



PRESS RELEASE

ALAÏA AFORE ALAÏA

under the direction of Olivier Saillard

Exhibition from the 28th of January until the 23th of October 2022

Open every day from 11 am to 7 pm

Ticket : 8€ - Reduced price : 3€

Métro : Hôtel de Ville

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« Alaïa Afore Alaïa » is an unprecedented and original exhibition, conceived and produced by the Foundation created by the designer some years before his death.

Through numerous archive documents, photographs, and drawings, the majority of which have never been displayed to the public, the exhibition analyses the formative years between the 1950s, just before the budding couturier would leave Tunis and move to Paris, to the early 1980s and the emergence of the Alaïa phenomenon.

A rigorous selection of dresses and creations from the beginning of his career, a selection of designs that revealed to the public something far beyond a singular style, a founding body of work dating from the late 1970s dialogues with timeless clothes, truly an intimate map of his eternal sources of inspiration.

“Alaïa Afore Alaïa” brings to light a portrait of the talented couturier, modest on the subject of his younger years, a twenty-year long period throughout which the world would be his school, and women his greatest teachers. Whilst others of his generation developed their design skills within the walls of a school, or in the workrooms and studios of existing fashion houses, Azzedine Alaïa was perfecting his technique, a technique that would become unparalleled over the course of his encounters with the growing circle of women that surrounded him. They were his protectors, supporters, select clients, they would become paths of inspiration for his entire body of work.

During these three edifying decades, a veritable underground archeology of his ambitions, Azzedine Alaïa met many important figures who would remain faithful to him for the rest of his life. Such encounters are favored only by fate when talent and friendship are combined. They are also the result of two journeys that coincide, encouraged by the exchange and development of art in all its forms.

To name but a few who belonged to this secret and benevolent assembly, Hafida, his sister, for whom he used to do some small sewing jobs whilst at school in Tunis, his lifelong friend Latifa Ben Abdallah, Madame Pinault, the midwife that he used to assist and who encouraged him in the vocation of sculpture then that of couturier before his move to Paris in 1956. With the advice and support of one of the great figures of female emancipation in Tunisia, Habiba Menchari, he met up there with her daughter, Leila, who worked as a model for Guy Laroche, but who possessed a powerful artistic talent which she would soon employ in the orchestration of the ephemeral for Hermès. Simone Zehrfuss, the wife of the great architect, and the Countess Nicole de Blégiers in whose home he lived for some time, also participated in the emancipation of the aesthetic eye of the young Azzedine, opening up to him the world of the arts of the time.



In 1959, he met Christoph von Weyhe. Together they explored the capital and its museums. The two young men, budding couturier and painter respectively, would accompany one another in their artistic paths. At the time, Azzedine Alaïa was the couturier working from his one room apartment and whose unique talents were a secret shared and maintained by a select few, to be protected from adulteration that an excess of adherents might cause. It is of little consequence that his time at Dior lasted but a few days, his training would be gracefully administered by these exclusive women who still dictated the trends and the fashions of Paris.

To his bedside couture atelier, the greatest names came rushing. For Greta Garbo, he made oversized masculine coats in which she could wrap herself in anonymity. Arletty was a devoted and unconditional fan. The two met through a friend, the hairdresser Frédéric Somigli, and she became the favorite person in the pantheon of Alaïa's inspirations. It is from her that he learned the most about the irreverent chic that only Parisian women can nonchalantly pre-empt. His famous zip dresses are owed very much to her influence. His close relationship with the literary figure Louise de Vilmorin invited him into artistic circles and guided him in the ways of high society. He would be her mirror. She became his model of influence, and throughout his life he never ceased to recall her importance.

To this concert of women, other noteworthy voices brought their harmony, for example Bettina, his great longtime friend, or Rosemarie Le Quellec, Lison Bonfils, Claude Brouet, Nicole Crassat, Dominique Miceli, Melka Tréanton, Carlyne Cerf de Dudzele and Carla Sozzani, all central figures in the orchestration and the development of Azzedine Alaïa's beginnings in fashion and in their unwavering friendship.

In addition to the growing number of client orders which accumulated daily at rue de Bellechasse, Azzedine was constantly experimenting, barely sleeping, always working, and already receiving all of Paris for meals in his open kitchen, recalls Rosine Baldaccini. At the invitation of Alain Bernardin, he created the costumes for the girls of the Crazy Horse. He made the woman's body his future assertion, a philosophy which would distinguish him from his peers.

Working with the great furriers, he perfected his technique. The leathers and pelts would become to him fabrics, mastered even more so than chiffon. A collection of studded, cinched leathers was turned down by Charles Jourdain, but paradoxically, this collection was the seed that would grow and bloom into the Alaïa phenomenon. The pioneers of the fashion world swore by him. From head to toe, from dawn until dusk, it is by Alaïa that they wanted to be dressed. He was invited to New York where he was universally acclaimed. The designer Thierry Mugler with whom Azzedine shared a strong friendship further encouraged him. Prosper Assouline and Andrée Putman accompanied him in his development. Gilles Bensimon and Claude Perdriel, caring and understanding friends, are amongst those who assisted him in the revelation of his artistic expression. Azzedine had become Alaïa.



Beneath the great glass roof of the gallery, in the very space where the couturier habitually invited friends and members of the press to the presentations of his coveted collections, at the very heart of his posthumous foundation where he hoped that the exhibitions would bring together as many people as possible from all walks of life to meet and exchange ideas, “Alaïa Afore Alaïa” shares rare accounts, delicate stories, and archive documents. Dresses from the past, born from these three seminal decades, alongside more recent creations inspired by his eternal subjects, reveal a gallery of portraits of those people who, certain of his great and unique talent, helped, guided, and supported him in the growth and development of his art.

The Azzedine Alaïa Foundation in partnership with Rizzoli publishing will release in the spring of 2022 a book illustrated with yet unseen documents, texts, and interviews under the direction of the journalist and author, Laurence Benaïm, with the participation of the philosopher Emanuele Coccia, the journalist Alexander Fury, Olivier Saillard, Director of the Azzedine Alaïa Foundation, and the artistic direction of Carla Sozzani, President of the Foundation. Though their names are quoted repeatedly in the book published to accompany the exhibition, not all those who, be it for a short time or for a lifetime, played a role in supporting Azzedine Alaïa could be spoken about in detail in this short text. However, heartfelt thanks are expressed to them all, their names are listed below. The exhibition and book invite readers and visitors to become more amply acquainted with each of them:

Prosper Assouline	Dominique Miceli
Latifa Ben Abdallah	Dominique Zehrfuss
Rosine Baldaccini	Edgar Morin
Gilles Bensimon	Thierry Mugler
Nicole de Blégiers	Claude Perdrriel
Silvia Bocchese	Zuleika Ponsen
Lison Bonfils	Marie Rucki
Claude Brouet	Dany Saval
Jean-Charles de Castelbajac	Frédéric Somigli
Carlyne Cerf de Dudzeele	Ibrahima Soumaré
Didier Grumbach	Nuccia Stinco
Sylvie Grumbach	Christoph von Weyhe
Serge Lutens	

Alaïa avant Alaïa

Rizzoli Edition
336 pages
200 colors photography and black&white
Size 23,5 x 29 cm
Price : 82 euros

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AZZEDINE ALAÏA FOUNDATION

Azzedine Alaïa lived a life filled with fashion, art, design, architecture, music and theatre.

Mr. Alaïa had been an avid collector in the creative and cultural disciplines for the past fifty years. In 2007, he set about to preserve his own work and his large holdings by founding the Association Azzedine Alaïa, later becoming the Azzedine Alaïa Foundation, with his lifetime partner, the painter Christoph Von Weyhe, and his close friend of forty years, the publisher Carla Sozzani.

The Azzedine Alaïa Foundation has been recognized as a public utility on February 28th, 2020. The Foundation's missions are the conservation and enhancement of the work of Azzedine Alaïa, the pieces he collected throughout his life in the fields of art, fashion and design, the organization of exhibitions, and the support for cultural and educational activities.

The foundation houses its collections in Paris and exhibits Alaïa's own work as well as his collections. It is located at 18 rue de la Verrerie where he lived and work and in Sidi Bou Saïd, the town he loved so dearly.

A bookshop and café, featuring books on fashion and cultural history, are also situated at the heart of the Foundation in Paris.

The Foundation will also give awards to promising visionaries in fashion.

The signature logo of the Azzedine Alaïa Foundation was designed by Julian Schnabel.