Italian Style
Fashion since 1945

June 5–September 7, 2015  Ingram Gallery

After the Second World War, Italy emerged as a fashion powerhouse by capitalizing on its traditions of bold design, exquisite textiles, fine craftsmanship, and dressing with sprezzatura—graceful nonchalance. This dazzling exhibition, assembled from more than forty collections, celebrates all that Italian style embodies, and charts its major historical developments over the past seventy years. Italian designers beyond Gucci and Salvatore Ferragamo started attracting international attention in the early 1950s, when elegant catwalk shows were presented to foreign buyers and press beneath the sparkling chandeliers of the Sala Bianca in Florence’s Pitti Palace. Financial support administered by the United States through the Marshall Plan ensured that Italian textile factories had adequate capital and raw materials for production. In the era of La Dolce Vita (1960), Italian style enhanced the glamour and mystique of movie stars filming on the streets of Rome. Audrey Hepburn, Marcello Mastroianni, and Elizabeth Taylor were seen impeccably dressed in Valentino dresses, Brioni suits, and Bulgari jewels, and everyone, including the Kennedys and Truman Capote’s swans, aspired to look like them. By the 1970s, Milan had eclipsed Florence and Rome as Italy’s premier city of fashion. Giorgio Armani, Krizia, and Missoni built their reputations on luxury ready-to-wear manufactured in Italy’s network of specialist factories. In the 1990s, advertising images cemented Italian fashion’s association with the international jet set,
and beautifully crafted leather accessories were more desirable than ever. Brand recognition became so strong that companies such as Dolce & Gabbana, Fendi, Prada, and Versace developed cult followings. Globalization in the twenty-first century has brought about the demise of many of Italy’s small family businesses, but has also broadened the market for Italian fashion. “Made in Italy” remains a mark of sophistication and quality admired throughout the world.

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V&A Exhibition organized by the Victoria and Albert Museum, London