



PRESS RELEASE

AZZEDINE ALAÏA AND AFRICA

Curated by Olivier Saillard

Exhibition from Tuesday July 7th, 2026 to Sunday January 4th, 2027

Open every day from 11 am to 7 pm

Full Price: 10€ - Reduced price: 3€

Métro : Hôtel de Ville

Press contact: fondationazzedinealaia@2e-bureau.com

Fondation Azzedine Alaïa
18, rue de la Verrerie, 75004 Paris
Tel. +33 (0) 1 87 44 87 75

fondationazzedinealaia@2e-bureau.com



Although he earned recognition and legitimacy in the world of French haute couture, Azzedine Alaïa stayed committed throughout his career to drawing on inspiration from a country – and a continent – that he had left at a young age but that never stopped fascinating him.

With a sense of nostalgia, the *mashrabiya*s come to mind, just as they did when he was a child in Tunis. These finely crafted lattice screens, which sculpt both light and gaze, find a kind of rebirth in Alaïa's designs. Rendered in white cotton – even more striking than the limewashed walls of his native Tunisia – the designer plays a game of hide-and-seek with bodies and fleeting silhouettes. Openwork hems on skirts and shirts reveal and conceal, just as they once did. Those same limewashed façades – traditionally splashed with cool water in summer to refresh interior courtyards – inspired the couturier to capture both fragrance and sensation. Their dazzling brightness, combined with the lightness of fabrics seemingly yearning for the rare breeze of warm lands, would remain a constant throughout his work. From North Africa and its people, he also retained the memory of simple jackets, from underneath which long striped shirts emerge – proudly worn by the models in his 1992 collection.

In apparent contrast to these sunlit whites, Azzedine Alaïa also explored every nuance of black. From the most radiant to the deepest shade, black imbues the movement of the body with a warm ink-like quality that simultaneously protects and shapes majestic silhouettes, as seen in his 1983 and 1984 collections. Sovereign heads are wrapped in hoods, while gestures adopt the fluid principles of unruly fabric. From the visual language of leather masks, and dark, burnt wood masks, he retained a sense of stylistic economy. Certain dresses, deliberately simple in appearance, become countenances in their own right through the expressive power of the materials used.

All the sandy hues of sub-Saharan Africa are subtly evoked, echoing the nuances of landscapes that seem to dissolve into intense reds. Raffia and twine give free rein to the imagination, used in dresses that the couturier conceived to be entirely adorned with embroidery featuring seashells and cowrie shells for three collections deeply marked by an African influence: Spring/Summer 1988, 1989, and 1990.

It was through imagery of Egypt and the secret art of mummification that the couturier took a closer, fresh look at the art of cutting – a skill that he mastered like few others. From this iconographic research emerged some of Alaïa's most iconic creations. His bandage dresses (first introduced in 1985) were true feats of construction that he invented from scratch, and which perfectly showcase the virtuosity of a designer perpetually captivated by the legacy of queens and pharaohs.

In 1996, the couturier traveled through Maasai country with the photographer Peter Beard. From this trip to Kenya, a connection grew between the two friends, who were united by deep mutual admiration. A series of photographs attests to the enthusiasm and emotion with which Alaïa returned from the journey, and to the profound impact that it left on him.

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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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