



Mr & Mrs Clark

Ossie Clark and Celia Birtwell | Fashion and Prints 1965-74

A project of Museo del Tessuto di Prato and the Sozzani
Foundation in collaboration with Archivio Massimo Cantini Parrini
curated by Federico Poletti

Stylised geometries, floral bouquets and patterns inspired by art (ranging from medieval tapestries to Ballets Russes to all the Cubist avant-garde and pointillism): the **Ossie Clark defined the language of Swinging London with his long, colourful, fluid clothes.**

With his unmistakable "flower power" style and one step ahead of new trends, Ossie was called the "King of Kings Road" thanks to his 1930s and 40s-inspired dresses with a slender cut that revealed the décolleté amidst sensual movements and plays on transparency. His short, but very intense, career left its mark in London in the period from 1965 to 1974,¹ between Mary Quant's miniskirt and the subversive punk movement of Malcolm McLaren and Vivienne Westwood. Clark and his wife Celia Birtwell (Mr and Mrs Clark and Percy, from David Hockney's famous painting at Tate Britain, 1970-71) came to define the bohemian neighbourhood of West London that was home to the new generation of brilliant and revolutionary youth.

Celia drew prints on light crêpes, silks and chiffons, and Ossie transformed them into clothes that immediately conquered the international jet-set and the pop scene. From Brigitte Bardot to Liz Taylor or Verushka, everyone was fascinated by their fashion. Mick Jagger, Brian Jones, Keith Richards, Jimi Hendrix, Marianne Faithfull, Anita Pallenberg, Eric Clapton, George Harrison, Bianca Jagger, Marisa Berenson: these are just some of the people that Ossie Clark dressed. When **Hockney painted Ossie and Celia** in their Notting Hill home, he depicted a snapshot of modern life, a perfect representation of the world of Clark and Birtwell, whose projects embodied a new, courageous way of life. Ossie was also the first designer to reconsider the idea of "occasion": for him, evening dresses could be worn during the day and vice versa, while he invented the nude look with his transparent chiffon.

Starting from a first important nucleus of clothes from the collection and archive of Massimo Cantini Parrini, the Museo del Tessuto di Prato and the Sozzani Foundation have dedicated a **vast retrospective** to the couple which will open in September 2022, recounting the incredible creativity of these two personalities who are often neglected in the history of fashion. Rare pieces from the private collections of Celia Birtwell from London and Lauren Lepire from Los Angeles complete the museum's exhibition.

Under the patronage of the National Chamber of Italian Fashion, the exhibition will open Sept. 16 at the Museo del Tessuto in Prato and arrive in January in Milan at the Fondazione Sozzani. The itinerary not only features a series of dresses with Ossie and Celia's iconic prints, but aims to tell the story of the designer's context and evolution, from the Quorum boutique in Chelsea, frequented by the youth of the London scene to performances, through a series of videos, period photos and editorials, memorabilia, sketches and reproductions of the designs, to an exclusive video interview with Celia Birtwell herself.



Also considering how his fashion was presented, Ossie Clark was the first designer to extend the concept of performance to fashion shows, proposing them in the most diverse places, for example the **Royal Court Theatre in 1971, with the musical contribution of David Gilmour, one of the founders of Pink Floyd**. His muses included **Jane Birkin** and **Amanda Lear**, who participated in his fashion shows for years, up to **Celia herself from whom he separated in 1973**, all the way up to his last **A/W 1974 collection presented at King's Road Theatre**, which marked the end of their "golden age" and the change of an era

"The exhibition is a celebration of his life and work. It's important to keep Ossie's flame burning and his work must not be forgotten. Professionals and students can still learn a lot from his pattern cutting and his style. He is still an inspiration for so many people and his clothes still look relevant today, a vision of a woman who is sexy and feminine, but never vulgar."

Celia Birtwell, wife of Ossie Clark and author of the prints and textiles

"We care a great deal about this exhibition project, which I consider to be highly innovative, both in terms of its content and its operational and organizational methods. The garments and documentation on display are extraordinary and perfectly document the artistic relationship of these two great protagonists of 20th century fashion. We are very happy to start the collaboration with Fondazione Sozzani in a cultural project that connects Prato and Milan, as well as to renew the friendship and collaboration with the great costume designer and collector Massimo Cantini Parrini."

Francesco Nicola Marini, Museo del Tessuto di Prato Foundation President

"In art and fashion one often encounters the role of the muse: Celia Birtwell and Ossie Clark are among the famous couples where one can never tell where one's creativity ended and the other's began. The Botticellian gowns of one and the dreamlike prints of the other, together they experienced a creative complicity that spawned a revolution in dress and a magic that defined an era of fashion."

Carla Sozzani, Fondazione Sozzani President

"The discovery of Ossie Clark and Celia Birtwell within Massimo Cantini Parrini's collection has allowed to bring a chapter that is sometimes neglected to light, conveying this extraordinary creativity combining fashion, art and music. Ossie and Celia is also the story of a special alchemy, one of the first creative couples in which a designer and a textile designer worked together to complete each other in total harmony."

Federico Poletti, Curator

"This exhibition recounts the journey and creative partnership of two artists who revolutionised and forever changed fashion, all within a single decade, inspiring many generations of future couturiers with how they reinterpreted the art of prints and the design of lines. I am honoured to have discovered, studied and collected their clothes."

Massimo Cantini Parrini, costume designer and collector



The exhibition and the catalogue - **Mr & Mrs Clark | Ossie Clark and Celia Birtwell** – pay tribute to two people overflowing with ideas for the new generations, and with **a bridge connecting Prato and Milan, they represent a concrete demonstration of the collaboration between institutions** working to **promote the culture of fashion through exhibitions and publications.**

The book will be presented at the opening in September at Museo del Tessuto di Prato, and includes contributions by journalists and experts including: **Suzy Menkes, Antonio Mancinelli, Renata Molho**, with **Cristina Giorgetti, Giorgia Cantarini, Antonio Moscogiuri, Beatrice Manca**, as well as unpublished interviews with **Amanda Lear** and **Celia Birtwell**.

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Curated by Federico Poletti, promoted by Mi Hub Agency

Museo del Tessuto di Prato Foundation and Fondazione Sozzani of Milan

With pieces loaned by: Massimo Cantini Parrini, Celia Birtwell, Londra, Lauren Lepire, Los Angeles.

Museo del Tessuto

Opening

Friday 16 September 2022

Exhibit open

from 17 September 2022 to 8 January 2023

Museo del Tessuto, via Puccetti 3 – 59100 Prato info@museodeltessuto.it

Fondazione Sozzani

Opening

Sunday 15 January 2023

Exhibit open

from 16 January to 10 April 2023

Fondazione Sozzani, corso Como 10 – 20154 Milano galleria@fondazioneozzani.org

Press contacts

Studio Maddalena Torricelli

T + 39 02 76280433 studio@maddalenatorricelli.com

Stefania Arcari

M + 39 335 7440820 press@fondazioneozzani.org

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