

THE VULGAR

Fashion Redefined

Winterpalais
3 March 2017 to 25 June 2017



Dior by John Galliano, Ensemble, Spring/Summer 2003, Haute Couture
Exhibition view The Vulgar: Fashion Redefined, Barbican Centre, 2016, Photo: © Belvedere, Vienna

THE VULGAR

Fashion Redefined

The Vulgar: Fashion Redefined explores the controversial yet compelling topic of taste in fashion. From 3 March to 25 June 2017, creations by leading designers, on show at Prince Eugene's Winterpalais, seek to stimulate discussion about the definition of "the vulgar" in an exhibition spanning a period from the Renaissance through to today. Drawing on quotes from famous figures such as Coco Chanel and Jonathan Swift, the underlying theory is that vulgarity and "good taste" are ultimately a matter of perspective.

The word "vulgar" was originally used in the English-speaking world to characterize a social class and to describe anything that was **commonly prevalent**. Over time, this neutral description morphed into an insult. Vulgarity became associated with pretension and ambition, with aspirations to special privileges. And it still conjures up **negative connotations** – words like "pretentious", "provocative", "over the top", and "common" spring to mind.

"The word 'vulgar' is used to police the boundaries of taste. Fashion is where good taste and bad taste mix and match," says psychoanalyst Adam Phillips on how the term relates to fashion.

The exhibition draws on literary sources to conjure new interpretations as well as look at the origins of the vulgar. It questions whether the meaning of "vulgar" can be confined to the realms of the superficial.

Curated and designed by exhibition-maker Judith Clark based on new texts by psychoanalyst Adam Phillips, the show takes the diverse **definitions** of the vulgar as its interdisciplinary starting-point. Based around **ten thematic categories** (e.g. "Showing Off", "Puritan", "Extreme Bodies", and "The New Baroque"), Phillips and Clark enter into a **dialogue** that accompanies the visitor through the exhibition. Clark's selection of diverse exhibits is a response to Phillips' analysis and illustrates the **various aspects of the vulgar in fashion**. Creations by Walter Van Beirendonck, Manolo Blahnik, Christian Dior, Karl Lagerfeld for Chloé, Prada, Vivienne Westwood, and many others are showcased in the exhibition. Displays range from the mantua dresses with their extremely wide skirts and dramatic silhouettes, which were worn at the English court in the mid-eighteenth century, to contemporary works by the designer Pam Hogg, whose creations often play with the extremes of revealing and concealing and allude to the hedonism of the club.

Judith Clark believes *“the vulgar and the Baroque have always been inextricable”*. Stella Rollig, Director General of the Belvedere emphasizes this, stating: *“The Baroque Winterpalais is the ideal venue for the presentation of opulent fashion creations through the centuries. In an interdisciplinary discourse between psychoanalysis and fashion, the exhibition-makers invite visitors to question the concept of the vulgar. This thrilling combination makes this project a unique experience.”*

“Adapting the subject to the cultural imprint of Austrian society certainly presented us with some challenges. Here the class mentality, and therefore the classification of people and actions as ‘vulgar’, is not as pronounced as, for example, in Britain. We finally decided on an open exhibition design. The monumental Baroque palace adds a new conceptual level to the presentation,” says curator **Alfred Weidinger**.

The exhibition combines **historical costume, couture, and ready-to-wear fashion** with every exhibit reflecting certain aspects of the vulgar, although all the objects are now sanctioned by society. This illustrates the **instability of taste**: what was once equated with vulgarity is reconjured by designers to become the height of fashion.

Previously shown to great acclaim at the **Barbican Centre in London**, the exhibition presents loans from important international public and private collections. These include contributions from leading modern and contemporary designers and fashion houses, such as **Christian Dior, Madame Gres, Jeanne Lanvin, Christian Lacroix, Louis Vuitton, and Vivienne Westwood**. It challenges visitors to consider the fashion industry from another perspective.

Fashion’s all-pervasive power manifests itself in multiple ways today. It judges and condemns its wearers, can be a means of self-presentation, manipulation, or can act as a protective shield. On **International Women’s Day on 8 March**, a thematic tour in German will explore the relationship between dress, the female body, and social conventions from the time of the Renaissance until now.

The **exhibition catalogue** (Verlag Buchhandlung Walther König) includes illustrations and essays by the exhibition-makers as well as interviews with designers featured in the exhibition, such as Walter van Beirendonck, Christian Lacroix, and Zandra Rhodes.

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THE EXHIBITION-MAKERS

Judith Clark is a curator based in London. She is currently Professor of Fashion and Museology at London College of Fashion, University of the Arts, London. Clark has curated numerous acclaimed exhibitions including *Spectres: When Fashion Turns Back*, V&A, 2005, *Anna Piaggi: Fashionology*, V&A 2006, *Chloé: Attitudes*, Palais de Tokyo, Paris, 2012, and recently the inaugural exhibition of *La Galerie, Louis Vuitton*, Asnières. Clark lectures on issues of dress display and fashion. Her latest book *Exhibiting Fashion: Before and After 1971* was published in 2014.

Adam Phillips is a psychoanalyst and writer. He is author of many celebrated books including *Side Effects*, 2006, *On Kindness*, 2009, *Missing Out: In Praise of the Unlived Life*, 2012, *One Way and Another*, 2013, and *Unforbidden Pleasures*, 2015.

Clark's practice interrogates the form of the exhibition and challenges conventional modes of display and interpretation of dress. Together with Adam Phillips, she has explored the rich connections between language and objects to striking and provocative effect in the exhibition *The Vulgar: Fashion Redefined*.

Judith Clark with Sam Collins re-designed the installation for the Winterpalais in consultation with Belvedere curator **Alfred Weidinger**.

Exhibition curated by Judith Clark. Organised by Barbican, London

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Press images are available for download under www.belvedere.at/press

A PDF of the exhibition catalogue can be found here:

<https://tinyurl.com/pressematerial-vulgaer>

Link to the Designer-Interviews: <https://tinyurl.com/thevulgar-interviews>

GENERAL INFORMATION

Exhibition title	THE VULGAR Fashion Redefined
Exhibition duration	3 March 2017 to 25 June 2017
Venue	Winterpalais (Himmelpfortgasse 8, 1010 Vienna)
Exhibits	89
Curators	Judith Clark (Barbican Centre), Alfred Weidinger (Belvedere)
Catalogue	<i>The Vulgar: Fashion Redefined</i> Ed. Jane Alison & Sinéad McCarthy 256p. 21,7 x 30,4 cm ISBN 978-3-96098-030-8 (English) EUR 48,-
Contact	Himmelpfortgasse 8, 1010 Vienna T +43 1 795 57-0 www.belvedere.at
Opening hours	Daily 10 am to 6 pm
Regular Entry	€ 9,- (Winterpalais)
Guided Tours	Belvedere & Winterpalais Visitor Services & Art Education T +43 1 795 57-134, M public@belvedere.at
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Complimentary images can be downloaded for press purposes at www.belvedere.at/press.

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