



COMUNICATO STAMPA

MR & MRS CLARK

OSSIE CLARK AND CELIA BIRTWELL

FASHION AND PRINTS 1965-74

EXHIBITION AND BOOK DOCUMENT THE MAGICAL DUO OF BRITISH FASHION IN THE 1970s

A project by **Museo del Tessuto di Prato** and **Fondazione Sozzani**
in collaboration with **Collezione Massimo Cantini Parrini**
Loans by **Celia Birtwell** and **Lauren Lepire**
Curated by **Federico Poletti**

Under the patronage of the **National Chamber of Italian Fashion**, the first exhibition in Italy dedicated to **Ossie Clark** and **Celia Birtwell** arrives in Milan at the Fondazione Sozzani on Jan. 15. "Mr & Mrs Clark" chronicles the journey of the two creatives and explores the genius of Celia's design, which developed prints inspired by nature and avant-garde art, and of Ossie's talent, whose mastery of cutting and pattern-making brought sensual and feminine clothes to life.

Their union, even in private life, was immortalized by **David Hockney** in the famous painting *Mr and Mrs Clark and Percy*, (1970-71, preserved at the Tate Britain in London), which represents not only a portrait of two fashion designers, but also a manifesto of a new creative class between art and fashion. Carla Sozzani writes in the preface of the book published by **Silvana Editoriale**: "Ossie and Celia are also the story of a special alchemy, one of the first examples of creative couples who worked together to complete each other in total harmony. 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."

"Mr. & Mrs. Clark. Ossie Clark and Celia Birtwell. Fashion and Prints 1965-1974" is a project, shared between the **Prato Textile Museum** and the **Sozzani Foundation**. The exhibition and the book, curated by **Federico Poletti**, enhance through various exhibition materials (including sketchbooks and vintage photos) an important nucleus of clothes designed by the London-based designer and from the collection of **Massimo Cantini Parrini** (celebrated and award-winning costume designer). **Lauren Lepire** (founder of the vintage store Timeless Vixen in Los Angeles), from the **archives of Celia Birtwell and the Clark family**.

Federico Poletti, curator, commented: "For the first time, both in the exhibition and in the catalog, the work of Celia Birtwell and Ossie Clark is presented together, because Ossie's shapes and cuts would not have had the same impact without Celia's prints. Thanks to extensive research, we have recovered rare materials of great historical and artistic value, creating a unique exhibition featuring 30 iconic dresses from their moment of greatest fame (1965-74), 7 precious notebooks by Ossie and Celia, numerous unpublished drawings, magazine shootings taken by leading international photographers, as well as rare memorabilia, to videos with Ossie Clark's incredible fashion performances/shows."

A tale for clothes and images that also takes shape, thanks to the video in which Celia Birtwell herself speaks: "Ossie could have been an architect. He was great at creating three-dimensional shapes, which I could never do. I create flat designs and he could create shapes and volumes...Ossie was perhaps the first to put music in a fashion show, involving models of different ethnicities, interesting people from all over, dancing during the show. A multicultural phenomenon for the time that started a whole movement."

Also available for the Milan exhibition is the volume published and distributed by Silvana Editoriale. "Mr & Mrs Clark. Ossie Clark and Celia Birtwell. Fashion and Prints" book chronicles the artistic and personal partnership of Ossie Clark and Celia Birtwell through essays, interviews and a wealth of iconographic documentation. Edited by Federico Poletti, with art direction by **Claudio dell'Olio**, the book traces the history of the British couple who originated an unmistakable style, leaving their mark on fashion in the period between Mary Quant's miniskirts and the subversive punk movement of Malcolm McLaren and Vivienne Westwood. Including texts by **Cristina Giorgetti**, **Beatrice Manca**, **Antonio Mancinelli**, **Suzy Menkes**, **Renata Molho**, and **Arianna Sarti**, the catalog is not only a natural complement to the exhibition, but also an important bibliographical tool for understanding the importance of this couple sometimes overlooked by critics.

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Renata Molho writes in her text "Ossie Clark, Silent Revolution," Together with Birtwell, Clark experimented and invented: the lime yellow and orange garments deserve mention, as do the reinterpretation of Poiret's designs, or the women's trouser suit anticipating Yves Saint Laurent's 1966 "Le Smoking". "This same dress was purchased from Quorum in London in 1965 and brought to Paris by some of Yves' collaborators," recounted fashion historian Judith Watt in an interview, pointing out, "I'm not saying that Saint Laurent stole it, but he certainly drew inspiration from it." Clark's creativity, supported by Celia Birtwell's talent, seemed inexhaustible. Palm trees, cherries, flowers and stylised geometries, his was a personal language but one which defined an era, the still unsurpassed one of swinging London.

Concludes **Suzy Menkes** among the first to witness the performances of Ossie and Celia, a witness to an era in great socio cultural ferment: "Together, the young and artistic couple produced images for a rapidly changing society and created a new design epicentre in West London. Portobello Road was where the "youth generation" was beginning to seed and grow. ... It was Ossie's skill that pushed fashion forward, "simply looking at a drawing and turning it into a wonderful toile," as Celia put it, adding, "with my fantasy-styled sketchbook drawings and pattern cutting skills, we made a brilliant team that caught the zeitgeist among young people wanting to escape the strictures of the post-war period."

OSSIE CLARK Protagonist of Swinging London, Raymond Clark was born in Liverpool in 1942, the youngest of six children. A graduate of London's Royal College of Arts, he made his debut in 1964, when he began designing clothes for the Quorum boutique in Chelsea, frequented by the British music and arts scene. He met Celia Birtwell at school, whom he later married. He was killed in 1996 at age 54, leaving behind two children. In 1999-2000, the Warrington Museum & Art Gallery held its first retrospective, which was followed in 2003 by one curated by London's Victoria and Albert Museum.

CELIA BIRTWELL born in 1941 in London, trained at Salford Art School in Manchester. She graduated in Textile Design from the Royal College of Art, moving to London in the early 1960s, where she produced her first Op-art style furnishing fabrics. In her prints she studies the collections of the Victoria and Albert Museum extensively, particularly the costumes of Leon Bakst and Sergei Djaghilev for the Ballets Russes with references ranging from medieval English tapestries to Cubism and Pointillism. He currently lives and works in London.

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

Fondazione Sozzani

Opening

Sunday, January 15, 2023

On view

January 16 - April 10, 2023

Fondazione Sozzani, Corso Como 10 - 20154 Milan

Admission - Every Day, 10.30 am - 7.30 pm

Full 8 euro

Reduced 5 euro (students up to 26 years old)

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