



PRESS RELEASE

AZZEDINE ALAÏA  
OF SCULPTED SILENCE  
THE COUTURE COLLECTION 2003

BRUCE WEBER  
PHOTOGRAPHS OF  
THE COUTURE COLLECTION 2003

Curated by Carla Sozzani, Joe McKenna and Olivier Saillard

**Exhibition from September 12<sup>th</sup>, until November 16<sup>th</sup>, 2025**

Open every day from 11 am to 7 pm

Full Price: 10€ - Reduced price: 3€

Métro : Hôtel de Ville

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Presented on 23 January 2003, the couture collection for the Summer-Autumn of the same year embodied Azzedine Alaïa's creative and stylistic renewal. The couturier had not presented a fashion show for eleven years. Having distanced himself from the fashion system he prophetically contradicted, no longer recognising himself in an era that celebrated minimalist fashions, Azzedine Alaïa stuck to reworking iconic designs season after season, whose technical perfection and craftsmanship confirmed them as classics that became his signature.

In 2003, when his fashion house was going through a period of financial vulnerability and the architectural heritage of his lifetime's work on Rue de la Verrerie and Rue de Moussy was sometimes putting its economic stability at risk, Azzedine Alaïa found new financial backers. Accompanied by his loyal friend and collaborator Carla Sozzani, he isolated himself for weeks in the silence of his studio and began to design a collection that would once again place him at the top of the fashion world.

Azzedine Alaïa's work spans four distinct periods. The first, from his arrival in Paris in 1956 to his first fashion show under his own name in 1982, was characterised by a long apprenticeship during which the couturier worked with a private clientele. These more than twenty years of training with the women he accompanied in their dressing rooms were his true school, where he acquired a perfect knowledge of the techniques of cutting and the human form. The second period, from 1982 to 1992, was one of triumph. Azzedine Alaïa presented his first fashion show at Bergdorf Goodman, encouraged by his friend Thierry Mugler. This was followed by a succession of major collections in which Azzedine Alaïa revealed himself as a couturier who magnified the body. In 1985, he won two Fashion Oscars, including one for the greatest designer of the moment. The 1980s belonged to him. Until 1992, each season saw the introduction of the central themes of his work: zip dresses, bandage dresses, shirts and jackets governed solely by the architecture of the volumes, etc. The years 1992 to 2002 were a period of analysis and reflection. Azzedine Alaïa broke away from a fashion system he found alienating. He saw the hastily produced collections as the exact opposite of what he wanted for his work, namely rigour and discretion.

In 2003, at the age of almost 68, the couturier was about to embark on the final period of his career, which would showcase the excellence of his work in all its glory. Azzedine Alaïa no longer had to prove his technical superiority over his contemporaries. His research, motivated by the quest for the ultimate cut, became quieter and more abstract, even more skilful because it was less visible on the surface. From this perspective, all the designs he was preparing to show in his Summer-Autumn 2003 collection, marking his return, were manifestos of the technical virtuosity that only he could master. Seemingly effortless, the jackets, coats and dresses were the culmination of a lifetime spent in the atelier.



Jackets and frock coats swing from straight to bias cuts, perforated, curved skirts tame denim as if it were precious chiffon, and zip dresses, guided by a desire for extreme purity, impose themselves with deliberate asceticism. Leather elongates the back in black or white crocodile tails. Shirts, in which the couturier excels in the exercise of restraint, are elongated. They shine in lily-white and English embroidery. Chiffon dresses, lighter than a breath, cry out his genius.

*'Sublime, inevitably Azzedine', 'Alaïa, a lesson in couture', 'Master Class from Alaïa', 'Alaïa, the magic of black', 'Alaïa Triumphs', 'Alaïa king of Curves', 'Alaïa is great'...* There is not a single article or signature that does not bow down before such brilliance. He is a man who imposes himself with silence and confidence, never shouting about his efforts. For beyond the timelessness with which he has sharpened his scissors, Azzedine Alaïa raises an important issue in the contemporary fashion debate. His haute couture, that historic and sometimes defunct territory beneath its stiff embroidery, which he alone revives with genuine and practical care, without artifice, renders his competitors' collections absurd and useless. He knows this well, having chosen to write *'Summer-Autumn 2003', 'Clothing, Couture, Edition, Ready-to-Wear'* as the epigraph for his press kit. In the calm of the glass-roofed space where the new vestal models parade with their feet almost bare, Azzedine Alaïa makes no distinctions. Whatever the materials, the uses, the sumptuous evenings they accompany, the uncertain days they combine, clothes demand and require equal attention. Whether haute couture and exceptional or ready-to-wear and everyday, each one has a right to nobility, all must clothe and remain.

Without decor or catwalk, amid the whispering of bare walls, accompanied by the poems of Jacques Prévert, the bursts of Arletty's voice and the songs of Juliette Greco, Azzedine Alaïa's clothes are the unchanging musical notes of a different score that takes the couturier into the 21st century. A new femininity, more serene, emerges from the radiant silhouettes. The applause continues throughout the day. True to himself, Alaïa does not come out to greet his audience, as if to further highlight the clothes to which he, as a couturier and collector, has devoted his entire life and passion.

*The exhibition brings together around thirty of the collection's masterpieces in the exhibition space itself, under the glass roof where the fashion show took place. Videos and films accompany the presentation.*

*Upstairs, next to the couturier's studio, which is open to the public, the photographs taken by his friend and artist Bruce Weber for a series published in Vogue Italia are on display for the first time. Still in black and white, the garments photographed brush against the bodies, approaching them delicately to better define them without overshadowing them, and reveal a new femininity in tune with that desired by the couturier.*

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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, 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 at 18 Rue de la Verrerie, where he lived and worked. Here the Foundation shows exhibitions about Azzedine Alaïa own work as well his collections of the History of Fashion, photography and design.

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

The Foundation also gives awards to promising visionaries in fashion.

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

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