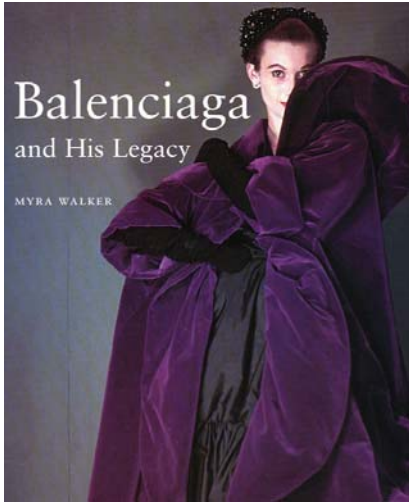


Balenciaga and his Legacy / Edited by Myra Walker.—New Haven, CT: Yale University Press in association with The Meadows Art Museum, Dallas, January 2007.—162 p.: ill.—ISBN 0-300-12153-9: \$50.00.



While some sectors of art history are like rush hour on a crowded academic freeway for scholars, fashion history is a relatively lonely side street. There are many picture books of fashion published each year for an audience of creative people seeking inspiration or decoration for their coffee tables, however few can be considered works of serious scholarship.

The attempts at more thorough treatments of fashion designers' legacies tend to cluster around a small group of undisputed masters. Of these, Cristóbal Balenciaga is the Picasso of fashion history. He was prolific, his work unique and sophisticated, and his legacy is fostered by well-documented archives and a formidable historian, Marie-Andrée Jouve.

Most of the books on Balenciaga are exhibition catalogs and they reflect a curator's critical selections from a large body of work. *Balenciaga and his Legacy* is much more of an account of notable Texas clients' wardrobes than about the designer's entire oeuvre and the content is similarly uneven.

The text is accompanied by a fine selection of historic photographs, as well as awkward shots of the exhibited garments on mannequins, or hats, floating inscrutably on the page; unfortunately, these new images unfortunately do nothing to support the premise that Balenciaga was a remarkable couturier. "Remembering Balenciaga," an essay by designer Hubert de Givenchy, is a charming memoir, as are the personal recollections of Agustín Balenciaga, the designer's nephew, but the rest of text does not add to our knowledge of Balenciaga in any substantive way. The selected bibliography and timeline are brief, and the latter makes no note of the importance of two exhibitions, one that took place before and one that took place just after the designer's death in 1972. The former is *Cristóbal Balenciaga* (Zurich: Bellerive Museum, 1970) and the latter is *The World of Balenciaga: An Exhibition presented by the Metropolitan Museum of Art under the Auspices of the Government of Spain* (New York, NY: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1973). The book is well-made, as Yale University Press publications are, and has an appealing design, particularly the dust jacket featuring fashion photographs by Louise Dahl-Wolfe and Neal Barr.

Overall, however, this catalog does not serve as an authoritative treatment of the career of Balenciaga. Libraries seeking such treatment are encouraged to look to fashion encyclopedias with worthy bibliographies and timelines and or Marie-Andrée Jouve's *Cristóbal Balenciaga* (Paris: Editions du Regard, 1988, New York: Rizzoli, 1989) and the Pamela Golbin's recently published *Balenciaga Paris* (Paris : Editions Thames & Hudson, 2006, London : Thames & Hudson, 2006).

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