



Immersive, inclusive, intersectional: JA Projects designs Fashioning Masculinities for the V&A

Landmark exhibition takes visitors on a journey
from historical to contemporary, exploring
gender, identity and adornment

19 March to 6 November 2022

Victoria & Albert Museum, Cromwell Road, London SW7 2RL



Installation view of Fashioning Masculinities at V&A, featuring Craig Green look © Victoria and Albert Museum, London

On 19 March, the V&A opens the doors on its first major exhibition to celebrate the power, artistry and diversity of masculine attire and appearance, *Fashioning Masculinities: The Art of Menswear* – revealing an immersive sensory space conceived and created by architecture and design practice JA Projects.



Fashioning Masculinities: The Art of Menswear traces how menswear has been fashioned and refashioned over the centuries, and how designers, tailors and artists – and their clients and sitters – have constructed and performed masculinity, and unpicked it at the seams. Curated by Claire Wilcox and Rosalind McKeever, the exhibition features around 100 looks and 100 artworks and combines work by iconic designers and rising stars of fashion, with historical pieces from the V&A collection and beyond.



Left: CRAIG GREEN SS21, photography by Amy Gwatkin. Right: Harris Reed Fluid Romanticism 001. Photographer Giovanni Corabi.

Commissioned to develop the creative concept for this landmark show, the architectural studio JA Projects has chosen to use the platform as an opportunity not only to chronicle the rich history of men's fashion, but to explore the shifting social contexts that have both defined – and been defined by – masculine attire over the centuries. Through juxtapositions, material choices, colours, shapes, lighting and physical perspectives, and even typography, the exhibition teases out the values fashion can represent, the power structures it reinforces or undermines, and the statements it can make about racial, bodily and gender identities.



“Fashion and architecture are both inherently about people and society. In how we dress, we make decisions about how we want to project ourselves into the world – how we want to be seen, what we want to say and how we want others to engage with us. At scale, ‘fashion’ starts to speak about these values at the level of the collective. The same is true of architecture, whereby we frame our collective culture through the creation of buildings and spaces that speak to these values – spaces that reflect and dictate the tone of our lived experience.”

– Jayden Ali, founder, JA Projects



Jayden Ali, founder, JA Projects designs Fashioning Masculinities for the V&A



'From Piazza to Pizzazz'

JA Projects' spatial design breaks the exhibition into three parts, taking visitors on a journey broadly from the ancient past to the present day – 'from Piazza to Pizzazz', as the practice describes it.

"Masculine fashion is enjoying a period of unprecedented creativity. It has long been a powerful mechanism for encouraging conformity or expressing individuality. Rather than a linear or definitive history, this is a journey across time and gender. The exhibition brings together historical and contemporary looks with art that reveals how masculinity has been performed. This is a celebration of the masculine wardrobe, and everyone is invited to join in."

– Claire Wilcox and Rosalind McKeever, co-curators, *Fashioning Masculinities: The Art of Menswear*

Undressed



Installation view of Undressed within Fashioning Masculinities at V&A © Victoria and Albert Museum, London



The first section, Undressed, focuses on the male body and how classical antiquity has influenced European ideals of masculinity. Entering the airy space, the visitor is surrounded by monumental sculptural forms that evoke classical proportions and ideals.

Bathed in light, gods and heroes are surrounded by draped fabrics that challenge euro-centric ideas of masculine beauty through an oversized and abstracted depiction of Black bodies.

Overdressed



Installation view Overdressed within Fashioning Masculinities at V&A © Victoria and Albert Museum, London

From here, visitors journey on to Overdressed – a theatrical series of four rooms reminiscent of a grand country house, celebrating the luxury and flamboyance of menswear as a signifier of power, wealth and individuality. Moving from armoury and dressing room, to billiard room and country garden, visitors are made to feel like



guests at a grand party, mixing and mingling with extravagantly dressed fellow guests. The space is defined by theatricality, a melange of rich colours, plush materials and a playful approach to scale.

To create the colour and material palette for this section, JA Projects draws on Yinka Shonibare CBE's photograph [Diary of a Victorian Dandy: 17.00 hours](#), depicting the artist, a Black man with a physical disability, using the fashions and conventions of 19th-century high society as a pathway to empowerment. The work features prominently in the gallery, which includes elements such as a 10ft billiard table that references Yinka's red livery in the image.

In this way, the space subtly supports the challenge of establishment power, a sentiment complimented by a soundscape of West African Highlife music, which both complements and contrasts with the stately home setting, while framing narratives from the global south found in the clothes of the contemporary designers exhibited.

Redressed



Installation view of Redressed within Fashioning Masculinities at V&A © Victoria and Albert Museum, London



The third part of the exhibition, *Redressed*, introduces the visitor to the city, a landscape defined by mass production and the rhythmic repetition of the factory. The fabric curtain walls that characterised *Undressed* are reinterpreted here to evoke the hard lines of urban architecture, and in particular the vast planes of glass that define the modern-day city the world over. Where *Undressed* had solid stone podiums, *Redressed* has translucent, glass plinths – conveying the story of modern industrial processes that transform raw materials into the building blocks of the metropolis.



Left: Omar Victor Diop, Jean-Baptiste Belley, 2014. Courtesy MAGNIN-A Gallery, Paris. © Omar Victor Diop.
Right: Orange Culture, Autumn Winter 2020 Flower Boy two-piece set, photographed by Mikey Oshai, image courtesy of Adebayo Oke-Lawal © Orange Culture

Against this backdrop, *Fashioning Masculinities* tells the story of the uniform of the modern man – the suit, from the conventions established by the likes of early pioneers such as Beau Brummell to their dissolution at the hands of contemporary designers.



Installation view of Fashioning Masculinities at V&A © Victoria and Albert Museum, London



Transitions and reflections

The first two sections of the exhibition are connected by a transitional central space – the Pinnacle – which sets Undressed and Redressed in counterpoint, juxtaposing the nude Apollo with the suited figures of Anglomania, separated by a thin metallic wall. This encapsulates the entire journey of the exhibition, the evolution of masculinity from antiquity to the present day.



Installation view, finale of Fashioning Masculinities at V&A © Victoria and Albert Museum, London

In the final moment of the exhibition, the visitor themselves becomes part of the exhibit, as they enter a room that is half mirror, half video artwork by Quentin Jones with Cadence Films, and are engulfed within a multiplicity of contemporary fashions, interpretations and expressions of gender and identity.



Fashioning the show

Led by founder Jayden Ali, JA Projects worked closely with the V&A curatorial team, developing the exhibition's creative concept via a series of weekly workshops.

"We're delighted to have collaborated with the fantastic team at JA Projects on the exhibition design for Fashioning Masculinities: The Art of Menswear. The team have been open to exploring big themes and ideas throughout the development, and simultaneously working on conscientious design strategies to reduce the material footprint for scenography. The resulting design is light and contemporary with an intelligent use of tone, image, texture and material, that creates a spatial equivalent and counterbalance to the curatorial ideas on show: the dialogue between design and content allows the two to work together to cumulatively add up to an overarching experience for visitors that is really successful."

– Evonne Mackenzie, Head of Design at the V&A

While JA Projects took charge of the overall shape of the show, Studio ZNA enriched the creative concept with considered lighting design that highlights the garments and artworks featured while thematically underscoring each section.

Graphic design is provided by Studio Hugo Blanzat, which has developed a bespoke typeface that evolves with the visitor journey – from the relative clarity and simplicity of Undressed, to the unpredictable exuberance of Overdressed, to the rationality-turned-rebellion of Redressed.

The result is an immersive, engaging and richly sensory exhibition that marries spectacle with social commentary, and which encourages visitors to unpick the values stitched into the seams of men's clothing through the ages.



Graphic design provided by Studio Hugo Blanzat. Installation view of Fashioning Masculinities at V&A © Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

“We’re interested in where culture resides in the city – from the home and the high street, to the more formal moments represented by museums and arts institutions. Exhibition design offers an opportunity to process our observations and design thinking into a thesis of sorts – an experienced commentary on the world we live in.

I want visitors to question museum collections, and fashion’s impact on the world with regard to representation and power dynamics in general. I hope they will be prompted to think through the experience of being held in a moment of tension between the sensory, the unexpected and the challenging.”

– Jayden Ali, founder, JA Projects

For more information, interviews with Jayden Ali and exhibition images, please contact japrojects@zetteler.co.uk.

ENDS



Notes to editors

Fashioning Masculinities: The Art of Menswear runs from 19 March to 6 November 2022.

Adult tickets are £20, on sale at vam.ac.uk/masculinities.

The exhibition is in partnership with **Gucci**, with support from **American Express®**.

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JA Projects

Founded by architect Jayden Ali, JA Projects is a multidisciplinary practice working at the intersection of architecture, urban strategy, art and performance. Aiming to enrich public spaces and inspire the communities that use them, the practice's recent and ongoing projects include a series of interventions on London's Low Line, a walking route connecting Bankside's historic railway architecture; leading a team transforming key areas of Camberwell Station Road on behalf of Southwark Council; and working on the £8 billion Thamesmead Waterfront development. Alongside its work on the urban landscape, the studio pursues its interest in the performative and cultural life of cities through the design and curation of experiences and exhibitions.

ja-projects.com

Studio ZNA

Studio ZNA is a creative lighting design practice established in 2006 and directed by Zerlina Hughes. Informed and inspired by the dynamic nature of light, the studio has extensive experience in lighting design for museums and galleries, high-end retail, commercial and residential buildings, theatre, opera and film.

studiozna.com

Studio Hugo Blanzat

Established in 2015, Studio Hugo Blanzat is a Paris-based creative studio with expertise in art direction, graphic design and typography in the field of arts, culture and commerce. From wayfinding in a public space to a niche publishing practice and



graphic design research, the variety of projects embarked on by the studio demands a bespoke approach, often resulting in unique typography.

hugoblanzat.com

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.

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