La Mode en Majesté

Royal Thai Dress from Tradition to Modernity

Press release



Her Majesty Queen Sirikit for *Vogue*, 1962 © Horst P. Horst / Condé Nast via Getty Images

May 13 — Nov 1, 2026

This exhibition is organised 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.

MUSÉE DES ARTS DÉCORATIFS

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La Mode en Majesté
Royal Thai Dress from Tradition to Modernity

From May 13 to November 1, 2026, the Musée des Arts Décoratifs presents, under the high patronage of Her Royal Highness Princess Sirivannavari Nariratana Rajakanya, the exhibition *La Mode en Majesté. Royal Thai Dress From Tradition to Modernity.* This event is organised as part of the 340th anniversary of the first diplomatic mission and the 170th anniversary of Franco-Thai diplomatic relations (1856–2026). This project offers an unprecedented reading of the evolution of dress at the Thai court, from the 1960s to the present day. Nearly 200 pieces, dresses and accessories designed primarily by the couturier Pierre Balmain and the house of Lesage, as well as by Thai designers, highlight the development of Thai court dress and its place on the international stage.



2.

1. Her Majesty Queen Sirikit in Paris visiting Balmain (44, rue François Ier) — October 12, 1960
Paris, Patrimoine Balmain
© Patrimoine Balmain

2. *Thai Chakraphat* — 1981
Unknown Thai designer
Plain silk, silk and metal-thread brocade, beads, metallic threads and sequins
Collection of Her Majesty Queen Sirikit



1.

Objects, textiles, and photographs from the royal collections complete this presentation. Through the prism of fashion, the exhibition analyses the role of costume as a cultural and diplomatic language. Presented for the first time in France, these court wardrobes, structured around the eight formats of traditional costume, were conceived by Her Majesty Queen Sirikit, in collaboration with Thai historians and designers.
The exhibition is organised in partnership with the Queen Sirikit Museum of Textiles (QSMT) and The Sustainable Arts and Crafts Institute of Thaïland (SACIT) as part of the celebrations marking the 340th anniversary of the first diplomatic mission and the 170th anniversary of diplomatic relations between France and Thailand, formerly the Kingdom of Siam.

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3.

3. *Thai Chakri, chong kraben* variation — 1982
Pierre Balmain (French, 1914-1982)
Silk and metal-thread brocade, plain silk, beads and sequins
Collection of Her Majesty Queen Sirikit

4. Evening Gown (detail) — 1985
Erik Mortensen (Danish, 1926-1998) for Balmain
Silk and metal-thread brocade, 19th century; silk
Collection of Her Majesty Queen Sirikit

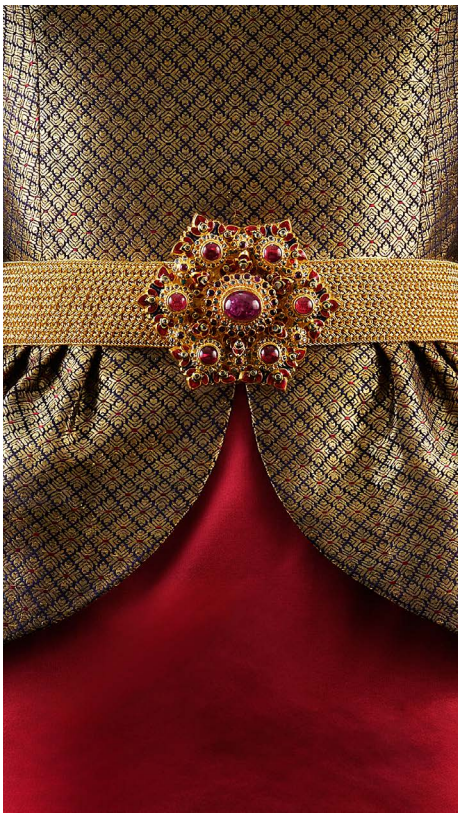
Thailand and France: Fashion as Cultural Diplomacy

The exhibition opens with the 1960s, a period during which Her Majesty Queen Sirikit maintained close relations with the great French couture houses and undertook an official visit to France with her husband, King Rama IX. She played a decisive role in the modernisation of court attire, presenting her creations during official trips made in 1960 to 14 European countries and the United States. With the couturier Pierre Balmain, she developed a new expression of Thai royal elegance, reconciling fidelity to heritage with international openness. The exhibition presents a selection of pieces from the wardrobes of the royal family, offering insight into the richness of Thai textile traditions and accessories.

Committed to the preservation of craftsmanship, Queen Sirikit created the SUPPORT Foundation in 1976, dedicated to safeguarding textile arts and handicrafts. Today, under the patronage of Her Majesty Queen Suthida, the Foundation continues this mission, while Her Royal Highness Princess Sirivannavari Nariratana Rajakanya extends its legacy through her commitment to contemporary creation and support for Thai designers.

Queen Sirikit and the Modernisation of Court Attire

From the first Siamese embassies to the Court of France to contemporary collaborations in the fields of art, haute couture, fashion, and textiles, these exchanges contribute to the representation of Thailand and France on the international stage. The exhibition pathway considers fashion as a form of cultural diplomacy, based on image, materials, and craftsmanship. Thai silks and ceremonial attire gained international visibility through collaborations with Parisian couture, while French expertise in turn contributed to the global dissemination of Thai textiles, in a relationship founded on reciprocity and creative exchange.



4.



5.

5. From left to right:

Evening Gown — 1960
Pierre Balmain (French, 1914-1982)
Silk satin embroidered with metallic threads and crystals
Collection of Her Majesty Queen Sirikit

Evening Gown — 1960
Pierre Balmain (French, 1914-1982)
Cotton lace, metallic threads, plastic threads, beads and sequins
Collection of Her Majesty Queen Sirikit

Evening Gown — 1960
Pierre Balmain (French, 1914-1982)
Silk satin with silk thread and braid, bead, paillette, and gold-metal coil embroidery
Collection of Her Majesty Queen Sirikit

Queen Sirikit: The Image of a Nation

The exhibition is structured around the wardrobe of Her Majesty Queen Sirikit, whose style and modernity profoundly influenced the international perception of Thailand at a pivotal moment in its history. In the 1960s, her appearances during state visits, particularly abroad, attracted the attention of the international press, making her an emblematic figure whose elegance extended beyond the diplomatic sphere. In the context of the post–Second World War period, as Thailand reaffirmed its place on the world stage under the reign of King Bhumibol Adulyadej (Rama IX), clothing became a vehicle of identity affirmation, combining refinement and cultural continuity.

Celebrations of Hands: Crafts and Accessories

An essential section of the exhibition is dedicated to Thai craftsmanship, focusing on the techniques and processes used to create the accessories and decorative elements that accompany Thai court dress today.

Selected craft objects are presented alongside close-up videos of the making process, offering insight into the skilled hands, methods, and material knowledge behind court attire and its continued influence on contemporary creation.
The practices highlighted include lipao weaving, folding fan painting, niello work, and gold damascening — crafts historically associated with court culture and still used today in the making of refined accessories accompanying Thai dress — as well as Bencharong ceramic painting, presented within the broader context of royal decorative arts.
The preservation of these traditions is closely linked to the work of the SUPPORT Foundation, established to safeguard traditional skills and support sustainable livelihoods for rural artisans. Through long-term support, training, and market development, the Foundation plays a central role in the transmission and continuity of craft practices. In addition, a programme of demonstrations by Thai master artisans will be presented at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs.



6.

6. Thai Inspired
Two-piece Ensemble —
2025
SIRIVANNAVARI
(Thailand, founded 2005)
Silk, glass and crystal
beads, cotton thread,
flat metal strips, and
upcycled plastic;
embroidery reminiscent
of cape jasmine
Collection
of SIRIVANNAVARI

7. Shoes —
René Mancini
(France, founded 1936)
Mat mii (ikat) silk, velvet
and beads
Collection of Her Majesty
Queen Sirikit

Modern National Heritage: Pierre Balmain and Haute Couture

For her state visits abroad, Her Majesty Queen Sirikit entrusted Pierre Balmain with the design of a wardrobe capable of translating Thai heritage through the craftsmanship of the French house. The couturier approached Thai attire as a true haute couture composition, conducting an in-depth study of forms, proportions, and textiles, derived from a tradition based on wrapping and draping rather than Western tailoring. Working with Thai silk, brocade, mat mii (ikat), and embroidery, he developed silhouettes suited to international official contexts, both deeply rooted in tradition and open to modernity. The exhibition reveals, for the first time, the process of work and research between Her Majesty Queen Sirikit, the House of Balmain, the House of Lesage, and the SUPPORT Foundation through drawings and samples of textiles and embroidery.

Thai Fashion Today: Contemporary Thai Dress

The exhibition presents Thai fashion as a constantly evolving tradition. Alongside historical pieces associated with Queen Sirikit, it also brings together outfits worn or commissioned by Her Majesty Queen Suthida and Her Royal Highness Princess Sirivannavari Nariratana Rajakanya. These works testify to the continuity of the principles established under the reign of Queen Sirikit — clarity of form, mastery of textiles, reinterpretation of traditional dress — which continue to nourish contemporary creation and the international influence of Thai fashion.

The exhibition concludes with a presentation of contemporary Thai designers, heirs and interpreters of this still deeply rooted and living tradition. The creations of the house SIRIVANNAVARI, founded by Her Royal Highness Princess Sirivannavari Nariratana Rajakanya, enter into dialogue with those of designers such as ASAVA, VATIT ITTHI, WISHARAWISH, TIRAPAN, and MESHMUSEUM. These works inscribe Thai dress in the present and the future, affirming the voice of contemporary Thai creation within international fashion ecosystems.

Partnerships

La Mode en Majesté. Royal Thai Dress from Tradition to Modernity is organised in partnership with the Musée des Arts Décoratifs (MAD), the Queen Sirikit Museum of Textiles (QSMT), and the Sustainable Arts and Crafts Institute of Thailand (SACIT).



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assisted by Astrid Novembre,
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and Louise Lartillot,
Curator assistant
bourse du Japon

The curator team at the Queen Sirikit Museum of Textiles, in collaboration with SACIT (Sustainable Arts and Crafts Institute of Thailand)
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Chief Curator & Educator, Queen Sirikit Museum of Textiles
→ Alisa Saisavetvaree
Curator, Queen Sirikit Museum of Textiles
Conservation & Registration Team
Queen Sirikit Museum of Textiles

— Les Arts Décoratifs
The not-for-profit organization Les Arts Décoratifs brings together the Musée des Arts Décoratifs, the Musée Nissim de Camondo, the Camondo School, the Ateliers du Carrousel, and the Library.
Lionel Sauvage, President
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Opening hours
→ Tuesday to Friday, 11 am – 6 pm
→ Open late in temporary exhibition on Thursdays until 9 pm
Admission
→ General admission: € 15
→ Concession: € 10
→ Free for under 26

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Closed from August 4, 2024 through 2027

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— Visitor engagement
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Closed Monday

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