LA MODE EN MAJESTÉ

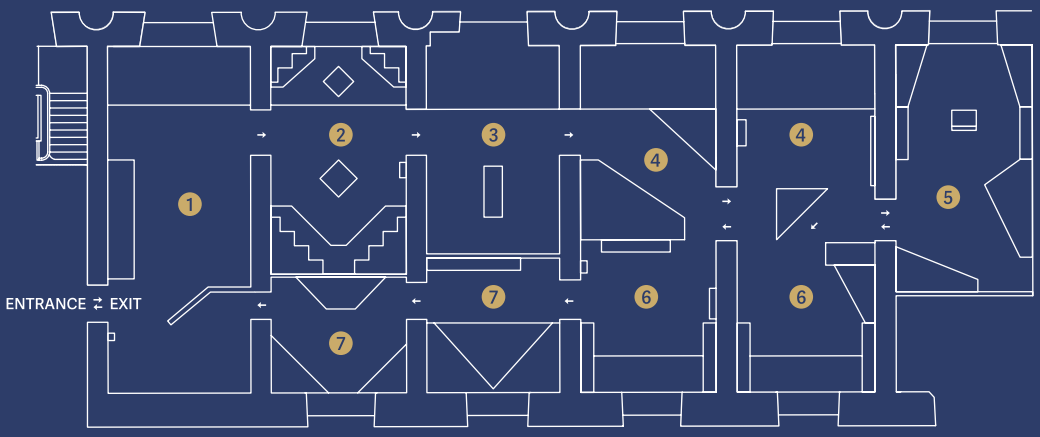
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Royal Thai Dress
from Tradition to Modernity

13 May – 1 Nov.
2026



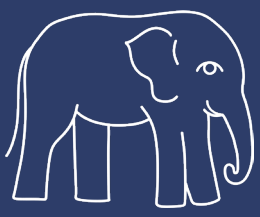
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FOR KIDS AND FAMILIES
IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF CĤĀNG THE ELEPHANT

These family-friendly texts (ages 7–12) takes you on a journey through the world of Thai clothing and fashion.
Follow Cĥāng the elephant as you discover this magnificent world.



Welcome to the Musée des Arts Décoratifs and to the exhibition "La Mode en Majesté. Royal Thai Dress from Tradition to Modernity". Enjoy your visit!

The exhibition is presented on the occasion of the 340th anniversary of the first contact between Siam and France, and the 170th anniversary of the two nations' diplomatic relations. It is organised under the royal patronage of Her Royal Highness Princess Sirivannavari Nariratana Rajakanya, in partnership with the Queen Sirikit Museum of Textiles (QSMT) and the Sustainable Arts and Crafts Institute of Thailand (SACIT).

Siam-France relations began in the 17th century with diplomatic missions connecting the courts of King Narai of Ayutthaya and King Louis XIV at Versailles in 1685-1686. Two centuries later, King Mongkut (Rama IV) entered into a Treaty of Friendship, Commerce and Navigation in 1856, ushering in a new era of Franco-Siamese exchange. In the 20th century, this dialogue took on a unique form when Her Majesty Queen Sirikit commissioned the Parisian fashion designer Pierre Balmain to create her Western wardrobe and help reform traditional Thai dress.

Presented for the first time in France, nearly 200 objects are brought together—including garments worn by members of the Thai royal family—alongside accessories, textiles, photographs and contemporary creations by Thai designers.

SERVICES

For the comfort and accessibility of all, folding seats, wheelchairs, magnetic induction loops, baby carriers, and changing tables are available on level –1 near the cloakrooms.

RECYCLE ME!

If you leave your brochure at the end of the exhibition, it can be recycled or reused.

THAILAND AND FRANCE

A DIALOGUE THROUGH DRESS

Across centuries, garments have served as visual statements through which Thailand presented its identity, dignity and cultural refinement to the world. Tracing the evolution of Thai royal dress as a meeting point of tradition, craftsmanship and international exchange, the exhibition reveals how garments, textiles and embroidery serve as powerful expressions of Thailand's cultural identity and diplomacy.

From the 1960s, Her Majesty Queen Sirikit played a pivotal role in shaping the modern image of Thai dress. She introduced a distinctive range of female national dress styles for the international stage. In collaboration with the Parisian couturier Pierre Balmain, Thailand's rich textile traditions were adapted through haute couture techniques.

The garments displayed here reveal how Thai textile traditions, court dress and French couture techniques came together to form a distinctive visual language.

THE EIGHT STYLES OF THAI DRESS

FROM ROYAL VISION TO NATIONAL IDENTITY

The Eight Styles of Thai Dress mark a defining moment in the modern history of the Thai national identity. Conceived under the vision of Her Majesty Queen Sirikit in the mid-20th century, they transformed historical court attire into a modern system of national identity.

In preparation for state visits to Europe and the United States in 1960, Her Majesty initiated research into historical Thai court dress and developed eight formal styles for women, known as *Chud Thai Phra Rajaniyom* (Thai outfits of royal favour), each designed for specific social and ceremonial occasions, a tradition now nominated for UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

Garments from members of the Thai royal family—including Her Majesty Queen Sirikit, Her Majesty Queen Suthida Bajrasudhabimalalakshana and Her Royal Highness Princess Sirivannavari Nariratana Rajakanya—demonstrate how these forms remain a living tradition within the royal family today.

CELEBRATION OF HANDS

TRADITIONAL THAI CRAFTSMANSHIP

This room pays homage to the artisans behind Thai crafts-manship. *Yan lipao* basketry, damascening and nielloware were once used to create items for courtly and everyday life, such as containers, utensils and objects of etiquette known as regalia. This is notably true of *bencharong* porcelains and metal wares.

Over time, these techniques have also been used to create accessories for traditional Thai dress, such as handbags and purses, as well as painted fans. Such creations require the mastery and patience of skilled hands. Today, they accompany traditional Thai dress, allowing objects once defined by their function to assume new roles within ceremonial attire. Many of these traditions are preserved through the work of the Queen Sirikit Institute, a vocational training centre established at Chitralada Palace.

Films document the gestures and techniques that bring these artworks to life.

BALMAIN FOR HER MAJESTY QUEEN SIRIKIT

A WARDROBE FOR HISTORY

In 1959, Her Majesty began a close collaboration with the Parisian couturier Pierre Balmain. The wardrobe of Queen Sirikit soon became a powerful expression of Thailand on the international stage.

Working with Balmain and the embroiderer François Lesage, she developed garments that brought together Thai textiles and motifs with haute couture craftsmanship. Over the years, Balmain named more than 20 designs "Bangkok" and "Sirikit", reflecting the lasting influence of this collaboration.

Created for state visits and official occasions, these garments were conceived with attention to the cultures and customs of the countries visited. Through these couture creations, fashion became diplomacy.

BROCADE

TEXTILES IN THAI COURT DRESS

Among Thailand's textile traditions, brocade holds a special place in court culture. Woven with supplementary threads of gold or silver, these richly patterned weavings create shimmering surfaces whose designs signal rank and ceremony.

Historically reserved for royalty and the highest nobility, brocade fabrics were worn by court ladies and members of the royal household. Portraits from the late 19th century, during the reign of King Chulalongkorn (Rama V), show women wearing pleated *pha nung* skirts and *chong kraben* trousers draped from these luminous fabrics.

This section presents royal garments and brocade textiles, showing how these traditions—from gold-thread court brocades to regional weaving traditions such as *khit*, *chok* and *phrae wa*—are kept alive through renewed use in royal and contemporary dress.

"A queen's wardrobe goes with her into her country's history. Her dresses must carry the stamp of enduring elegance and guard against becoming antiquated."

Pierre Balmain, in *My Years and Seasons* (1964)

MAT MII

FROM VILLAGE LOOMS TO PARIS COUTURE

For generations, *mat mii* (ikat) was woven by village women in north-eastern Thailand, its motifs shaped by memory, belief and local identity. The softly blurred patterns emerge only when the dyed threads are aligned on the loom, revealing the quiet precision of the weaver's hand.

In the late 20th century, the textile gained wider recognition through the SUPPORT Foundation, which was established by Her Majesty Queen Sirikit to preserve traditional crafts and support rural artisans. Through this initiative, *mat mii* became an important source of income for village weaving communities.

After the death of Pierre Balmain, Her Majesty continued working with Balmain designer Erik Mortensen, and later with the houses of Dior and Valentino. The garments shown here include creations by Balmain and Dior. Lesage's inventive embroidery often highlights the motifs and natural beauty of *mat mii*.

THE FUTURE OF TRADITION

FROM COURT TO CATWALK

Modern Thai dress emerged in the 20th century through the vision of Her Majesty Queen Sirikit, who transformed historical court attire into a living national form. Rather than fixing tradition in the past, this vision allowed Thai dress to evolve while preservingits distinctive identity.

Since then, Thai dress has continued to develop through new interpretations by contemporary designers. Today, what defines contemporary Thai dress rests on three enduring elements: the use of Thai silk, the language of draping and wrapping cloth around the body and new adaptations of the eight styles.

The garments presented here show how designers extend this dialogue between heritage and creativity, renewing Thai dress for the present while remaining unmistakably Thai.

ACTIVITIES

INDIVIDUALS

GUIDED TOURS

ADULTS (FROM AGE 15)
Thursdays 6:30–8:00 PM
Fridays 11:30 AM–1:00 PM
Saturdays 11:30 AM–1:00 PM,
2:00–3:30 PM, 4:00–5:30 PM

WORKSHOPS

Wednesdays, 2:30–4:30 PM
Saturdays and Sundays, 10:30–12:30 AM
Tuesday to Friday during school holidays,
10:30 AM–12:30 PM and/or 2:30–4:30 PM

"THAI IMPRESSION"
Ages 4–6, 7–10 ans, and family
Lotus flower, jasmine, diamonds... So many patterns, colours, and rythms weaven, embroidered, or printed to inspire a creation based on Thai textiles.

"EMBROIDERY IN ALL ITS MAJESTY"
Ages 11–14
The young teens are invited to explore the world of embroidery. Inspired by Thai patterns and the colors' richness of the threads, they explore textures, gestures, and details to create their own work.

ARTISANAL DEMONSTRATIONS

Demonstrations of various Thai craft techniques will take place at the museum during some weekends.
Included in the ticket price.

· 13–17 | 22–24 MAY
Embroidery

· 18–21 JUNE
Damascening and metal chasing

· 16–19 JULY
Prae wa silk weaving and *mat mii* (ikat) silk weaving

· 10–13 SEPTEMBER
Thai traditional weaving (bamboo and *yan lipao*)

· 8–11 OCTOBER
Painting on traditional folding fan

LECTURE

Thursday, October 8, 2026 from 6:30 PM to 8 PM
Only in French

GROUPS

Guided tours and workshops are available for adults as well as youths, according to profiles (student groups, recreation centers, higher education, associations, companies), at the day and time of their choice.

20 participants maximum per group; up to 30 for school groups, including accompanying adults. Languages: French, English, Spanish, Italian, Danish and Greek.

To book a guided tour:
reservation@madparis.fr | +33 (0) 1 44 55 57 66

You are looking for a time slot for your group tour (with no guided tour):

book a self-guided group ticket:
billetterie.madparis.fr/en/

Scan this code to find all the information about the exhibition and to book activities:

Les Arts Décoratifs is a non-profit association that brings together the Musée des Arts Décoratifs, the Musée Nissim de Camondo and the Camondo School, the Ateliers du Carrousel and the library.

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and from 7 PM to 11 PM

#Expo_ModeenMajeste

This exhibition is organized in collaboration with the Queen Sirikit Museum of Textiles (QSMT) and Sustainable Arts and Crafts Institute of Thailand (SACIT). It is held in celebration of the 340th anniversary of the first diplomatic relations and the 170th anniversary of the establishment of formal diplomatic ties between France and Thailand.

CURATOR
Béatrice Quette
Piyavara Teekara Natenoi
Sarttarat Muddin
Alisa Saisavetvaree
Suchaya Srisongkram

ASSISTED BY
Louise Lartillot, Astrid Novembre, Marie Oulès

SCENOGRAPHY
Studio Formule

GRAPHIC DESIGN
Sabir

EXHIBITION CATALOGUE
Available at the bookstore-boutique.
Published by Les Arts Décoratifs
and Queen Sirikit Museum of Textile in Bangkok,
216 pages, 160 illustrations and 3 brochures.
24 × 31 cm, €39.

Discover the collections and exhibitions of the Musée des Arts Décoratifs with our digital guide, available on the free app :

Bloomberg Connects

Evening gown, 1960, Pierre Balmain | Evening gown in traditional Thai style with a double train, 1985, Erik Mortensen for Balmain, Collection of Her Majesty Queen Sirikit © QSMT

Graphic design : Sabir

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