balenciaga Archives, Paris. Photo © Pierre Even

Balenciaga was particularly fond of the transparency of black lace. The way he was able to manipulate this almost ethereal material made his dresses seem to float on the body. Black lace, of course, held a special place in Balenciaga's art, as it embodied the very soul of Spanish piety and folklore. In his hands, however, it was never merely picturesque or pretty, nor was it a source of easy charm.

Balenciaga's use of lace was sometimes unconventional, even counterintuitive. While careful to benefit from and even accentuate the lightness of the material, he only occasionally exploited its natural transparency. With black lace—more sensitive than all other fabrics to the effects of light—he reserved his graphic effects for the contours of the silhouette, largely hiding the delicate patterns by setting them against a black ground. For this cocktail ensemble, the see-through effect of the lace coat can be appreciated only in the sleeves and around the low-cut back. For the rest of the ensemble, Balenciaga superimposed lace and horsehair braid on a black organza ground to create a vibrant juxtaposition of materials.





Cocktail dress  
1967

Cigaline (synthetic fabric). Embroidery of plastic paillettes and glass beads  
Palais Galliera, gift of Cristóbal Balenciaga. Photo © Pierre Even

Balenciaga's love of embroidered black beads and sequins, set on fire by the light, came from the late nineteenth-century dresses and collars that he collected. The embroiderers whom he entrusted with this precious, intricate work—Lesage, Rébé, or Métral—also reinterpreted the reliefs and ornamental embroideries of the bullfighter's traditional costume, the *traje de luces*, with braiding and tassels in brilliant black silk.

In the 1960s, natural stones and metal were replaced by plastic. Lurex and Rhodoid, in the form of lamé, sequins, and paillettes, covered Balenciaga's straight, light dresses in flowing patterns. These embroideries were more than an ornament: they were the very essence, the outer skin of the dress.



Dress

Winter 1967

Marquisette (gauze) made of artificial fibers. Pale pink satin ribbon. Underskirt in crêpe de Chine  
Palais Galliera, purchase. Photo © Julien Vidal / Galleria / Roger-Viollet

Balenciaga used black to create infinite possibilities and transformations. He particularly liked the varied effects of transparency. Repeatedly, the arrangements he created gave substance to even the most ethereal materials and made use of their fluttering movement. The couturier overlaid airy textures, playing with their lightweight nature to create imperceptible modulations and degrees of opacity. With organza, gauze, tulle, and chantilly, he created shadow and obscure sheen effects.

For this dress, he chose marquisette, an airy and sheer gauze. Seen from the front, this delicate fabric appears to be an intense black, held by the satin ribbon belt on the opaque crêpe de Chine ground. From the back, the loose line moves freely, resulting in a light and hazy impression.



Coat

Designed with Elsa, winter 1957

Twill weave wool. Arctic fox collar. Passementerie buttons.

Silk taffeta lining. Concealed elastic ribbon in the middle of the back

Palais Galliera, gift of Mrs. Diez de Rivera. Photo © Julien Vidal / Galleria / Roger-Viollet

Balenciaga saw in the opposition of black and white a timeless association, one that evoked the lace ruffs of the austere suits of Spanish monarchs, synonymous with both luxury and renunciation, or the immaculate collars of bourgeois dress, symbolizing ceremony and restraint. For Balenciaga, stoles, collars, and edgings of immaculate fur were used to counterbalance the severity of black and the precision of a piece's cut. Luxurious, vibrant pelts of arctic foxes and white mink could illuminate a woman's face and brighten shadowy silhouettes.

Here, harmony between black and white is crafted in the careful proportions of the coat and also in the disparity of materials. On the silhouette of a matte shadow, the generous mass of the cape-like collar stops at the level of a seam placed slightly above the waist, right at the garment's point of equilibrium.

## CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

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### DESIGN / COLLABORATE

- **ATELIER:** Take turns giving each other three rules for your ideal garment. Sketch a design based on these rules. Receive feedback from your partner and adjust your design based on their suggestions. Sample rules: This garment must be ideal for skydiving, make noise when you walk, or have a long train.
- **MIX-n-MATCH INSPIRATION:** Design a garment that takes inspiration from three details of different designs found in the exhibition. Share your design with the class.
- **EXQUISITE FASHION PLATES:** Divide a sheet of paper into four sections: one to focus on headwear, one for the torso, one for just below the waistline, and one for footwear. Take turns designing different aspects of an outfit all in black. Each addition should take into consideration the previous person's drawing. Complete one round top to bottom. Then try bottom to top.
- **MIXED-MEDIA CHALLENGE:** Create your own Balenciaga-inspired accessory using only black materials. Try construction paper, tissue paper, or any other available materials.

### WRITING / PERSONAL CONNECTIONS

- **FASHION STORYTELLERS:** Using only ten sentences, tell a story from the perspective of the person wearing this garment. Where are they? What are they feeling? What are they doing? What do they like (or not like) about what they're wearing? Share your story with the class.
  - If you complete this activity in the exhibition, exchange your story with a partner and see if they can guess the garment your main character was wearing.
- **PERSONIFY DESIGN:** From the perspective of your favorite garment, complete the following sentences:
  - When light hits me, I \_\_\_\_\_.
  - In a gust of wind, I \_\_\_\_\_.
  - I \_\_\_\_\_ the figure.
  - The most surprising part of me is the way that I \_\_\_\_\_.
  - I make my wearer feel \_\_\_\_\_.
  - The most distinctive part of me is the way that I \_\_\_\_\_.
  - A surprising contrast can be found in my \_\_\_\_\_.
- **ACTION FABRIC:** Challenge yourself to come up with as many verbs as possible to describe the fabric that composes a particular garment. For instance: This fabric billows, shines, falls, puffs, elevates, lengthens, etc.
- **NAME THAT BLACK:** Name the different blacks that Balenciaga uses to compose a garment. In one sentence, describe the reason you chose this name. For instance:
  - Raven's Wing – I chose this name because it reminds of me of a bird's dark feathers.
  - Starless Night – I chose this name because the fabric reminds me of going camping.
- **INVESTIGATIONS:** Research the color black and its role in Spanish history, folklore, and/or historic dress. See if you can draw connections between what you discover and Balenciaga's designs. Recommended topics: lace mantillas, the matador's costume, Spanish royalty, or find a topic using the chronology (pp. 17–20).



## GALLERY ACTIVITIES

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### DESCRIBE / COLLABORATE

- **BE MY EYES:** Print out full-scale reproductions of garments on view in the exhibition. Take turns taping them to a partner's back. Describe the garment and try to see how quickly you can lead your partner to that garment.

### EXPLORE

- **SCAVENGER HUNT:** Challenge yourself to find a garment in the exhibition that matches each criterion. Write down the name and date of the garment that:
  - Includes three different shades of black.
  - Makes use of transparent materials.
  - Emphasizes geometric shapes.
  - Introduces an organic shape.
  - Incorporates pattern.
  - Cinches at the waist.
  - Includes a large, full collar.
  - Is composed of one color besides black.
  - Is almost perfectly symmetrical.
  - Reflects light.
  - Has a design that emphasizes contrast.
  - Is somehow convertible.

### LOOK / VISUALLY ANALYZE

- **CLOSE-LOOKING SKETCHES:** (Ideally, visit one of the garments you can see in the round.)
  - Face the front of the garment. Draw the negative space that surrounds the garment by shading with the side of your pencil point.
  - Choose your favorite one-inch-square detail and blow it up to four times the scale.
  - Using one continuous line, draw the garment's silhouette from the side.
  - Choose one area of the garment you'd like to change somehow. Draw your reinterpreted garment.
  - Using only arrows, draw the way the fabric falls across the body of the figure.

### MAKE PERSONAL CONNECTIONS

- **CHOOSE YOUR DESTINY:**
  - Ask the students to explore a gallery and decide which garment:
    - They would most like to Wear, Alter, or Bury.
    - Would best clothe a Hero, Villain, or Victim.
    - Would best clothe someone from the Future, the Past, or the Present.
  - Once they've chosen the garment that meets each criterion, ask them to stand next to it. Then have a group discussion about why the students made their choices.

## CHRONOLOGY

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- 1895 Birth of Cristóbal Balenciaga on January 21 in Getaria, a village in the Basque region of Spain. His father, José Balenciaga Basurto, is a fisherman and mayor of Getaria. His mother, Martina Eizaguirre Enbil, is a seamstress.
- 1906 Death of Balenciaga's father.
- 1907 Begins apprenticeship as a tailor at Casa Gómez in San Sebastián.
- 1907 Pablo Picasso paints *Les demoiselles d'Avignon*.
- 1910 Gabrielle Chanel opens boutique on rue Cambon, Paris, where she sells her hats and, beginning in 1913, her clothes.
- 1911 Joins dressmaking department of the Au Louvre department store in San Sebastián.
- 1913 Becomes head of production at Au Louvre.
- 1915 Manuel de Falla composes first version of his score for the ballet *El amor brujo*.
- 1917 Opens his first fashion house under the name C. Balenciaga at 2 calle Vergara, San Sebastián.
- 1917 Artist Francis Picabia founds the magazine *391* in Barcelona.
- 1920 Spanish-born Eugénie de Montijo, former empress of the French, dies at Palacio de Liria in Madrid.
- 1924 Creates haute couture house under the name Cristóbal Balenciaga at 2 avenue de la Libertad, San Sebastián.
- 1925 Dalí presents first solo exhibition at Galeries Dalmau in Barcelona.
- 1926 Chanel creates the "little black dress."
- 1927 Opens new fashion house under the name Eisa Costura at 10 calle Oquendo, San Sebastián.

- 1929                      Exposición Internacional is held in Barcelona. *Un chien andalou*, a Surrealist film directed by Luis Buñuel (screenplay by Buñuel and Dalí), is shown at Studio 28 in Paris.
- 1931                      End of Spanish monarchy and proclamation of Second Spanish Republic.
- 1936                      Group of officers led by General Francisco Franco seizes power and Spanish Civil War begins. García Lorca is shot by the Francoist civil guard in Viznar. Robert Capa makes the well-known photograph *The Falling Soldier*.
- 1936                      Leaves Spain and momentarily suspends work at his three fashion houses.
- 1937                      Opens couture house at 10 avenue George V, Paris, on July 7. Presents his first collection in August.
- 1937                      Picasso paints *Guernica*, inspired by the bombardment on April 26 of the small Spanish Basque town by German and Italian planes backing the Nationalists.
- 1939                      General Franco announces end of Spanish Civil War on April 1.
- 1944                      Occupying German authorities order closure of the houses of Balenciaga and Grès in Paris.
- 1945                      After Liberation of Paris, participates in *Théâtre de la mode*, a show organized by the Chambre syndicale de la couture parisienne at the Pavillon de Marsan.
- 1946                      Pierre Soulages begins painting his abstract canvases, dominated by black. They are rejected by the Salon d'Automne.
- 1947                      Launches his "barrel" line. Creates fragrance Le Dix.
- 1947                      Christian Dior presents his first collection in Paris. The matador Manolete dies in the arena in Linares, Andalucía.
- 1948                      Death of Balenciaga's close collaborator and friend, Wladzio d'Attainville. It is said that the couturier considered retiring, but Dior convinced him not to. The collection that followed was black and somber in tone.

- 1950 André Courrèges joins Balenciaga as a cutter.
- 1951 First semi-fitted suit.
- 1954 Chanel reopens her fashion house after a fifteen-year hiatus.
- 1957 First sack dress.
- 1958 First baby doll dress. Named chevalier de la Légion d'honneur. Gustav Zumsteg, of the Swiss textile firm Abraham, creates gazar\* for Balenciaga. Emanuel Ungaro joins the house.
- 1958 Yves Saint Laurent presents his first collection for Dior.
- 1960 Designs wedding gown for Fabiola de Mora y Aragón, who becomes queen of Belgium.
- 1963 Museu Picasso opens in Barcelona.
- 1964 Abraham firm creates zagar, a heavier and more closely woven gazar\*.
- 1966 Saint Laurent launches ready-to-wear line Saint Laurent Rive Gauche and creates first *smoking* (tuxedo) for women.
- 1967 After ten years of censorship, the projection of Luis Buñuel's film *Los olvidados* is legalized in Spain.
- 1968 Presents his final collection and closes couture house in Paris. Retires to Spain.
- 1968 Publication of *L'œuvre au noir* by Marguerite Yourcenar (translated into English under the title *The Abyss*).
- 1971 Makes last public appearance at Chanel's funeral in Paris.
- 1972 Designs wedding gown for duchess of Cadix and General Franco's granddaughter, Carmen Martínez-Bordiú y Franco; it is his final creation. Death of Cristóbal Balenciaga in Xàbia, near Valence, on March 24. He is buried in his native village, Getaria.



## GLOSSARY

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Basting stitch	Large temporary stitch used to assemble multiple pieces of fabric or to mark a pocket or hem before sewing the final seams.
Bias or true bias	Imaginary line lying at a 45° angle to the fabric's straight grain. "True bias" is attained by positioning the fabric diagonally in relation to the straight grain. Cutting on the bias lends more stretch to fabric so that it clings to the body and drapes more smoothly. Madeleine Vionnet is known for having first developed the use of the bias cut.
Cannelé	Fabric of which the weave, derived from plain weave, produces a succession of ribs running parallel to the weft and formed by warp floats. Usually a heavy, matte fabric, silk cannelé can also have a sheen.
Canvas	Simplest type of weave. The weft yarn alternates between passing over and passing under the warp yarn. Cotton, silk, and wool canvases are relatively coarse and have an even surface.
Chantilly lace	Originally, a handmade silk bobbin lace. Usually black, it can also be white. In black, the play on transparency is more visible, allowing the floral pattern to stand out clearly against the hexagonal tulle ground. Beginning in the second half of the nineteenth century, "Chantilly" also referred to strips of machine-made lace sold by the meter. It has a continually repeating pattern or consists of trimmed flounces that can be layered for decorative use.
Crêpe	Fabric with a grained surface obtained by weaving hard-twisted yarns. Depending on the type of thread used (cotton, silk, wool, and so on), how tightly they are twisted, the direction in which they are twisted (forming an S- or a Z-shape), and the weave, many different types of crêpe can be obtained.
Crêpe de Chine	Light and very thin plain-weave silk fabric. In the 1930s, much fine lingerie was made of crêpe de Chine.
Crin	Long, thick hair from the necks or tails of certain animals (usually horses). This sturdy and flexible fiber is generally used to make fabric and bindings capable of supporting voluminous constructions. Also refers to synthetic version.

Drape	Quality of a fabric that determines how supple it is, how it behaves, and the harmonious way it moves and comes alive.
Gauze	Weave in which the warp yarns are interlaced after each passage of the shuttle. It is the lightest, most transparent fabric.
Gazar	Fabric created in 1958 at Balenciaga's request by Gustav Zumsteg for the Swiss textile firm Abraham. Sheer and crisp with a lot of body, it is best used to create airy volumes
Grain or straight grain	The direction of the fabric running parallel to the selvage. Pattern pieces are usually cut by placing them in this direction.
Lamé	Thin strip of metal or metallic plastic used as thread. The French term <i>laminette</i> refers to an even narrower version.
Lunéville	Type of embroidery in which a hook is used to apply beads, paillettes, or tubes with a chain stitch. This type of embroidery, done on a frame, differs from other techniques in that the beads, paillettes, or tubes are applied with a needle. The paillettes can be applied in straight lines or in the shape of a river, scales, or wavy lines.
Lurex	Material made of a thin layer of aluminum fully lined with a transparent sheet of polyester. Metallic in appearance, it is used in weaving and embroidering in the form of yarn, <i>laminette</i> , or lamé. Lurex is a registered trademark.
Mantilla	A lace or silk scarf worn over a woman's head and shoulders, especially in Spain and Latin America.
Marquissette	Originally, a type of gauze with an organzine warp and a silk weft. It is a light fabric with an airy transparency and an open weave.
Muslin	Plain-weave cotton used for making patterns, usually ecru-colored. There are many different types of muslin, defined according to their thickness and weight. The type of muslin used to make a pattern depends on the fabric from which the final model will be cut.
Organza	Fabric created by the silk manufacturer Bianchini-Férier in 1932. A treated plain-weave silk with a crisp finish, it resembles both mousseline and organdy in its transparency and subtle sheen. It can

be used for interfacing (fabric used on an unseen area for rigidity or shape retention).

Paillette	Small metal or plastic disk with a pierced center that can be applied to a fabric. Paillette embroidery can be done with a needle or a hook (see Lunéville). In the 1960s, the House of Schlaepfer was the first to perfect the allover embroidery of paillettes by machine.
Passementerie	Elaborate trimming of cord or braid, usually arranged in scrolling patterns, sewn together and sometimes enhanced with fringe, pompons, cord-covered dangles, beads, jet beads, paillettes, or sequins. Used on clothing, including military uniforms and matador attire, as well as for furniture.
Percalé	Thin, plain-weave cotton fabric that is firm, closely woven, and smooth in appearance.
Piping	Thin strip of fabric or leather that can be sewn into a seam and that is used along the edges of certain parts of a garment to create a decorative finish.
Plain weave	The most basic type of textile weave, in which the weft alternates over and under the warp to form a criss-cross pattern.
Satin	Weave in which the face is characterized by a preponderance of long warp floats. It is a smooth fabric with a lustrous face and a matte back. There are many varieties of silk satin for evening wear. Charmeuse is a languorous satin that drapes smoothly. Duchesse satin and <i>satin cuir</i> are weightier.
Selvage	Edge of a piece of fabric that runs down its length, usually in a different color and/or texture. The composition of the fabric and the name of the maker are often printed or woven here.
Sequin	Metal or plastic (celluloid) disk, larger than a paillette with a pierced opening. Usually used in embroidery.
Serge	Fabric characterized by diagonal ribs on the face produced by a progression of interlacings. It exists in both warp effect and weft effect.
Taffeta	Lightweight plain-weave fabric in natural silk or synthetic fibers with

a close weave. It has an even grain and is the same on both the face and the back. Taffeta is both soft and crisp, with a lustrous appearance. Wrinkling or brushing against it produces a characteristic rustling noise that is synonymous with lightness.

Tarlatan	Loose, plain-weave cotton gauze fabric that is treated to give it some stiffness. It is usually used to make patterns.
Toile	Mock-up or early version of a garment, often made in cheaper material.
Tulle	Light, transparent fabric in silk, nylon, or cotton, usually with a hexagonal mesh. White tulle is frequently used for wedding veils. When gathered, it creates volume for tutus and petticoats.
Twill	Type of weave in which the weft thread passes over one and under two or more warp threads repeatedly to create a diagonal pattern. It often drapes well.
Velvet	Fabric in which the surface is covered in a short pile over a background weave. Cut velvet has a pattern. Black velvet absorbs the light more than any other fabric.
Weave	The structure of a fabric; the way in which the warp yarns (running lengthwise) and the weft yarns (running crosswise) interlace and produce a specific texture. There are three basic kinds of weave—plain or taffeta, twill, and satin—as well as many other varieties. Knowing weaves makes it possible to obtain consistent fabrics. The way in which weavers combine and use the wefts and sometimes an additional warp to create a pattern leads to what are referred to as fancy weaves, or <i>façonné</i> fabrics.



## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

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Visit the Kimbell's website for more information on the exhibition:

[Kimbell Art Museum, "Balenciaga in Black"](#)

Visit the Kimbell's YouTube channel to watch videos of Miren Arzalluz, Director of the Palais Galliera, discuss a few of Balenciaga's designs in the exhibition:

[Kimbell Art Museum on YouTube](#)

Download the app for the exhibition and listen to audio commentary about select garments:

[Paris Musées, "Balenciaga in Black"](#)

Read a detailed biography for Cristóbal Balenciaga:

[Charleston, Beth Duncuff. "Cristóbal Balenciaga \(1895–1972\)." In Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000–.](#)

Read a blog entry from The Art of Dress about Cristóbal Balenciaga:

[The Art of Dress, "Born on this day in fashion: Christian Dior and Cristobal Balenciaga, Part II"](#)

Read the Victoria & Albert Museum's introduction to Cristóbal Balenciaga:

[Victoria & Albert Museum, "Introducing Cristóbal Balenciaga"](#)

Read and watch videos about the construction of some of Balenciaga's most iconic designs:

[Victoria & Albert Museum, "Secrets of Balenciaga's construction"](#)

Learn more about Balenciaga's designs in black:

[Palais Galliera, "Balenciaga, l'œuvre au noir"](#)

Learn more about Haute Couture in the collection of the Palais Galliera:

[Palais Galliera, "Collections: Haute Couture"](#)

Read more about Cristóbal Balenciaga and his designs:

[Blume, Mary. \*The Master of Us All: Balenciaga, His Workrooms, His World\*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2013.](#)

[Walker, Myra. \*Balenciaga and His Legacy: Haute Couture from the Texas Fashion Collection\*. Dallas: The Meadows Museum, 2006.](#)

Read about Mary Blume's recent biography, *The Master of Us All: Balenciaga, His Workrooms, His World*:

[Vogue, "Couture Culture: \*The Master of Us All\*, A New Biography of Balenciaga"](#)