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TEMPORARY EXHIBITION

Asunción Bastida. Barcelona and Haute Couture

From 4 November 2026 to 14 March 2027. Disseny Hub Barcelona



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INTRODUCTION:

From **4 November 2026 to 14 March 2027**, the Disseny Hub Barcelona (DHub) will be hosting ***Asunción Bastida. Barcelona and Haute Couture***, the first retrospective on this **pioneering fashion designer and successful businesswoman** who made her name among the greats of Spanish haute couture in the 20th century, alongside Cristóbal Balenciaga, Manuel Pertegaz and Pedro Rodríguez. Regarded by the curator as "the Spanish Chanel" for her innovative work, Bastida overcame the obstacles faced by women at a time when society allotted them the role of looking after the home and the family, turning her fashion business into one of the most important in Barcelona and Madrid, recognised beyond Spain's borders too.

Curated by **Laura Ballarín Bescós** and produced by the **DHub and La Fábrica**, the exhibition **regains Bastida's invisibilised legacy** and invites us to rethink hegemonic narratives of the history of fashion from the gender perspective and in the social and political context of 20th-century Spain. It also looks at other women who had a key role in the development of this industry, for instance at models, a figure that was stigmatised at the time. All this, in a context of a **Barcelona** that became a **capital of haute couture** with leading designers, exclusive shops and outstanding fashion parades.



Asunción Bastida in her haute couture business in Barcelona. 1965–1970. Museu del Disseny – Disseny Hub. Asunción Bastida archive

The exhibition brings together **hundreds of pieces, including fashion photographs, original figurines, documentary material, magazines, publicity, audiovisuals and textiles**. Many of them come from the Museu del Disseny-DHub and its library and archive, as well as the previously unseen archive of Viky Ballarín, the dean of Spanish models who worked for Asunción Bastida for 30 years. We can also see other pieces from public institutions and private collections.

The seamstress who created an emporium

Asunción Bastida **was born in 1902** in Barcelona. Her father owned a large dress design business in Passeig de Gràcia. Although her dressmaking vocation appeared at an early age, her family's opposition meant that she would not become devoted to it until she got married. Her husband, Marcelino Mases, had a hosiery shop in Carrer Girona, which **she turned into a dressmaking business under the name Modas Mases de Asunción Bastida**. The business grew and she was able to move it to the Gran Via in 1928. Six years later, with the prestige gained and more customers, Bastida transferred her haute couture business to Passeig de Gràcia 96, by La Pedrera, in the heart of the Quadrat d'Or area. That same year, she **expanded her business to Madrid**.

After the Spanish Civil War, during which Bastida established herself in San Sebastián, she returned to Barcelona in 1939 to reopen her salons. Her prestige grew further and in the 40s the business expanded with an enlargement to the premises in Barcelona, a change of location in Madrid and a new branch in Seville, as well as parades in several Spanish cities. Early in that decade, the **Cooperativa d'Alta Costura** was also founded in Barcelona, inspired by the Cambra Sindical d'Alta Costura and linked to the regime's trade union apparatus. Bastida was one of its founders (and the **only woman until Carmen Mir entered over 20 years later**) and forms part of the select group that would be known as the **"five greats" in Spanish haute couture**, together with **Pedro Rodríguez, Pertegaz, Santa Eulalia and El Dique Flotante**.

Very attuned to and closely connected with the Parisian avant-garde, Bastida was a pioneer in the fashion industry. She was the **first designer to introduce cotton into Spanish haute couture**, changing luxury codes through technical excellence. She was also a **forerunner in the introduction of the bikini in Spain**, shortly after it appeared in France. In addition, she **promoted the internationalisation of Spanish fashion** with her parades in Europe, Africa and America. One example of her prestige and good international connections is that she was the **only designer authorised by Christian Dior to reproduce and sell his models exclusively in Spain**.

Bastida inherited an audacious business vision from her father, which together with her boldness saw her bring *prêt-à-porter* fashion to Spain with the opening of her firm's shop, where she sold the Jeunes Filles collection, designed in collaboration with Jacques Heim, as well as sports pieces and accessories. Another important achievement was the **creation of the magazine *Boletín de la Moda***, one of the main haute couture magazines for twenty years which allowed her to open a new line of business too: the press. Aware of the work involved in giving her collections publicity, Bastida established a very strong connection with the world of cinema and **dressed big stars such as Lola Flores** (whose wedding dress she made, on display in the exhibition), **Sara Montiel, Mary Sempere and Amparo Rivelles**.

All this made her a leading figure in Barcelona and Spain over her **fifty-year career in the fashion business**.



Models from Barcelona's haute couture businesses parading in Montjuïc in 1955. Viky Ballarín Archive. Photograph: Hortolà

The boxes that held the memory of fashion

The origin of *Asunción Bastida. Barcelona and Haute Couture* is a personal story that reconnects the curator's family history with that of the Catalan dressmaker. When her great-aunt passed away in her native Huesca, Laura Ballarín Bescós checked the boxes of memories discretely and carefully kept aside for years, finding **hundreds of photos, dresses and yellowed press cuttings**. One of these articles was an interview with **Viky Ballarín**, describing her as the "dean of Spanish models". There were also photos of Viky Ballarín in Egypt, Paris and New York, at glamorous fashion parades surrounded by people. This discovery revealed a side of her great-aunt that the curator had not known about: after emigrating to Barcelona and working in the home of a wealthy local family, Viky met Asunción Bastida and **worked with her as a model for more than thirty years**.

Driven by curiosity about her family history, Ballarín discovered the figure of Bastida, the prestige she gained during a career spanning fifty years, and in contrast, the scarce public information about it. Because of this, after the discovery of the pieces kept by her aunt, she embarked on **research that now takes the form of this first retrospective exhibition** devoted to Bastida and the **first publication** centring on the figure of this Barcelona dressmaker.

Asunción Bastida at the Museu del Disseny

One of the first institutions that Laura Ballarín Bascós approached in her research was the **Museu del Disseny-DHub**, which holds some of the designer's pieces. The fashion design collection has **13 pieces designed by Asunción Bastida (4 hats, 7 dresses, 1 coat and 1 jacket)**. Of these, the exhibition features five dresses and four hats from the 40s, 50s and 60s.



Cocktail dress in flocked cotton tulle with chenille and velvet bow, 1956

In addition, the **Library and Archive of Design** holds the **Asunción Bastida Archive**, a valuable documentary account of the activity of her haute couture business. Donated to the museum by her family in 2021, the bulk of the archive is made up of **6,000 original figurines, showing the different collections she designed from 1943 to 1971.** It also includes a small set of portraits by the designer, photographs of models and social events she took part in. Finally, we find some press cuttings and the complete collection of the magazine ***Boletín de la moda***, directed by Asunción Bastida herself.

SECTIONS:

1. THE ORIGINS OF A PIONEER. LEARNING A TRADE

At the age of just 16, Asunción Bastida started to alter dresses stitch by stitch, to suit her own taste. She grew up in a family involved in the textile business. Her father, Alejandro Bastida, ran Casa Bastida, a large tailoring emporium on Passeig de Gràcia that brought the latest Paris and London fashions to Barcelona. This initial contact with the international fashion centres would leave its mark on her understanding of creation and haute couture.



Mannequins wearing two classically inspired dresses on the first floor of Asunción Bastida's Modas Mases store on Gran Via, Barcelona, 1934. Museu del Disseny – Disseny Hub. Asunción Bastida archive

In 1926, at the age of 24, she transformed her husband Marcelino Mases's hosiery business (at 90 Carrer Girona), into a dressmaking establishment: Modas Mases de Asunción Bastida. She started to design a distinctive style, influenced by the modernity of the 1920s, with clean, straight, silhouettes. Her early experience left such a lasting impression that in 1957 she revisited this influence with the

1925 Inspiración collection and again, in 1964, with Reminiscencias de los Años 20, featuring Charleston-style garments.

She achieved institutional recognition in 1935, when she was given the Grand Prize and Gold Medal at the Art of Dressing Exhibition, awarded by the Government of the Republic. Her creations were worn by the greatest actresses of the time, such as Maria Fernanda Ladrón de Guevara, and the Miss Spain and soprano Teresa Daniel.

1.1 BARCELONA, CAPITAL OF HAUTE COUTURE



Viky Ballarín at the Spanish Fashion Show held at the Hotel Ritz in Barcelona and organised by the Cooperativa d'Alta Costura, 1957. Viky Ballarín Archive.

In the early 20th century, Catalonia was the motor of the European textile industry. The region accounted for 80% of Spanish cotton production and pioneered the use of machinery and innovation in textile printing. Thousands of women worked in the factories or in garment-making, and hundreds of men ran textile businesses.

Barcelona operated as a workshop city and, in the middle of the century, driven by the economic rise of the bourgeoisie and its connections with Paris, it became the Spanish haute couture capital.

In the Quadrat d'Or area around Passeig de Gràcia, fabric shops displayed their wares in their windows, while haute couture houses set up in Modernista buildings. Asunción Bastida set up her business at 96 Passeig de Gràcia, next to the La Pedrera building, in the former home of the painter Ramon Casas. She installed workshops on the ground floor while the first floor housed the laboratory and salons, where models presented the collections. The firm's success drove it to rapid expansion. She opened a branch in Madrid, near Gran Via – which was later moved to Carrer Hermosilla – and another one in Seville.

2- THE WILL TO DRESS AN ERA

After the coup d'etat in 1936, Bastida moved to San Sebastian, where she continued her professional activity for exclusive clientèle who could afford to buy her designs during the Spanish Civil War. From there she oversaw the organisation of the workshops supplying the hospitals and rebel forces.

Once the war had ended, she returned to Barcelona and reopened her salons, despite the shortage of materials. The National Catholic ideology transformed the idea of elegance and imposed sobriety and discretion. Alongside military influences, the period saw the return of "Spanish black" and mantillas were reused as shawls. Bastida would always maintain that supreme luxury lies in simplicity and naturalness.

Despite the austerity of the period, her spring-summer collections included vibrantly coloured dresses, rich in embroidery and floral prints. Such garments were an unattainable luxury for most of the population of a country plunged into poverty, forced to darn their own socks.

2.1 THE SKILL OF OPPENING A PATH TO MODERNITY

As a woman, Bastida knew what it felt like in women's clothes. They had to be comfortable and versatile without sacrificing elegance. This is why, in 1934, she introduced linen and cotton in her country and beach collections, as had Chanel. Given their success, Bastida ventured to use these everyday fabrics, which until then had been outside the conventions of luxury, to make evening dresses and even her Modernista-inspired embroidery.

She also launched new lines of business that complemented her haute couture collections, developed a distinctive aesthetic language and established the brand's image beyond dresses. The first was a lingerie division, which she developed with her sister and right-hand woman, Lolita Bastida.

In 1947, she once again demonstrated her connection with the fashion avant-garde, as just one year after the bikini made its debut in France, she included several designs in her summer collection. This was a bold move: the Franco regime would not authorise their use until 1953.

Her major breakthrough came in 1951, when she opened her first boutique on Calle Claudio Coello in Madrid. A pioneer of *prêt-à-porter*, she collaborated with Parisian designer Jacques Heim on the Jeunes Filles collection, designed for a younger clientele.

2.2 MODEL BY PROFESSION

Before the consolidation of haute couture, displaying a dress was an informal action. The profession of model was not yet recognised and working as one during the dictatorship was verging on the scandalous. Asunción Bastida's fashion house helped transform perceptions of the profession. In the fashion parade, models bring silhouettes to life and display the volume and movement of the fabrics. Furthermore, the designer can adjust the garment directly on the model's body. Displayed to clients, the dress ceases to be a mere garment and becomes an object of desire.

In the 1940s, María Teresa Zubiaur, the designer's future daughter-in-law, was already modelling dresses by Asunción Bastida. In the 1950s, Vicky Ballarin the doyenne of Spanish models, worked for the fashion house for more than 20 years. In the 1960s, the most widely known face was that of Paloma Cela, who would later go on to make films. Laura Valenzuela and Pilar Bardem also began their careers at the fashion house. In addition, international models were also working there, such as Jeanne Lacluque, Mavis van Rensburg and Ivana Uehlein.



Asunción Bastida alongside her models at the Gran Teatre del Liceu, 1963. Viky Ballarín Collection. Photograph: Josep Postius

3- POWER OF THE WARDROBE

In the 1950s, Spain was bankrupt, but the Pacts of Madrid with the "American friend" marked a turning point. This alliance ended the country's international isolation and boosted trade between Barcelona's haute couture houses and North American clients.

Bastida consolidated her international prestige. Her standing in Paris circles enabled her to secure Christian Dior's approval to reproduce his designs and sell them in Spain under the Dior label. After the Second World War and as women left the factories, it was Dior who introduced the New Look, with its defined waist and voluminous silhouette. Bastida incorporated this new silhouette in her collections, adapting it to the codes of the dictatorship.

Fashion became a powerful tool for conveying status and authority. An elegant wardrobe showing off purchasing power had to include tailored suits for the morning, coats for the afternoon and cocktail and evening dresses for the night, not forgetting hats and other such accessories.



Fashion illustration from the spring/summer 1956 collection. Museu del Disseny – Disseny Hub. Asunción Bastida archive

4. TWISTING TO THE WINDS OF CHANGE

In the 1960s, dissent found its way through the cracks in Franco-era censorship. After the visit of The Beatles, young people danced to the beat of the twist and the streets adopted the ye-ye look.

London gradually replaced Paris as the leading fashion laboratory. There, Mary Quant, with her miniskirt, proposed new silhouettes and materials and a style of dressing more in tune with a generation looking to stand out from their parents. This desire for freedom, together with advances in industrialisation, drove the rise of ready-to-wear fashion. Fashion became more democratic and transformed a system previously led by haute couture.

Bastida sought to adapt to the changing times and broke with the rigid styles of the 1950s: she shortened her skirts slightly and embraced the trapeze silhouette. A subtle aesthetic renewal that allowed her to remain true to her style and traditional clientele, which included women from the aristocracy and high society.

5. THE FINAL REINVENTION

A political decision precipitated the end of the golden age of Spanish haute couture: the Ministry of the Treasury imposed a luxury tax on fashion houses that presented their collections at fashion parades. To avoid the tax, Bastida responded by presenting her collections on hangers, triggering the “beauties’ strike”, which was supported by models from the leading fashion houses.

Despite the return of the fashion parades, the rise of *prêt-à-porter* was unstoppable. Aware of the change of era, Bastida embarked on one final reinvention: she abandoned haute couture, turned her Madrid salons into a boutique and launched ASBAS, her high-end ready-to-wear label, with flared trousers and multicoloured prints.

Times had changed. A new fashion system transformed the relationship between industry, design and consumption for ever. At the age of over 70, Bastida decided to close her fashion house. The success of her legacy in textile innovation and the ability to constantly adapt were also thanks to the professionals who supported her and worked for the fashion house for more than half a century.

MODULE 1: FROM CAIRO TO NEW YORK. THE SOFT POWER OF FASHION

To promote their businesses, the haute couture houses established the Cooperativa d'Alta Costura in 1940, within the regime's trade union structure. Bastida was the only woman among the "Five Greats", alongside Pedro Rodríguez, Manuel Pertegaz, Santa Eulàlia and El Dique Flotante. They presented their collections twice a year at the Spanish Fashion Salon, published the magazine *Alta Costura* to promote their designs and took part in high-society events.

Aware of the soft power of fashion, the Directorate-General for Tourism funded the Cooperative to present a modern image of the isolated country and also to bring in foreign currency. To attract foreign buyers, Bastida created the "Spanish trend", inspired by traditional folklore. The designer was one of the first to internationalise Barcelona haute couture and take her collections to Europe, America and Africa. She was also present in fashion parades at the iconic 1958 Brussels World's Fair and achieved a major milestone by participating in the 1964 New York World's Fair.



Fashion illustration of the "Spanish trend" in the evening dress collection from 1952-1953. Museu del Disseny – Disseny Hub. Asunción archive

In 1965, together with the designer Pedro Rodríguez, she received the Silver Plaque for Tourism Merit for her key role in raising the international profile of Spanish fashion.

MODULE 2: HER OWN MAGAZINE AND AN ASPIRATIONAL SCREEN

At that time, fashion's aspirational system operated through the "trickle-down effect". First, the haute couture houses created trends and publicised them through radio, press and the screen. Women then recreated the garments in dressmaking workshops and at home, imitating the style of the well-to-do.

Bastida quickly understood the potential of controlling her fashion house's image and creating a distinctive, recognisable visual identity. She realised that print was the most effective medium for reaching women and, in 1952, she launched her own magazine, *Boletín de la moda*. For 20 years, the magazine published the designer's vision alongside contributions from figures such as María Luz Morales, and featured photographs by Postius, Gyenes and Joana Biarnés, among others.



The magazine *Boletín de la Moda*, 1952. Museu del Disseny – Disseny Hub. Asunción Bastida archive

Her creations were also frequently seen on the big screen, both in the NO-DO news bulletins and in box-office hit films. She designed the wardrobe for more than 30 feature films over three decades and dressed Spanish film stars, such as Estrellita Castro, Ana Mariscal, Paquita Rico, Amparo Rivelles, Carmen Sevilla, Sara Montiel, Lola Flores and Mary Santpere.



Natural silk sari. c. 1969-1970. Viky Ballarín Archive. Photograph: Darío Gil Cabanas

THE CURATOR:

LAURA BALLARÍN BESCÓS

Journalist, curator and researcher with the Department of Art History at the National University of Distance Education (UNED).

Her work explores the fault lines between dominant narratives and testimonial accounts. She examines the performative power of testimony to transform discourse, shape visual imaginaries and rethink consensus around what is considered truthful in contemporary culture.

A graduate in Journalism from the Autonomous University of Barcelona, she also holds a Master's degree in Research in Journalism, Discourse and Communication from the Complutense University of Madrid, and a Master's degree in Cultural Project Management from the Ortega y Gasset–Gregorio Marañón University Research Institute.

MUSEOGRAPHY:

The design of the exhibition space, created by Studio Animal, is based on the idea of 'dressing' the space. To achieve this, the proposal is to construct the entire set design using the fundamental material of fashion: fabric. Large textile pieces, five metres high, hang from the museum ceiling, creating inverted vaults within which the pieces are displayed, as if in cases. As visitors walk through the exhibition, openings of varying sizes allow them to gradually discover the space, the different exhibits and more than 30 dresses.

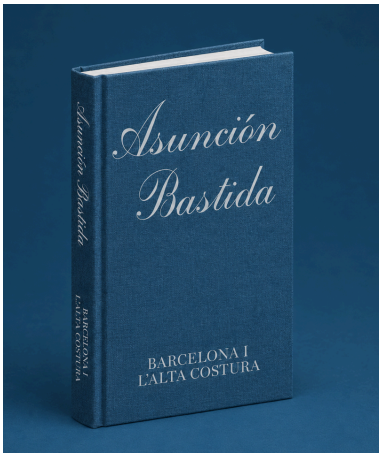
The graphic design for the exhibition and communications is by León Romero Studio, whilst the lighting design is by Intervento.

RELATED ACTIVITIES:

The DHub has scheduled a series of related activities for the exhibition. These include a **series of lectures** to be given while the exhibition is on, looking further at the figure of Asunción Bastida and at the universe of haute couture in Barcelona. There will also be **guided tours of the exhibition** on Saturdays. In October a new edition of the **book club 'Llegim el Museu'** began, organised by the DHub and the Biblioteca El Clot-Josep Benet, with a programme combining essay and fiction to reflect on the history of fashion, women's work and the symbolic value of dressing.

PUBLICATION:

In addition, Barcelona City Council and La Fábrica have published ***Asunción Bastida. Barcelona i l'alta costura***. This is the **first book on the designer** that includes the research carried out by Laura Ballarín Bescós, as well as texts by other leading authors. Through her **personal and professional journey**, it explains how she transformed a vocation that began at a very young age into one of the most important haute couture businesses in Barcelona and Madrid. Besides her biography, the book offers a **panoramic vision of the golden age of Spanish fashion between the 30s and the 70s**. It describes **Barcelona's role as the capital of fashion**, the creation of the Cooperativa d'Alta Costura, the relationship with Paris and the international exposure of Spanish firms. Finally, the work focuses on the **women who made this world possible and whose contributions have often been overlooked**: models, seamstresses, embroiderers and workshop staff. The **figure of Viky Ballarín** stands out in particular, Bastida's trusted model for nearly three decades, as well as the dressmaker's links with cinema and iconic artists such as Sara Montiel and Lola Flores. In this way, the book **champions women's contributions to the history of fashion** and pays tribute to the professionals who helped modernise and internationalise Spain's visual culture and fashion industry.



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https://eicub.net/share/service/publicSite?node=workspace://SpacesStore/103ef0d9-dd1e-40d0-b0be-c8bfe9f4d3ff

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Concessions: €4.2
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Combined discounted admission for temporary exhibitions: €5.2
Combined general admission: €9.2 (includes admission to the permanent exhibitions and temporary exhibitions)
Combined discounted admission: €6.2 (includes admission to the permanent exhibitions and temporary exhibitions)