

Press Release  
January 2021

## Studio MUTT completes the design of *Bags: Inside Out*, a vibrant exhibition in V&A Fashion Gallery



The mezzanine level of *Bags: Inside Out* at the V&A, by Studio MUTT. Photograph by FRENCH+TYE

### **Overview**

*Bags: Inside Out* at the V&A is the UK's most comprehensive exhibition dedicated to the ultimate accessory. Curated by Dr Lucia Savi and designed by Studio MUTT, with graphic design by Heather Whitbread, V&A Design Studio, and lighting by Studio ZNA, the exhibition features 300 items from designer handbags to despatch boxes, vanity cases to military rucksacks, and explores our longstanding fascination with the bag. The architecture responds to the particular duality of bags - at once symbolic and intimately private - by creating two very different experiences across both levels of the Fashion Gallery. Downstairs reflects the rich interiors of bags: new translucent, stretched fabric walls subdivide the gallery to create colourful rooms, pockets and alcoves for object display. Upstairs showcases the process of designing and making bags: cabinets disguised as miniature buildings and a large theatrical workshop table present objects from behind the scenes.

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## **Project Description**

Studio MUTT were appointed by the V&A in February 2019, through an invited competition, to design *Bags: Inside Out*, a major exhibition dedicated to bags and their impact on culture and society. Curated by Dr Lucia Savi, the exhibition explores the function, status and craftsmanship of bags through 300 objects varying in scale from tiny purses held on a fingertip to luxurious travel trunks. *Bags: Inside Out*, sponsored by Mulberry, was scheduled to open in April 2020, and opened after a Covid-19 delay in December 2020.

The design of the exhibition responds to the particular duality of bags - at once symbolic and intimately private - by creating two very different experiences across both levels of the Fashion Gallery, refurbished in 2013 by 6a. The lower level, entered through a supersized zip with suspended charm-like brass signage, reflects the rich interiors of bags with colourful rooms, pockets and alcoves, while the upper level creates a miniature cityscape from existing cabinets disguised as a fashion atelier and a bag factory for visitors to wander through.

The existing lower level of the gallery is a challenging space, made up of 12 existing cabinets arranged in no particular sequence. Studio MUTT embraced the oddness of the space, looking to the poche plan of the museum as inspiration to create a series of semi-transparent rooms to form curatorial sections. Colourful fabric walls, stretched around timber frames, line rooms and divide spaces, while screen printed patterns on the fabric add a layer of ornament to the spaces.

The first section of the exhibition on *Function* examines bags as practical objects designed to hold our belongings. From holiday outfits to confidential documents, make-up to money and even gas masks, the design and materials of our bags often reflect their intended purpose as functional objects. Rare exhibits on show include a large embroidered burse used to protect the silver matrix of Elizabeth I's Great Seal of England, Winston Churchill's red despatch box and Vivien Leigh's attaché case. Screen-printed blockwork and lintel patterns on the fabric walls create a surreal functionality in the space, and decoration within the cases exaggerates the curatorial narrative.

*Status and Identity*, the second ground floor section, looks at the role of the bag in celebrity culture and its notoriety among the political and societal elite. Featuring a Hermès 'Kelly' named in honour of Grace Kelly and a 'Lady Dior' handbag named after Princess Diana, the section explores the powerful and influential world of celebrity endorsement. The Fendi 'Baguette' bag worn by and stolen from Sarah Jessica Parker in one of *Sex and the City's* most famous scenes sits alongside a gold Louis Vuitton 'Monogram Miroir' Speedy bag by Marc Jacobs, popularised by Paris Hilton and Kim Kardashian. A series of arched openings in the green fabric walls frame views of the objects, which are elevated on new classical-inspired plinths, sampling those found throughout the museum.

Upstairs, the third section of the show looks at the *Design and Making* process from sketching to sampling, sewing to selling. Four large glass cabinets have been clad as an imagined Parisian fashion house and an anonymous industrial building, reflecting the different ways in which bags are conceived and made. The buildings are split and pulled apart to create alleys and are arranged as a miniature cityscape through which visitors are encouraged to wander and explore. This section includes innovative and often limited-edition collections such as Prada's nylon bag reinvented by Japanese architect Kazuyo Sejima, Valextra's collaboration with Bethan Laura Wood and the 'International Woman' suitcase by Tracey Emin for Longchamp. Bags are displayed in curtain-lined windows, focusing the view on small and delicate objects in large cabinets.

Finally, *The Makers' Table*, a supersized, theatrical workshop table, presents an opportunity to get up close to the techniques and materials used in making bags. A 10m long table was recycled from a previous exhibition, saving it from landfill. It has been refurbished with a new linoleum top, an overhead railing for hanging material samples, and a central, spool-like drum for displaying talking head interviews with Mulberry, Bill Amberg and Elvis & Kresse. The tabletop contains sketches, samples, tools and prototypes from international fashion houses and emerging designers.

## Project Details

<b>Project:</b>	Bags: Inside Out
<b>Client:</b>	V&A
<b>Architect:</b>	Studio MUTT
<b>Exhibition Curator:</b>	Dr Lucia Savi
<b>Graphic Designer:</b>	V&A Design Studio
<b>Lighting Designer:</b>	Studio ZNA
<b>Project Manager + QS:</b>	Flemming Associates
<b>AV Hardware Designer:</b>	DHD Service Ltd
<b>AV Software Designer:</b>	Cultureshock
<b>Address:</b>	Gallery 40, V&A, London, SW7 2RL
<b>Completion:</b>	December 2020
<b>Gross Internal area:</b>	665 m <sup>2</sup>
<b>Contract type:</b>	JCT Minor Works
<b>Construction cost:</b>	£288,000
<b>Main Contractor:</b>	setWorks
<b>Software:</b>	Vectorworks

## Architect's View - Studio MUTT

*After two separate Covid-19 delays, Bags: Inside Out opened to the public in December 2020. We were appointed to the project following an invited competition in early 2019, and it has been a privilege to work with the V&A for the first time. They are a client who truly understands the importance of design, storytelling and innovation, and have a reputation for championing emerging designers.*

*The existing spaces of the V&A Fashion Gallery offer significant challenges, and our first big moves were to clarify the spatial sequence of the lower level through creating new rooms and alcoves, and to remove a 3m-tall polycarbonate screen from around the upper level, opening up the views to Aston Webb's 1909 domed roof. Through collaborative workshops with the design, curation and technical teams the design has developed into a multi-faceted exhibition which is greater than the sum of its parts. We look forward to this being hopefully the first of many with the museum.*

## Client's View - Dr Lucia Savi, V&A, curator of Bags: Inside Out

*Curating an exhibition is about storytelling. Crafting the narrative and selecting the final objects to display are some of the most challenging aspects of a curator's job. This cannot be fully achieved without an engaging and effective exhibition design.*

*Working with Studio MUTT on Bags Inside Out at the V&A has been a truly collaborative project. MUTT engaged with the themes of the exhibition with creativity and dedication and transformed the gallery into an uplifting, immersive and surprising space.*

## Client's View - Evonne Mackenzie, V&A Head of Design

*Studio MUTT's design concept created a spatial and architectural response to the curatorial ideas around the duality of bags, as both personal and public. The design explored this through the first series of interior spaces, that were functional then decorative and followed this with an idea based on urban space and the public street. Throughout the whole show*

*runs the thread of visitor views – whether of spaces, cases or vignettes and this really successfully knits the whole thing together.*

*Studio MUTT brought their distinct design approach - clear design strategies, delicate communicative models – that had charm and delight, a careful consideration of how best to present objects to visitors and plenty of humour throughout – in the design and the collaboration.*

*It was a total pleasure and delight to work with Studio MUTT throughout - from the first initial conversation to final snagging and the end result is a fun, breath of fresh air.*

## **Notes to Editors**

For press enquiries, images and interviews please contact

Graham Burn, Director and Project Lead

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## **About Studio MUTT**

Founded in 2017, Studio MUTT is an energetic architecture and design studio working across culture and identity, placemaking and public realm. Our ambition is to create joyful projects to make everyday life better.

We design projects of character.

We collaborate to create the unexpected.

We are joyful realists.

We design places with identity.

We champion healthy design.

*Previously completed projects include:*

- *2 stores for fashion brand Universal Works, in Soho and Coal Drops Yard.*
- *Out of Character, an installation at the Sir John Soane Museum and RIBA North.*
- *Ordnance Pavilion, a sculptural micro-gallery in the Lake District, shortlisted for AJ Small Projects 2019.*
- *Inn Bloom, a floral pavilion in Mexico City.*

*And current projects include:*

- *Pool Meadow, a refurbishment of Coventry bus station into an arts and culture hub and gateway for UK City of Culture 2021. (Completion May 2021)*
- *Westminster Church Street Regeneration Base, a community resource and council office for the Church Street regeneration project. (Completion summer 2021)*
- *The Pottering Shed, a beachside art studio for Roger Zogolovitch (Completion 2021)*
- *Oriel Chambers, a careful refurbishment and fitout of Grade 1-listed (and home to Studio MUTT) Oriel Chambers in Liverpool (Completion 2021)*
- *James Street, a 10 storey new build hotel on Liverpool's historic waterfront*

*NLA Awards 2020: Placemaking - Shortlisted, Camden Gardens*

*Archiboo Awards 2020: Best Use of Video - Finalist, Runcorn Multi-Story*

*AJ Small Projects 2019 - Shortlisted, Ordnance Pavilion*

*Dezeen Awards 2019: Emerging Practice - Finalist*

Web: [www.studiomutt.com](http://www.studiomutt.com)

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Twitter: @studio\_mutt

## **About V&A**

The V&A is the world's leading museum of art and design, housing a permanent collection of over 2.3 million objects that span over 5,000 years of human creativity. The Museum holds many of the UK's national collections and houses some of the greatest resources for the study of architecture, furniture, fashion, textiles, photography, sculpture, painting, jewellery, glass, ceramics, book arts, Asian art and design, theatre and performance.

Web: <https://www.vam.ac.uk/>

Instagram: @vamuseum

## **About Mulberry (exhibition sponsors)**

Founded in 1971, Mulberry creates luxury lifestyle goods that playfully interpret heritage and celebrate intelligent creativity. We take great pride in creating objects that are made to last, to be loved and passed onto the next generation. Originally a family-run business, today we have grown to be the largest manufacturer of luxury leather goods in the UK with factories in Somerset and a design studio in London. Mulberry's bags, jewellery and accessories are available in over 120 stores worldwide and through the digital flagship [mulberry.com](http://mulberry.com).