YVES SAINT LAURENT
THE PERFECTION OF STYLE
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The forty-four-year career of Yves Saint Laurent (1936–2008) demonstrates that the power of style reaches well beyond the ephemeral fluctuations of fashion. More than just a trend-setting couturier, Saint Laurent built an œuvre of unique creativity and originality, earning him exhibitions in major international museums.

The 1960s signaled the moment when society moved out of a postwar mentality and crossed the threshold into modernity. Saint Laurent would accomplish the same in the field of fashion. Rejecting the nostalgia or futurism typical of some fashion trends, his message was that women should dress for today. His approach to style was to offer sartorial choices that invited women to express themselves through clothing.

Featuring collections from the Fondation Pierre Bergé – Yves Saint Laurent, The Perfection of Style presents more than one hundred garments from both haute couture and SAINT LAURENT
rive gauche, the ready-to-wear line that became a global phenomenon after its introduction in 1966.

Photographs, drawings and production documents offer a rare behind-the-scenes look into the creative workings of the fashion house and private life of the couturier. Collection boards featuring sketches from 1962 to 2002 retrace forty years of the maison de couture’s fascinating history.

Unpublished documents from the Foundation’s vast archive include personal portraits of Yves Saint Laurent, drawings from his adolescence and research sketches from his early days as Christian Dior’s assistant. The sophisticated paper dolls Saint Laurent crafted when he was a teenager foreshadow the unique destiny of the young prodigy who would become one of the greatest couturiers of all time. This and many other highlights from the legendary designer’s life, creative process, and brilliant career await you in the galleries ahead.
THE PAPER DOLLS
“I was lucky enough to have all my childhood dreams come true,” said Saint Laurent.

In fact, he did have a wonderful childhood in Oran, Algeria, with his father, a corporate insurer and administrator who also ran a chain of movie theaters, his beautiful mother, two sisters, Michèle and Brigitte, and two cousins. His childhood role-playing included pretending to be an orchestra conductor, a film director, an interior designer, and a couturier. The set of paper dolls he made as a teenager was like a rehearsal for his future couture house. He cut out silhouettes of famous models like Bettina Graziani and Suzy Parker from fashion magazines and created entire outfits for them made of paper. His sisters would receive invitations for these paper fashion shows addressed to “Madame la Baronne” or “Madame la Comtesse.”

This is the first time the paper dolls have been shown publicly in the United States. In the case to your right, you can try different outfits on Suzy—slide the paper doll behind the different looks of her wardrobe.
Fashion-show programs for two paper dolls collections: Autumn–Winter 1953-54 and Autumn–Winter 1954-55

Programs made of cardboard, paper, black ink, and ribbon

“Bettina” paper doll with five outfits from her wardrobe and her pattern, 1953-54

“Ivy” paper doll with seven outfits from her wardrobe, 1953-54

Twenty-four accessories for paper dolls

Paper dolls cut out of magazines and glued onto cardboard
Pattern made of graphite pencil on cardboard
Garments and accessories made of paper cut-outs, ink, watercolor, and gouache
Yves Saint Laurent, Paris, 1958
Vintage silver gelatin print
Irving Penn
American, 1917–2009

Yves Saint Laurent, Paris, 1971
Vintage silver gelatin print
Jeanloup Sieff
French, 1933–2000

Yves Saint Laurent, Paris, 1983
Vintage silver gelatin print
Irving Penn
American, 1917–2009
THE CHILD PRODIGY
Yves Saint Laurent was born on August 1, 1936 in Oran, Algeria, a French colony at the time. He later recalled his early childhood there as idyllic, full of fantasy and playful invention with his two sisters. As a teenager he was bullied by classmates and took refuge “in an imaginary, solitary world, where I felt safe.”

Confident in his ability to draw, in 1953 Saint Laurent submitted sketches to the Woolmark Prize competition organized by the International Wool Secretariat in Paris. He won the prize twice, once tying with Karl Lagerfeld, who became a close friend for a few years. Encouraged by Michel de Brunhoff, the powerful editor-in-chief of *Vogue* Paris, Yves went to Paris to study at the École de la chamber syndicale de la couture. Brunhoff introduced the young prodigy to Christian Dior, who hired him on the spot as an assistant in the studio.
Yves Saint Laurent as a child with his mother, Oran (Algeria), late 1930s
Vintage silver gelatin print
Unknown photographer

Yves Saint Laurent as a teenager with friends, Oran (Algeria), late 1940s
Vintage silver gelatin print
Unknown photographer

Yves Saint Laurent at a costume party, Oran (Algeria), early 1950s
Vintage silver gelatin print
Unknown photographer

Yves Saint Laurent at the award ceremony of the Secrétariat international de la laine competition, Paris, November 25, 1954
Vintage silver gelatin print
Unknown photographer
Rules for the Secrétariat international de la laine competition, 1954
Page from a magazine

Letter from Michel de Brunhoff to Yves Saint Laurent, August 19, 1954
Black and gray ink on vellum paper

Teenage sketch, 1950s
Graphite pencil, black ink, and black pen on cardboard

Teenage book entitled Pourquoi parler d’amour, 1950s
Black ink and watercolor on vellum paper

Teenage book based on Madame Bovary, novel by Gustave Flaubert, 1951
Black ink and watercolor on vellum paper
Teenage sketch of a costume for the character
L’archange in Sodome et Gomorrhe,
play by Jean Giraudoux, 1951
Gouache on black vellum paper

Teenage sketch of a costume for the character
Dalila in Sodome et Gomorrhe,
play by Jean Giraudoux, 1951
Gouache on black vellum paper

Teenage sketch of a costume for the character La
Reine in L’Aigle à deux têtes,
play by Jean Cocteau, 1951
Gouache on colored vellum paper

Teenage sketch for the set of L’Aigle à deux têtes,
play by Jean Cocteau, 1951
White gouache on black vellum paper
THE LITTLE PRINCE OF FASHION
Beginning with the Autumn-Winter 1955 collection, Dior, the world’s most celebrated couturier, began to include his young assistant’s designs in the collections. A black dress draped with a white scarf caused a sensation when it appeared in the now-iconic photograph by Richard Avedon, Dovima with Elephants.

After Christian Dior’s sudden death in 1957, the twenty-one-year-old became the Artistic Director of the House of Dior. It was a huge challenge—and an honor—because the house was the premier address for French luxury in the world. Saint Laurent’s first collection for Summer 1958 was enthusiastically received. The Trapeze collection launched the fashion of the 1960s, with girlish dresses free of waistlines, liberating the body from the constraints of structured clothing.

For his sixth and last collection at Dior, named the “Beat Look,” Saint Laurent went even further: leather, the kind worn by American bikers, made a
startling appearance in the hushed salons of avenue Montaigne. The “Chicago” leather jacket was seen by the press as the emblem of a stylistic revolution that would send the maison’s traditional clientele running. Drafted into the army in 1960, Saint Laurent was ultimately declared unfit for service. He soon fell into a deep depression. The House of Dior decided to dismiss him.
Ten creative sketches for
**Christian Dior Couture**, 1958-60
Graphite pencil on vellum paper

**Christian Dior and Yves Saint Laurent backstage at Dior, 30 avenue Montaigne, Paris**, ca. 1956
Modern digital print (2016)
Unknown photographer

**Soirée de Paris gown worn by Dovima, Le Cirque d’hiver, Paris**, August 1955
Gown designed by Yves Saint Laurent for the Autumn-Winter 1955 Christian Dior haute couture collection
**Paris Capitale**, February 1992
Photograph by **Richard Avedon**
American, 1923–2004

**Yves Saint Laurent at the Dior boutique, 30 avenue Montaigne, Paris**, 1958
**Harper’s Bazaar**, February 1958
Photograph by **Inge Morath**
American (born Austria), 1923–2002
Creative sketch for the Christian Dior boutique, Summer 1957
Black ink and colored gouache on vellum paper

Paris Match, March 1, 1958
Photograph by Willy Rizzo
Italian, 1928–2013
© WILLY RIZZO/PARIS MATCH/SCOOP

Yves Saint Laurent on the balcony of the House of Dior after presenting his first collection, 30 avenue Montaigne, Paris, January 30, 1958
Vintage silver gelatin print
Philippe Dalmas
French, dates unknown


THE BEATNIK COUTURIER
In 1962, Yves Saint Laurent and Pierre Bergé, his partner in life since 1958, co-founded the haute couture house at 30 bis rue Spontini in Paris. From that moment, the collections drew their inspiration from street life and pop culture. Saint Laurent proclaimed, “You no longer need to be rich to have style.”

In 1966, Saint Laurent and Bergé launched the SAINT LAURENT rive gauche label. A pioneer in luxury ready-to-wear, the brand succeeded beyond their wildest expectations, enjoying worldwide acclaim. The Tuxedo, which had, at first, no success in an haute couture version, caused a shopping frenzy in the brand’s first boutique on rue de Tournon.

The shy young man in the black tie had evolved into a long-haired beatnik couturier. He exemplified the synchronicity between appearance and lifestyle. Saint Laurent and Bergé bought their Dar el-Hanch house in Morocco. There, wearing jeans, a T-shirt,
sandals or barefoot, Saint Laurent enjoyed a chic bohemian lifestyle. His group of friends included artists, the “beautiful people,” the young millionaires Paul and Talitha Getty, interior designer Bill Willis, the “Dreamachine” inventor Brion Gysin, designer Fernando Sanchez, and the Countess Charles de Breteuil. And, of course, “les jolies filles,” Betty Catroux, Loulou de La Falaise, and Paloma Picasso, who exemplified the many inspiring facets of a modern woman.

He also spent time with Andy Warhol, his alter ego in the world of contemporary art. According to Women’s Wear Daily’s John Fairchild, “This guy is the only designer in Paris who really belongs to the sixties because he’s part of the world around him and therefore understands it.”
Yves Saint Laurent preparing his first collection under his own name, rue Jean-Goujon, Paris, December 1961
Vintage silver gelatin print

Pierre Boulat
French, 1924–1998
© Pierre Boulat / Cosmos

Atelier’s specification sheet
Spring–Summer 1962 haute couture collection
Graphite pencil, red and blue pencil on thick perforated grid paper sewn with a fabric swatch

First Yves Saint Laurent fashion show, 30 bis rue Spontini, Paris, January 29, 1962
Vintage silver gelatin print

Pierre Boulat
French, 1924–1998
© Pierre Boulat / Cosmos
LA VILAINÉE LULÚ

Saint Laurent created the character of La Vilaine Lulu (the Naughty Lulu) while working at the House of Dior. Lulu is a whimsical, hard-headed, narcissistic, and mean girl who will do anything to get her way. Years later, Yves Saint Laurent published the drawings in La Vilaine Lulu, a comic book for grown-ups.

“Lulu à l’école”

Original boards for the Vilaine Lulu comics, created in 1956

Graphite pencil and red pencil on vellum paper

“Lulu yéyé à l’Olympia”

Original boards for the Vilaine Lulu comics, created in 1956

Graphite pencil and red pencil on vellum paper
“Du Schmuck et du pluck”
Original board for the Vilaine Lulu comics, created in 1956
Graphite pencil and red pencil on vellum paper

“Un choix difficile”
Original board for the Vilaine Lulu comics, created in 1956
Graphite pencil and red pencil on vellum paper

“L’année Lulu”
Original board for the Vilaine Lulu comics, created in 1956
Graphite pencil and red pencil on vellum paper

“Lulu à Deauville”
Original boards for the Vilaine Lulu comics, created in 1956
Graphite pencil and red pencil on vellum paper
Daytime dress worn by Luciana at the Jardin des serres d’Auteuil, Bois de Boulogne, Paris, January 1967
Spring–Summer 1967 haute couture collection
Vintage silver gelatin print
Jean-Paul Cadé
French, dates unknown

Evening ensemble worn by Luciana in the photographer’s studio, Paris, July 1967
Autumn–Winter 1967 haute couture collection
Vintage silver gelatin print of contact sheet
Peter Caine (born Pedro Alcaine Escano)
Spanish, born 1937

Atelier’s specification sheet
Autumn–Winter 1966 haute couture collection
Graphite pencil and red pencil on thick perforated grid paper sewn with fabric swatches

Atelier’s specification sheet
Autumn–Winter 1966 haute couture collection
Graphite pencil and red pencil on thick perforated grid paper sewn with fabric swatches
Evening gown worn by Danielle Luquet de Saint Germain in the photographer’s studio, Paris, July 1968
Autumn–Winter 1968 haute couture collection
Vintage silver gelatin print of contact sheet

**Peter Caine** (born Pedro Alcaine Escano)
Spanish, born 1937

Yves Saint Laurent in Brittany (France), 1966
Vintage silver gelatin print

**Pierre Bergé**
French, born 1930

Dresses from Spring–Summer 1970 SAINT LAURENT rive gauche collection worn by Talitha Getty

*Vogue* Paris, May 1970

Photographs by **Jeanloup Sieff**
French, 1933–2000

Jeanloup Sieff / *Vogue*, May 1970 / © Condé Nast
Evening ensemble worn by Danielle Luquet de Saint Germain in the photographer’s studio, Paris, July 1967
Autumn–Winter 1967 haute couture collection
Vintage silver gelatin print of contact sheet
**Peter Caine** (born Pedro Alcaine Escano)
Spanish, born 1937

Yves Saint Laurent at his desk, 30 bis rue Spontini, Paris, 1971
Vintage silver gelatin print
Unknown photographer

Evening gown worn by Jacqueline at 30 rue Spontini, Paris, January 1970
Vintage silver gelatin print
Spring–Summer 1970 haute couture collection
Unknown photographer
Outfits from the Autumn–Winter 1970 haute couture collection

_Vogue_ U.S., September 15, 1970

Photographs by **David Bailey**

English, born 1938

David Bailey / _Vogue_, September 1970 / © Condé Nast

**Original sketch**

Autumn–Winter 1970 haute couture collection

Graphite pencil and red felt-tip pen on vellum paper

**Yves Saint Laurent at home, Place Vauban, Paris, 1970**

_Harper’s & Queen_, December 1970

Photographs by **Helmut Newton**

German and Australian, 1920–2004

**Yves Saint Laurent styling a model for a TV show, Paris, 1971**

Vintage silver gelatin print

**Giancarlo Botti**

Italian, born 1931


THE CELEBRITY COUTURIER
During the 1970s, Saint Laurent’s status went from fashionable couturier to superstar on a par with Mick Jagger or David Bowie. This emboldened him to court scandal personally and in his work. In November 1971, to promote his men’s fragrance Pour Homme, he released a nude photograph of himself taken by Jeanloup Sieff. Saint Laurent told the press: “I wanted to shock.” The photo marks a turning point in the representation of masculinity, revealing the feminine side of a man who, despite the taboos, never denied his homosexuality.

Critics and clients were offended by his 1971 Spring-Summer collection because it reawakened tragic memories of the German occupation in World War II. Outlasting the scandal, Saint Laurent’s introduction of the influential retro movement would seduce the younger generation, now tired of the casual hippie look. Another seismic moment occurred in 1976 when he returned to classic a reflection of the old caste system.
sophistication with the collection named Opéra - Ballets Russes—an approach that during the May 1968 anti-establishment unrest had been rejected as Opium perfume’s 1977 launch caused another scandal because the name was seen to glamorize drug use. The firm Charles of the Ritz, which owned the Yves Saint Laurent Perfumes, had to fend off American anti-drug coalitions as well as the Chinese-American community. The New York Times reported on the “Opium War.” The scandal was good for business: stores sold out of Opium within four days.

Despite his success, Saint Laurent, whose early responsibilities denied him a real childhood, felt a need for freedom and to experience everything “intensely.” Sexual escapades and artificial paradises, including the use of drugs and alcohol, were his antidote to ennui. In the late 1970s, along with his wild night companion Betty Catroux, he entered a rehabilitation program.
Dresses from the Spring–Summer 1971 haute couture collection worn by Anjelica Huston

**Vogue** Italy, June 1971

Photographs by **Bob Richardson**
American, 1928–2005

**Yves Saint Laurent with Andy Warhol’s portraits of him, Paris,** 1972

Vintage silver gelatin print

**Jeanloup Sieff**
French, 1933–2000

**Sketch of a costume for the character Edith de Berg in L’Aigle à deux têtes (Act III),** play by Jean Cocteau, directed by Jean-Pierre Dusséaux, Théâtre de l’Athénée–Louis Jouvet, Paris, 1978

Graphite pencil and colored pencil on vellum paper pinned with fabric swatches

**Detail sketches for the set of L’Aigle à deux têtes,**

Colored and black felt-tip pen on vellum paper
Yves Saint Laurent at home, Rue de Babylone, Paris, 1977
Modern digital print, overseen by the photographer (2016)
André Perlstein
French, born 1942

Velasquez, book by Yves Bottineau, Éditions Citadelles & Mazenod

Original sketch
Spring–Summer 1977 haute couture collection
Graphite pencil and colored felt-tip pen on vellum paper pinned with fabric swatch

Composition inspired by Diego Velázquez, from the Spring–Summer 1977 haute couture collection
Vintage silver gelatin print
Unknown photographer

Creative sketch of a sphinx for a ballet project, inspired by Diego Velázquez
Graphite pencil on laid paper
Wedding gown
Finale of the fashion show for the Spring–Summer 1977 haute couture collection at the Hôtel Inter-Continental, Paris, January 1977
Vintage silver gelatin print
Unknown photographer

Evening ensemble from Autumn–Winter 1979 haute couture collection worn by Mounia at the Hôtel Inter-Continental, Paris, July 1979
Vintage carbon print
Claus Ohm
German, born 1935

Original sketch
Spring–Summer 1977 haute couture collection
Graphite pencil and colored felt-tip pen on vellum paper

Original sketch
Spring–Summer 1977 haute couture collection
Graphite pencil and red pencil on vellum paper pinned with fabric swatches
Original sketch
Spring–Summer 1977 haute couture collection
Graphite pencil and red felt-tip pen on vellum paper
pinned with fabric swatches and ribbons

Outfits from the Autumn–Winter 1976 haute couture collection known as Opéra – Ballets Russes collection, at the Hôtel Inter-Continental, Paris, January 1976
ELLE Switzerland, September 1976
Photographs by Claus Ohm

Original sketch
Autumn–Winter 1976 haute couture collection known as Opéra – Ballets Russes collection
Graphite pencil, black and colored felt-tip pen on vellum paper stapled with suede swatches

Original sketch
Autumn–Winter 1976 haute couture collection known as Opéra – Ballets Russes collection
Black and colored felt-tip pen on vellum paper
Outfits from the Autumn-Winter 1976 haute couture collection known as Opéra – Ballets Russes collection, Paris, 1976
Vogue U.S., December 1976
Photographs by Duane Michals
American, born 1932

Original sketch
Autumn-Winter 1977 haute couture collection
Graphite pencil on vellum paper

Creative sketch for the fragrance Opium, 1977
Black and orange felt-tip pen on vellum paper

Jerry Hall photographed in Yves Saint Laurent’s home for the Opium fragrance advertisement, Rue de Babylone, Paris, 1977
Vintage photomechanical print
Helmut Newton
German and Australian, 1920–2004
Creative sketches for the evening launch of the fragrance Opium, 1977
Black and colored felt-tip pen on vellum paper

Yves Saint Laurent with Thadée Klossowski, Loulou de la Falaise, and Marina Schiano at the American launch of the fragrance Opium aboard the ship Peking, New York, September 1978
Vintage silver gelatin print
Roxanne Lowit
American, dates unknown

Yves Saint Laurent and models at the American launch of the fragrance Opium aboard the ship Peking, New York, September 1978
Vintage silver gelatin print
Roxanne Lowit
American, dates unknown


17. **Wedding gown.** Autumn–Winter 1970 haute couture collection. Multicolored silk velvet coat with appliqué letters forming the words LOVE ME FOREVER (front) OR NEVER (back) and heart, stars, and cloud in multicolored silk satin.
A LIVING LEGEND
From the 1980s until the maison de couture’s closing, every move by the couturier contributed to the creation of his mythic persona. The first such event was the large retrospective exhibition in 1983 at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. Curated by Diana Vreeland, it celebrated twenty-five years of creations. It was the first time that a living couturier was the subject of a museum show. Saint Laurent was only forty-seven years old. Another global milestone was reached in 1992, this time in Seville, where Saint Laurent’s iconic styles were shown in a fashion retrospective at Expo 92.

The 1998 World Cup soccer final marked another breakthrough moment in the couturier’s life, offering him the opportunity to present haute couture to a truly global audience. He organized an outsized retrospective fashion show at the Stade de France. Stunned fans and viewers from all over the world watched three hundred models parade around the stadium to the music of Ravel’s Boléro, accompanied by one hundred percussionists.
But all the accolades could not save the couturier from a slow and irreversible descent into the abyss of depression. Success could no longer guarantee happiness. From this moment forward, Saint Laurent retreated from the world. In a moving speech given on January 7, 2002, he announced his decision to retire from haute couture. One last retrospective show, at the Centre Pompidou in Paris, marked the end of forty years of creation. Anna Wintour, the *Vogue* Editor-in-Chief, wrote: “All my congratulations for everything you have achieved and for always being a great fashion leader, never a follower.”
Paris evening gown from Autumn–Winter 1983 haute couture collection worn by Kirat at the Hôtel Inter-Continental, Paris, July 1983

Vintage carbon print

Claus Ohm

German, born 1935

Original sketch

Autumn–Winter 1983 haute couture collection

Graphite pencil on vellum paper

Homage to Georges Braque evening gown from Spring–Summer 1988 haute couture collection worn by Katoucha at the Hôtel Inter-Continental, Paris, January 1983

Vintage carbon print

Claus Ohm

German, born 1935

Atelier’s specification sheet

Spring–Summer 1990 haute couture collection

Graphite pencil and collage with picture of Zizi Jeanmaire onstage, on thick perforated grid paper
Homage to Pablo Picasso evening gown from Autumn–Winter 1979 haute couture collection worn by Amalia at the Hôtel Inter-Continental, Paris, July 1979
Vintage carbon print

Claus Ohm
German, born 1935

Book for the Yves Saint Laurent exhibition at the Costume Institute of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York
(December 14, 1983–September 2, 1984)
Photograph by Duane Michals
American, born 1932

Original sketch
Spring–Summer 1980 haute couture collection
Black felt-tip pen and yellow pencil on vellum paper

Atelier’s specification sheet
Autumn–Winter 1980 haute couture collection
Graphite pencil, red pencil, and collage on thick perforated grid paper sewn with fabric swatches
View of the Grand Salon, Rue de Babylone, Paris, 1986
Vogue Décoration, Paris, September 1986
Photograph by François Halard
French, born 1961

Creative sketch for the set of a fashion show
Spring–Summer 1988 haute couture collection
Colored pastel and graphite pencil on vellum paper

Yves Saint Laurent at his residence, Château Gabriel, Normandy (France), 1983
Vogue U.S., December 1983
Photographs by Horst P. Horst
German and American, 1906–1999

Pierre Bergé and Yves Saint Laurent in their helicopter, Normandy (France), 1986
Vintage silver gelatin print
François-Marie Banier
French, born 1947


23. **Short evening ensemble. Inspired by Henri Matisse.** Autumn–Winter 1981 haute couture collection. Ivory wool etamine Romanian-style blouse embroidered with sequins, silk thread, seed beads, and tubular beads in reds, greens, and oranges; flared skirt of sapphire-colored silk velvet; and black silk embroidered belt. Embroidery by Lesage.

A LIBERATED STYLE
With his haute couture collections and SAINT LAURENT rive gauche label—the pioneer of luxury ready-to-wear—Yves Saint Laurent liberated the world of fashion. He would invent a look that suited the contemporary woman and reflected her newfound status in society. Saint Laurent dismissed the conventions and restrictions that anchored fashion to the past. One concept dominated: eliminating the “total outfit,” which stood in the way of true self-expression. His trousers, pullovers, pantsuits, and day-to-night fashions would anticipate the disruptive events of May 1968. “I am not interested in beauty. I am only interested in shock and seduction,” he said.
NEVER TOO MUCH
The Yves Saint Laurent style is recognizable by a certain economy of means. The couturier avoided the over designed approach of many traditional haute couture garments. He focused attention on the beauty of the cut rather than superficial ornament, which was easier to achieve—proving that the simplest dress, or even a jumpsuit, can be more spectacular than a dress covered with decorative embellishment. In 1969, during a televised interview, the couturier was asked why a simple pea jacket was so expensive: “It’s because of the cut,” he shot back. With this search for restraint, Saint Laurent embodies a French spirit balanced between boldness and sobriety.

26. **Evening gown.** Autumn–Winter 1965 haute couture collection. Black silk crepe draped bodice with boatneck, knotted at the back and attached to a long skirt by a golden metal brooch.

CONTRADICTORY IMPULSES
With a penchant for paradox, Saint Laurent’s style is full of apparent contradictions. Among them is pushing the symbols of bourgeois decorum toward vulgar transgression. This idea is embodied in two films for which Saint Laurent designed the wardrobe: in *Belle de jour* (1967; directed by Luis Buñuel) Catherine Deneuve’s ladylike clothes conceal her secret identity as a call girl. In *Stavisky* (1974; directed by Alain Resnais), Anny Duperey, posing as a tasteful, elegant woman, appears completely uninvolved with her husband’s dishonest dealings.

Saint Laurent also shows nudity in an ambiguous way—very “dressed,” very “covered.” One of his most famous “transparent” dresses, worn by Danielle Luquet de Saint Germain, was modestly cut. It covered her décolleté and arms entirely with sheer chiffon and encircled her hips with a halo of ostrich feathers. Explaining this contradiction, Saint Laurent said to the *Los Angeles Times*: “When a woman loses her mystery, she is finished forever.”


THE GENDERS
Saint Laurent questioned the traditional representation of the genders. As sexual roles began to blur in the 1960s, he saw the possibility of a disruptive new form of seduction and created a new identity more complex than the usual opposition between masculine and feminine. In 1966 he created the first version of the Tuxedo, “Le Smoking,” and feminized it by pairing it with an organdy blouse with a soft bow. This challenged the customary codes of evening wear, which at the time were low-cut evening gowns for women and tuxedos for men.

The play between masculine and feminine is seen in other Saint Laurent garments that borrow from menswear: the Autumn-Winter 1963 motorcycle jacket, the Autumn-Winter 1967 pantsuit inspired by film noir gangsters, the trench coat drawn from British World War I officers, and the jumpsuit, the uniform of aviators. The exploration of fashion that transcends gender culminated in the redesign of
the safari jacket, inspired by big game hunters of France’s colonial past. In an emblematic photograph from 1969, Saint Laurent and Betty Catroux stand together, wearing nearly identical safari jackets that express their own new gender. Worn with thigh-high boots, Betty Catroux exemplifies rock and roll while Yves adopts an androgynous pose. Saint Laurent proposed that men concede part of their virility to women and that women accept men’s feminine side.


34. **Tuxedo dress.** Autumn–Winter 1966 haute couture collection. Black wool dress with flounced bib, white organdy cuffs, and black patent leather belt.


A MODULAR WARDROBE
Within the traditional system, clothing was dictated by its function or by one’s affiliation to a group. Evening wear or Sunday clothes were different from day or work clothes. Clothing was an especially visible symbol of any attempt to climb up the social hierarchy. This system began to crumble during the cultural upheaval of 1968. Saint Laurent anticipated this social revolution in 1966 when he launched his ready-to-wear brand SAINT LAURENT rive gauche. Instead of offering precisely matched outfits, the new brand proposed options, leaving women to choose whatever combinations they wanted. A wide variety of items, diverse shapes, and extensive range of colors made it possible for women of all ages and circumstances to express their individuality. The search for a “look” replaced the choice of an outfit. Saint Laurent’s friend Loulou de La Falaise said, “An outfit was something that had been determined earlier, whereas a look was an idea.”
The younger generation, which had adopted jeans and T-shirts as a sign of belonging to a more egalitarian society, saw haute couture as a symbol of inequality. With his ready-to-wear line, Saint Laurent offered an alternative to haute couture, creating styles that were more affordable and easier to wear. “Attitude” replaced “well-dressed.”
Collection board
Spring–Summer 1967 SAINT LAURENT rive gauche collection
Graphite pencil, black and red felt-tip pen on thick grid paper pinned with fabric swatches

Collection board
Autumn–Winter 1966 SAINT LAURENT rive gauche collection
Graphite pencil, black and red felt-tip pen, and red pencil on thick grid paper pinned with fabric swatches


44. **Coat.** Spring–Summer 1970 SAINT LAURENT *rive gauche* collection. Blue topstitched denim coat with appliqué belt.

46. **Daytime ensemble.** Autumn–Winter 1976 SAINT LAURENT rive gauche collection. Quilted cotton canvas vest and skirt with pink floral print; cotton tabby sleeves with gray floral pattern.


51. **Daytime dress.** Autumn–Winter 1969 SAINT LAURENT *rive gauche* collection. Black silk crepe dress with lace-up bodice and black leather belt.

52. **Evening ensemble. Homage to Léon Bakst.**
Spring–Summer 1991 SAINT LAURENT *rive gauche* collection. Jeweled bustier with multicolored ceramic and glass beads; organdy pants with a multicolored pattern and belted with a burgundy passementerie cord with tassels.
Fabric by Abraham.

53. **Daytime ensemble.** Spring–Summer 1977 SAINT LAURENT *rive gauche* collection. Off-white terry cloth top, cuffs and hem embroidered with off-white and brown thread; voluminous pants, hem with matching embroidery.

55. **Daytime ensemble.** Autumn–Winter 1980 SAINT LAURENT rive gauche collection. White wool etamine Romanian-style blouse and gypsy skirt with multicolored print and orange, blue, and fuchsia braided belt.
THE ALCHEMY OF STYLE
The production of an haute couture garment was a complex process that began with a sketch, usually created during a peaceful retreat in the designer’s Marrakech home. Saint Laurent’s drawings included specifics about ergonomics, “drape” and the equilibrium that must be maintained between the fabric and the body. He would then meet with his chefs d’ateliers (workshop heads) to give them his drawings to be translated onto a toile, the preliminary garment made of white cotton. Workshops had been divided between the métiers of dressmaking and tailoring. Saint Laurent, however, made the particular demand of having his workshop heads excel in both techniques. The toile was then fitted on the mannequin cabine (fitting model) and presented to Saint Laurent and the entire studio team, including his close colleagues Ann-Marie Muñoz and Loulou de La Falaise.

Once Saint Laurent had approved the toile after three or four fittings, it was time to choose the
fabrics, colors and adornments, such as exclusively-made buttons. Then the toile was laid flat to create the paper pattern that would be used to cut the fabric. If the fabric was to be embroidered, the motif was either drawn in pencil or a paper cutout of the motif was applied to the toile. Sometimes the process was simplified, by draping the fabric directly onto the model’s body. Saint Laurent declared, “I can’t make any decisions without them.” The models were, he said, his “reality.”

Finally, a few days before the fashion show, in the large Second Empire style salon, Saint Laurent would choose among the many accessories displayed on trays and other embellishments.
**Original print for patterned fabrics, Abraham, 1986**
Paper with black and brown print on a white background

**Original sketch**
Autumn–Winter 1986 haute couture collection
Graphite pencil on vellum paper pinned with a fabric swatch

**Atelier’s specification sheet**
Autumn–Winter 1986 haute couture collection
Graphite pencil on perforated graph paper pinned with a fabric swatch

**Handling record**
Autumn–Winter 1986 haute couture collection
Red and black felt-tip pen, graphite pencil, and satin fabric swatch pinned onto thick printed paper

**Ten research sketches of patterns for printed fabric**
Watercolor on vellum paper
Original print for patterned fabrics, Abraham, 1971
Paper with black print on a white background

Original sketch
Spring–Summer 1971 haute couture collection
Graphite pencil on vellum paper pinned with a fabric swatch

Atelier’s specification sheet
Spring–Summer 1971 haute couture collection
Graphite pencil on perforated grid paper pinned with a fabric swatch

Handling record
Spring–Summer 1971 haute couture collection
Red and black felt-tip pen, graphite pencil, and crepe fabric swatch pinned on thick printed paper

Greek-style evening gown from the Spring–Summer 1971 haute couture collection worn by Elsa, 30 bis rue Spontini, Paris, January 1971
Vintage silver gelatin print
Unknown photographer
Sixteen linocuts for fabric printing

Research sheet of geometric patterns
Sewn fabric swatches and watercolor sketch glued onto vellum paper

Atelier’s specification sheet
Autumn–Winter 1973 haute couture collection
Graphite pencil on perforated grid paper pinned with a fabric swatch
PRINTED FABRICS
Delivered to the studio at the start of the collection season, the rolls of fabric waited in a corner before being assigned to each specific garment. Occasionally, Saint Laurent assigned a fabric to a sketch even before he saw the toile. Printed fabrics are an indelible part of the Saint Laurent style. He had an exemplary collaboration with Gustav Zumsteg, the owner of Abraham Ltd., a textile firm in Zurich. The designer gave rough sketches or even just ideas to Abraham designer André Barrieu, who translated them into new patterns. The “general impressions for printing on fabric”—test prints on paper that aimed for the desired effect—were presented to the designer for approval. Many color variations accompanied each creation. Most representative of Saint Laurent’s style were geometric patterns based on Art Deco and Pop Art, Picasso harlequin diamonds, patterned palm leaves, leopard prints, and designs inspired by Greek ceramics. The bold color ranges, sharp lines, and color block effects are particularly recognizable.
Seven embroidery samples

Work document comprised of ribbons and fabric swatches
Graphite pencil on vellum paper pinned with a fabric swatch and ribbons

Original sketch
Spring–Summer 1988 haute couture collection
Graphite pencil on vellum paper

Original sketch
Spring–Summer 1983 haute couture collection
Graphite pencil on vellum paper pinned with an embroidered swatch and stapled with fabric swatches
EMBROIDERY
The term “embroidery” encompasses many techniques, including sequins, beading, appliqué, and embroidery with thread. Saint Laurent identified where on a garment he wanted embellishment, and for each project, the designer would choose from several tests created by the embroiderer. François Lesage and Pierre Mesrine, the best embroiderers of their time, both created exquisite work for Yves Saint Laurent, some of which is on display here.
“TOILE” AND “STOCKMAN”
The toile, made of white cotton, was the first translation of the artist’s sketch into a garment. Later, taken apart and transformed into flat shapes, it became the pattern that would be used to cut the garment out of the chosen fabric.

For orders from haute couture clients at least three fittings were required with the Première d’atelier, the workshop head, or the Première main qualifiée, the “first qualified hand.” The pattern was adjusted to the client while remaining as faithful as possible to the original design. The first fitting provided an opportunity to check the measurements of the “Stockman” dress form that is like the imprint of a client’s body in wood and canvas. The measurements were recorded in the fitting book. The workshops could work on the garment between each fitting using the Stockman form.
Toiles from various haute couture and SAINT LAURENT rive gauche collections, 1970–2001
Ecru and black cotton toile, black silk satin and grosgrain ribbons, passementerie, printed paper, seed bead and sequin embroidery

Dressmaker forms made according to clients’ measurements, including one for Zizi Jeanmaire
Ecru cotton toile, wood, black and white bolduc ribbon, and padding
THE HAUTE MODE
The Haute Mode, the millinery workshop, is one of the most important departments of the house and the symbol of an haute couture process where every accessory is created by the couturier. This workshop was one of the most famous in Paris for its ability to translate the designer’s sketches into three-dimensional volumes. The favorite Yves Saint Laurent forms were boaters, Chinese conical hats, men’s hats, caps, and draped toques. These forms were obtained using wooden molds carved by a formier or through types bardées—prototypes made with sparterie, a kind of loose-weave canvas originally made from willow.
Types bardés and toile hat forms
Esparterie, ecru cotton toile, and grosgrain

Hat blocks
Sculpted and varnished limewood

Yves Saint Laurent in his studio working on a toile for a dress from the Autumn–Winter 1977 haute couture collection worn by Kirat, 5 avenue Marceau, Paris, July 1977
Vintage silver gelatin print
André Perlstein
French, born 1942

Yves Saint Laurent drawing in his studio, 5 avenue Marceau, Paris, early 1980s
Vintage silver gelatin print
François-Marie Banier
French, born 1947
Yves Saint Laurent accessorizing the wedding gown from the Autumn–Winter 1980 haute couture collection worn by Mounia, 5 avenue Marceau, Paris, July 1980

Vintage silver gelatin print

François-Marie Banier
French, born 1947

Yves Saint Laurent in his studio working on a dress from the Autumn–Winter 1977 haute couture collection worn by Kirat, 5 avenue Marceau, Paris, July 1977

Vintage silver gelatin print

André Perlstein
French, born 1942
YVES SAINT LAURENT AND HIS MODELS

Yves Saint Laurent once said, “Choosing the right models is very important to me. I drape the fabric around them and, suddenly, an idea explodes.” He looked for elegance, power, and character, knowing that the first impression of a garment on critics and buyers came from the models. Long before many other designers, Saint Laurent regularly hired models of color. As Mounia, a model from Martinique, recounted, “I was his first black muse. . .He helped open the door to black models. Sometimes I was his confidant, and I would sometimes inspire his creativity.”
Vintage silver gelatin print of contact sheet

**Peter Caine** (born Pedro Alcaine Escano)
Spanish, born 1937

Yves Saint Laurent in his studio choosing fabric for an ensemble from the Autumn–Winter 1977 haute couture collection worn by Mounia, 5 avenue Marceau, Paris, July 1977
Vintage silver gelatin print

**André Perlstein**
French, born 1942

Preparations for the Autumn–Winter 1979 fashion show, 5 avenue Marceau, Paris, July 1979
Vintage silver gelatin print

**François-Marie Banier**
French, born 1947

Vintage silver gelatin print of contact sheet

**Peter Caine** (born Pedro Alcaine Escano)
Spanish, born 1937

**Pierre Bergé and Yves Saint Laurent working on the sequencing for a fashion show, 5 avenue Marceau, Paris**, early 1980s

Vintage silver gelatin print

**François-Marie Banier**
French, born 1947

Vintage silver gelatin print

François-Marie Banier

French, born 1947
AFRICAN ART
Saint Laurent’s first incorporation of fine art into fashion was the iconic Mondrian dress from 1965, seen in the next gallery. Its design was based on Piet Mondrian’s signature geometric compositions from the 1920s, which marked a breakthrough in modern painting. The designer would next turn his attention to the artists of his own time who embodied the youthful spirit of Pop Art. Tom Wesselmann, Roy Lichtenstein, and Andy Warhol found inspiration for their boldly colored imagery in advertising, comic books, and ordinary mass-produced objects. Experimentation, humor, and a sense of freedom also emerged in popular music and film—and through Saint Laurent, in fashion. He later said, “I participated in the transformation of my era. I did it with clothes, which is surely less important than music, architecture, painting . . . but whatever it’s worth, I did it.”
Study for Vicki!, 1964
Oil and Magna (solvent-based acrylic) on paper
Roy Lichtenstein
American, 1923–1997
Seattle Art Museum, General Acquisition Fund, 75.102

Flowers, from the Flowers Portfolio, 1970
Screenprint on paper
Andy Warhol
American, 1928–1987
Seattle Art Museum, Gift of Willard Wright, 91.42

Flowers, from the Flowers Portfolio, 1970
Screenprints on paper
Andy Warhol
American, 1928–1987
Seattle Art Museum, Bequest of Kathryn L. Skinner, 2004.120, .121
Great American Nude No. 66, 1965
Oil and acrylic on canvas
**Tom Wesselmann**
American, 1931–2004
Promised gift of the Virginia and Bagley Wright Collection, in honor of the 75th Anniversary of the Seattle Art Museum

67. **Evening gown. Homage to Tom Wesselmann.**
Autumn–Winter 1966 haute couture collection.
Purple wool jersey dress with pink wool jersey incrustation (piecing).

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MONDRIAN AND POP ART
Piet Mondrian was the first modern painter Saint Laurent discovered, in 1965, in a book his mother gave him. In Mondrian’s paintings, Saint Laurent saw how the rhythm of color could be combined with a bold and forceful line. He would translate this building process into a dress of thick wool jersey. It is pieced together from blocks of color suspended in a geometric framework of black lines. The simplicity of the final cut makes it easy to miss the masterful construction. The flat modernist design is animated and given volume by the female body. This ideal meeting of color and architecture remains a pillar of Yves Saint Laurent’s style.

To his detractors who thought artistic appropriation was too easy or too pedantic, Saint Laurent would cite Proust, who said “that if one author admired another, he should not be afraid to imitate him, to find that which was so extraordinary, and take it further.”
68. **Cocktail dress. Homage to Piet Mondrian.**
Autumn–Winter 1965 haute couture collection. Wool jersey dress with ivory, black, blue, red, and yellow incrustations (piecing).

69. **Cocktail dress. Homage to Pop Art.**

70. **Cocktail dress. Homage to Pop Art.**

71. **Cocktail dress. Homage to Pop Art.**
72. **Cocktail dress. Homage to Pop Art.**
FROM DARKNESS TO AN EXPLOSION OF COLOR
The young Saint Laurent used a rather dark color palette. When he discovered Morocco in 1966 he was shocked by the intensity of the blue sky, the beauty of the Majorelle Garden which Pierre Bergé and he saved from destruction and bought in 1980, and the varied hues of traditional garments worn in the medina. In addition, his admiration for the paintings of Henri Matisse helped Saint Laurent to expand his palette into an explosion of intense colors that would become a strong element of his style going forward. From black, which he considered a real color, to the exploration of this colorful palette, Saint Laurent’s sensitivity to color is noticeable in every aspect of his style.

Here you can discover a selection of his costume jewelry, the most inventive in the history of fashion, which followed the themes of each collection using the most diverse techniques and materials. The designer advised women without means to dress in a full Saint Laurent look, to wear a very beautiful piece of fantasy jewelry over a simple skirt, a black
sweater, and boots. The importance granted to the accessory, which establishes the Saint Laurent look, prefigures the contemporary era.

The next galleries conduct you through a large selection of pages of échantillons de tissu—fabric samples that he used as a reference to his preferred hues, including his favorites, pink and blue. Near these pages, color-coordinated gowns from forty years of his career display key elements of the Saint Laurent style.


75. **Long evening ensemble.** Autumn–Winter 1976 haute couture collection. Brown silk velvet hooded cloak trimmed with gold lamé passementerie, ivory and gold wool etamine blouse, skirt trimmed with braided gold passementerie, and tie belt.


82. **Evening suit.** Autumn–Winter 1981 haute couture collection. Organza jacket and long skirt embroidered with gold chenille, rhinestones, and green, blue, and red sequins forming a paisley pattern. Embroidery by Lesage.

83. **Evening gown.** Autumn–Winter 1991 SAINT LAURENT *rive gauche*. Gold silk lamé sari-style dress; bodice draped to form a hood, skirt draped at the hips.

84. **Evening gown.** Autumn–Winter 1980 haute couture collection. Green silk velvet medieval-style dress with flared sleeves lined in purple façonné silk satin; black passementerie and embossed metal tie belt.


87. **Evening ensemble.** Spring–Summer 1981 haute couture collection. Black chiffon blouse embroidered with black beads and black sequins, loose ice blue moiré faille bustle skirt with ruffled flounces creating a train effect, and black shawl. Embroidery by Vermont.

88. **Evening ensemble.** Autumn–Winter 1976 haute couture collection, known as Opéra-Ballets Russes collection. Multicolored silk chiffon lamé blouse, emerald-colored silk moire petticoat skirt trimmed with black silk, purple taffeta underskirt, and silk velvet belt trimmed with red rhinestones and passementerie cord ties.
89. **Evening ensemble.** Autumn–Winter 1979 haute couture collection. Black silk velvet long coat and green chiffon long pleated dress with belt made of black ribbons, passementerie, and jet beads.

90. **Evening gown. Inspired by Henri Matisse.** 
Autumn–Winter 1981 haute couture collection. Blue silk taffeta gown with white silk taffeta flounces trimmed with black braiding.

91. **Evening ensemble.** Autumn–Winter 1981 haute couture collection. Storm gray silk satin trench coat, black marocain sheath skirt, black silk velvet sweater; copper headdress by Claude Lalanne.

92. **Evening gown.** Autumn–Winter 2000 haute couture collection. Purple silk crepe draped vestal-style gown with two panels forming a hood.

93. **Short evening dress.** Autumn–Winter 1977 haute couture collection. Purple silk crepon gown with black lace ruffles, cuffs, and petticoat.
94. **Evening ensemble.** Autumn–Winter 1979 haute couture collection. Pink gazar ruffle cape with black silk velvet and black passementerie neckline, black silk velvet sheath dress with pink gazar ruffles, and black silk passementerie tassels with beaded ends.


102. **Evening gown.** Autumn–Winter 1995 haute couture collection. Strapless dress with flared skirt; black silk velvet front, coral silk faille loose bustle with train and black silk velvet bow.
103. **Evening ensemble.** Autumn–Winter 1976 haute couture collection, known as *Opéra-Ballets Russes* collection. Gown with black silk velvet bodice, black silk satin sleeves, and lacing; trimmed with embroidery of jet beads; yellow silk satin long loose-fitting skirt, gathered at the waist with inverted pleats.

104. **Evening gown.** Spring–Summer 1997 haute couture collection. Bodice embroidered with silk organza, sequins, and raffia in a poppy and leaves pattern; red silk tulle pleated skirt with red silk satin ribbon tie belt. Embroidery by Lesage.


108. **Evening gown.** Spring–Summer 1980 haute couture collection. White gazar dress with wide ruffle at the neck, long striped skirt with a pleated effect and a horizontal strap of black gazar bias, and black grosgrain belt.
109. **Evening gown.** Worn by Marie-Hélène de Rothschild for the Proust Ball, December 1971. Ivory silk satin ball gown with train: neckline extended by a silk chiffon flounce, muttonchop sleeves trimmed with a silk chiffon flounce with sunburst pleating, black silk velvet bow; black silk velvet ribbon and black pleated silk tulle hem; and ivory silk satin pouf-style sash belt.


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Yves Saint Laurent, 1974
Silkscreen on canvas

**Andy Warhol**
American, 1928–1987
Fondation Pierre Bergé – Yves Saint Laurent, Paris