



Major V&A exhibition celebrating the diva to open on Saturday, with iconic outfits worn by Rihanna, Whitney Houston, and Lil Nas X

The exhibition includes five key looks from global megastar Rihanna on display for the first time

DIVA

24 June 2023 – 7 April 2024

Gallery 40

Supported by NET-A-PORTER

Opening on Saturday 24 June, *DIVA* is the first exhibition of its kind to celebrate the extraordinary power and creativity of iconic performers who have made their voices heard from the 19th century to today.

Today the V&A reveals that five key looks worn by global phenomenon **Rihanna** will be shown together for the first time for the exhibition. On loan to the exhibition from the artist herself, the objects track Rihanna's style evolution as an artist and celebrate her ability to transform her own personal image, shaping style and popular culture along the way. Stretching creative and technical limits both on and off the stage, whilst mixing street style and high glamour, Rihanna is one of the most anticipated stars on the red carpet.

A duo of looks worn by the artist to the Met Gala are on display: the 2018 high-fashion Papal look, with jewel-encrusted robe and matching mitre designed by John Galliano for Maison Margiela, and the 2021 couture black gown complete with beanie, designed by Demna Gvasalia for Balenciaga. *DIVA* also displays one of Rihanna's earliest high-impact fashion moments, the sheer 'naked' dress worn to the CFDA Awards in 2014, designed by Adam Selman, and accented with over 200,000 Swarovski crystals with a matching durag and gloves, as well as this year's 2023 Oscars award Alaïa ensemble, designed with mesh cut-outs over her pregnancy bump. Finally, on display is the crown used for Rihanna's ANTI album cover (2016), made by Roy Nachum, and accompanying iconic visuals from Rihanna's career.

Kate Bailey, curator of *DIVA*, said: *"At the heart of this exhibition is a story of iconic performers who with creativity, courage and ambition have challenged the status quo and used their voice and their art to redefine and reclaim the diva. Rihanna is a multifaceted, independent performer who has used her strong sense of self to shift the needle. She embodies the spirit of the nineteenth century divas and shows us today how divas don't just create art, they are culture-makers, entrepreneurs and activists. We are delighted to showcase a range of objects that reflect how Rihanna has used her authentic voice to make a difference - from Bajan ambassador to style icon to music pioneer. The V&A with its world class collections of art design and performance and*

its mission to inspire creativity in all its forms is the perfect stage to celebrate the multifaceted Diva.”

Additional headline ensembles also announced today include **Whitney Houston’s**, floor length black and gold dress worn to receive her three Grammys for *The Bodyguard* soundtrack, including song of the year for single I Will Always Love You, designed by **Marc Bouwer** (1994); **Billie Eilish’s** Glastonbury ensemble (2019) designed by **Stella McCartney**; and a lilac Versace deconstructed suit worn by **Lil Nas X** on the MTV VMA red carpet (2021).

The looks are on display alongside 60 ensembles and 250 objects drawn from the V&A collection and loans from across the world, spanning fashion, photography, design, costumes, music, and live performance. Through a sonic headset experience by **Tonwelt**, theatrical staging, and a planetarium style architectural take-over designed by BAFTA-winning video designer **Tal Rosner**, *DIVA* celebrates the powerful and personal stories of creativity, ambition, and resilience of some of the best-known divas, from opera goddesses and silent movie stars to sirens of the big screen and today’s global megastars. The exhibition looks at how the performer has intersected with society and driven change through their platform and profile for social good and political change, including global civil rights and feminism.

DIVA demonstrates the phenomenal ability of the diva to transform, inspire and embrace the external and internal forces that contribute to defining, shaping, and worshipping a diva. Delving into the origins of the term ‘diva’ - meaning goddess in Italian - the exhibition explores how the meaning of the word has been subverted and embraced over time, and how the label has been reclaimed by performers, their fans and wider society.

Of the 60 looks featured in the exhibition, many are rare or on display for the first time, including: a stage ensemble worn by **Maria Callas** as Norma in the Covent Garden Opera Company production of 'Norma' (1952); the fringed black dress worn by **Marilyn Monroe** as Sugar "Kane" Kowalczyk in 'Some Like it Hot' (1959); iconic costumes designed by fashion designer for the stars **Bob Mackie**, including looks worn by **Tina Turner**, **P!nk** and **CHER**; a Louis XIV inspired look, with towering powdered wig and train worn by **Elton John** for his 50th birthday celebration, designed by **Sandy Powell**; **Shirley Bassey’s** couture pink gown designed by **Julien MacDonald** including customised wellington boots, worn on stage at Glastonbury (2007); and **Janelle Monae’s** 'vulva pants' designed by **Duran Lantink** for the music video 'Pynk' (2018);

Also on display will be examples of ephemera from the divadom including posters, song sheets and handwritten lyric sheets as well as personal objects and accessories owned by divas. *DIVA* also includes examples of diva branding, highlighting the entrepreneurial and enterprising spirit of these divas, as well key works by photographers and image-makers including **Sheila Rock**, **David Corio**, **Denis Regan** and **Nick Knight**. Finally, a video wall celebrates the art of drag and its relationship to the diva.

The voice of the diva is amplified by a sonic experience designed by world-leading sound designer Gareth Fry. This will be delivered by **Tonwelt’s** new Spheric headset system which includes ambisonics, a 360-degree surround sound. As visitors move through the galleries the headsets will trigger performances by individual divas creating an iconic and emotional soundtrack which plays throughout the exhibition and includes key music by **Maria Callas**,

Jessye Norman, Aretha Franklin and Josephine Baker to Dolly Parton, Adele, Prince, Ella Fitzgerald, Sade, Beyoncé and Madonna.

- ENDS -

For further PRESS information about *DIVA* please contact Shannon Nash on s.nash@vam.ac.uk / 020 7942 2502 (not for publication). A selection of press images is available to download free of charge from pressimages.vam.ac.uk.

Notes to Editors:

- The exhibition *DIVA* runs from 24 June 2023 – 7 April 2024.
- Adult tickets £20, student and under-26 tickets £13.
- V&A Members visit free
- The exhibition has been curated for the V&A by Lead Curator Kate Bailey and Project Curator Veronica Castro.
- The exhibition is accompanied by a new V&A publication, *DIVA*, edited by Kate Bailey. RRP £30.

About the Exhibition:

‘Act One’ provides historical context to the creation of the Diva and explores the goddesses of the stage and screen who have endured and gone on to shape popular culture today. This section celebrates how the first opera divas **Adelina Patti** and **Jenny Lind** created and performed extraordinary roles which brought them wealth and recognition at a time when most women were unable to pursue an education or careers. This section also explores how actors such as **Ellen Terry**, **Sarah Bernhardt** and **Marie Lloyd** drove the first wave of feminism and how the powerful women of the 20th-century built on this struggle for equality, including silent-screen sirens **Clara Bow** and **Mary Pickford** and Golden Age of Hollywood stars **Vivien Leigh**, **Mae West** and **Marilyn Monroe**. Also explored in this section is the impact of cult status, and the role of studios and the press in fueling public interest in the diva's personal lives.

Key highlights in this section include: early Parisian couture worn by **Adelina Patti** from the V&A's collection, on display for the first time; a jewellery box embellished with mother of pearl inlay, presented to **Jenny Lind** after a charity concert in aid of the Queen's College Hospital, Birmingham (1848); an ensemble worn by prima ballerina **Tamara Karsavina** as Salomé in ‘La Tragédie de Salomé’, performed by Serge Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes (1913); powerful objects including a couture gown, on loan from **Josephine Baker’s** former home in France - Château de Milandes - will reveal her ground-breaking career, from performer to activist; Margot Channing’s party dress from ‘All About Eve’ (1950), performed by **Bette Davis**, designed by iconic costume designer **Edith Head**; a corseted crimson dress designed by Christian Dior and worn by **Vivien Leigh** as Paolo in Jean Giradoux's 'Duel of Angels' at the Apollo Theatre (1958); costumes from Hollywood, including a silk chiffon and sequin dress worn by **Mae West** as lion tamer Tira in ‘I’m No Angel’ (1933); the sleek black fringed dress worn by **Marilyn Monroe** as

the character Sugar “Kane” Kowalczyk in ‘Some Like it Hot’ (1959); and a sensual beaded look worn by **Theda Bara** for lost film ‘Cleopatra’, dir. J. Gordon Edwards (1917).

The finale of ‘Act One’ showcases the timeless opera diva, and include costumes worn by **Maria Callas** from her very first and last performances at The Royal Opera House; as Norma in the Covent Garden Opera Company production of ‘Norma’ (1952) and the legendary ‘Tosca’ directed by Franco Zeffirelli (1964), **Joyce DiDonato’s** custom red satin dress by Vivienne Westwood (2012) and a grey chiffon dress and turban decorated with diamanté, worn by **Jessye Norman** as Ariadne in The Royal Opera House production of ‘Ariadne auf Naxos’ (1985). ‘Act Two’ celebrates the diva today and explores how performers of all genders have redefined and reclaimed the title ‘diva’ as an expression of their art, voice, and sense of self. It interrogates divas navigating the historically male-dominated music and film businesses; those who have expanded their affairs into the worlds of business, and the phenomenon of the diva brand through artists such as **Rihanna**, **Dolly Parton** and **Barbra Streisand**. It explores how the modern performer continues to use their voice to enable social and political change, looking at artists such as **Billie Holliday**, **Nina Simone** and **Ella Fitzgerald** who endured backlash, criticism and danger to oppose the status quo, and how **Aretha Franklin’s** anthem ‘Respect’ (1967) became an anthem of women’s empowerment and the US Civil Rights Movement. The section features boundary-pushing divas such as **Grace Jones**, **Annie Lennox**, **Prince** and **Elton John**, and how they have emancipated themselves from the limitations of traditional representation, using costume, androgyny and performance style as tools through which to express relationships with sexuality, gender and the body. It reveals how divas like **Björk** are unafraid to transform and reinvent themselves and how divas like **Siouxsie Sioux** and **Missy Elliott** shifted the diva needle into new genres. How the modern diva navigates the cult of celebrity, the media eye, and the struggle between personal and private life will also be examined. Finally, this Act considers how performing the diva requires exceptional talent, dedication and the pursuit of perfection and how legendary divas **CHER** and **Tina Turner** have collaborated with visionary fashion designer **Bob Mackie** to construct their full glam, high camp stage personas and how that has inspired the divas of drag, such as **Ru Paul**.

Highlights from Act Two include; **Edith Piaf’s** instantly recognisable little black dress (1960s); several iconic costumes worn by **CHER** across the decades, including a glittering two-piece ensemble, worn to the 1975 Rock Music Awards, designed by **Bob Mackie**; **Tina Turner’s** iconic ‘Flame Dress’ (1977), also designed by **Mackie**; an acid yellow and pink tunic and leggings worn by **Debbie Harry** on Blondie’s 1979 European tour; a Louis XIV inspired look, with towering powdered wig and train worn by **Elton John** for his 50th birthday celebration (1997), designed by **Sandy Powell**; **Shirley Bassey’s** couture pink gown designed by **Julien MacDonald**, with customised wellington boots, worn to Glastonbury (2007); the ‘Vulva pants’ designed by **Duran Lantink** for **Janelle Monáe’s** music video ‘Pynk’ (2018); a lilac ensemble worn by **Lil Nas X** at the MTV VMA red carpet (2021); a Valentino Haute Couture, worn by **Björk** during performance in Reykjavik (2021); and a duo of Met Gala looks worn by **Rihanna**, including the

2018 pope inspired look by John Galliano for Maison Margiela.

Also announced today is the exhibition's **Act Three**: the “diva-valhalla”, which - using projection mapping and stage lighting – take over the alcoves of the fashion gallery to present a constellation of divas in a planetarium-esque contemporary hall of fame featuring familiar and much-loved diva moments, including Freddie Mercury, Kate Bush, Whitney Houston, and Beyoncé. Projections for Act Three were created by BAFTA-winning video designer **Tal Rosner**, whose scope of work covers a uniquely wide spectrum including music, theatre and opera. He designed both Opening and Closing Ceremonies of the Commonwealth Games in 2022 and has worked with the New York Philharmonic, Pet Shop Boys and Marni. The transformative Exhibition Lighting has been designed by Olivier award winning designer Jessica Hung Han Yun.

Support for the V&A is more vital than ever. Please help us by acknowledging the exhibition supporters NET-A-PORTER, and Kathryn Uhde.

About the V&A

The Victoria and Albert Museum, London (V&A) is the world's leading museum of art, design and performance with collections unrivalled in their scope and diversity, spanning 5000 years of human creativity. It was established in 1852 to make works of art available to all and to inspire British designers and manufacturers. Today, its purpose is to champion creative industry, inspire the next generation, and spark everyone's imagination. Vam.ac.uk

About NET-A-PORTER

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About Tonwelt

Enjoy the new V&A exhibition hands-free with state-of-the-art sound! The new all-in-one headset supraGuide SPHERIC has innovative 3D sound technology and automatic triggering. It will guide you through the show and fill your ears with the immersive tones of iconic performers from opera, stage, pop music and film. Enjoy a new form of exhibition experience at the V&A!