



How Azzedine Alaïa Popularized Street Style in High Fashion

A new exhibition examines the Tunisian designer's Tati collection.

BY BARRY SAMAHA

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The late Azzedine Alaïa seldom—if ever—followed the rules of fashion, carving his own path in an industry marked by rigid show schedules, and churning out trends at a rapid pace. Over the course of his illustrious career, the Tunisian-born, Paris-based designer took his time crafting and presenting pieces that melded street style and couture techniques—a quality that is highlighted in “Azzedine Alaïa, Another Way to Look at Fashion: The Tati Collection,” an exhibition held at the designer’s atelier on 18, Rue de la Verrerie.

Debuting at Alaïa’s runway show in 1991, the Tati collection garnered a wave of praise at Paris Fashion Week for bringing a fresh perspective to fashion. Tati was a high-street label that was known for its enlarged houndstooth-print logo, which was pervasive in French cities at the time. Alaïa placed it on body-hugging trousers, crop-tops, hot-pants, and jackets using the age-old practices of couture houses.



“What excited me was to attach my name, and the world of haute couture, with this brand that represented bargain clothing and bargain prices,” Alaïa said at the time. “When I would fly home to Tunisia, I would see travelers at Paris’ Orly airport with huge Tati bags, [filled] to the brim. I wanted to design something of good quality for this clientele, who until now could not afford my clothes.”

This blend of contemporary and couture was initially inspired by his friend [Julian Schnabel](#). The artist caught Alaïa’s attention by using a vichy check pattern on a series of paintings, transforming something commonplace into something rarefied—a technique Alaïa then applied to fashion design. “With Tati, I learned many things, another way to look at fashion,” he said.



These days, Alaïa's outlook, his adopting of mainstream motifs, is the trend du jour. The biggest brands are looking to the streets for inspiration, tweaking certain styles for their ready-to-wear presentations. But 28 years ago, as "Azzedine Alaïa, Another Way to Look at Fashion: The Tati Collection" conveys, he was one of the first to do it.

Curated by Olivier Saillard, the exhibition will feature pieces from the 1991 show, three works from Julian Schnabel, illustrations by Thierry Perez, and photographs by Ellen von Unwerth. The show is a reminder of Alaïa's boundary-pushing influence, the effects of which still reverberate through the fashions of today.



“Azzedine Alaïa, Another Way to Look at Fashion: The Tati Collection” will run from July 1 to January 5 at 18, rue de la Verrerie, 75004 Paris.