Evening dress

Place of origin: Paris (made)
Date: 1954 (made)
Artist/Maker: Balenciaga, Cristóbal, born 1895 - died 1972 (designer)
Materials and Techniques: Silk taffeta, boned and padded, metal, machine-sewn and hand-finished, wire, lined with chiffon
Credit Line: Given by Miss Caroline Combe
Museum number: T.427-1967
Gallery location: In Storage

Public access description
Throughout the 1950s Cristóbal Balenciaga (1895-1972) designed a series of extravagant and inventive evening dresses (mainly in fine silk taffeta) that were based on immense drapes and flounces. In this dress he confines the bouffant drapes to the back, while in contrast the front has a simple appearance with a V-neck and a straight, very narrow skirt, slit at the centre front hem to allow movement.

Descriptive line
Evening dress of silk taffeta, designed by Cristóbal Balenciaga, Paris, Autumn / Winter 1954

Physical description
Evening dress made from cerise silk taffeta. The sleeveless bodice has a plunging 'V' neckline and the construction of the skirt back is highly involved. It consists of a swathed and drawn back skirt with a double tier of enormous triangular flounces (formed by looping and gathering) topped by a large bow. The flounces are wired to keep their bouffant shape. The dress is mounted on a boned and padded foundation which fastens at the centre back with a metal zip. The bodice doesn't have a side seam, but rather a centre front seam. The front is simple, and smooth with a v neck and a straight, narrow skirt at the front, with a slit in the hem to ease movement. The dress fastens over this with a row of covered buttons. It has two ties which would have tied around the calf, in order to show more of the flounces of the dress. Lined with chiffon.

The dress is machine sewn and hand finished. It is a good example of the draped and flounced dresses of the 1950s, some reminiscent of late 19th century bustle effects. The dress is a further example of Balenciaga's ability to perfect imperfections, as the dress was designed to balance out the body of the wearer.

Dimensions
Circumference: 83 cm bust, Circumference: 58 cm waist, Circumference: 220 cm hem, Length: 35.8 cm  Bodice to waist, Length: 10 cm  Arm opening - left, Length: 12.5 cm  Arm opening - right

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Object history note
The dress was worn, and given by Caroline Colthurst, nee Combe (1935-2011). She was a debutante, and model, working for Pierre Cardin and Yves Saint Laurent. She also pursued a a career in fashion, working for as a fashion assistant for Ernestine Carter, and writing for Harpers Bazaar and Vogue, and several national newspapers. She owned a fashion boutique, with her cousin, Countess Lindsey and Abingdon, called 'Buy and Large'.
This dress was the first Balenciaga object to enter the Textile and Fashion collection in 1967.

URL
http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O15581/evening-dress-balenciaga-cristobal/