

BALENCIAGA

BALENCIAGA CREATES ITS FIRST ACADEMICIAN'S HABIT FOR THE RECEPTION OF ANTOINE COMPAGNON AT THE ACADEMIE FRANÇAISE

On May 11th, 2023, literary critic, writer and professor emeritus at the Collège de France, Antoine Compagnon, will be received at the Académie française, wearing a bespoke Balenciaga suit.

The Académie française was founded in 1635 to safeguard the French language and maintain its official dictionary. Forty academicians, also known as *immortals*, are elected for life by their peers. For their induction, the tradition is that they receive a sword representing their life and work and wear a *habit vert* – a black or navy blue suit embroidered with green and gold olive branches. Over the centuries, this uniform has become a symbol of the Académie and its prestige. This is why new members regularly turn to French luxury houses for its design.

On the occasion of his induction at the Académie française, Antoine Compagnon commissioned Balenciaga to create his *habit vert*. For the first time since its founding in 1917 by Cristóbal Balenciaga, the House has been called upon for its expertise to create and produce an academician's suit. Drawing on the legacy of the man who was known as the "couturier of couturiers" and who, until the closure of his ateliers in 1968, was exclusively dedicated to Haute Couture clients, the House made its return to Couture in 2021; in its historic salons on avenue George V, Demna, its artistic director, now creates for men as well as for women.

The academician's costume created by Demna required more than 300 hours of work in the ateliers of the Maison de Couture.

The black tailcoat and pants are enriched with a woven embroidery of a gold and green olive branch motif, which took 900 hours for the Maison Lesage to make.

The specific materials for each garment were selected from weavers with unique and exceptional savoir-faire, including the French House of Dormeuil, founded in 1842, for the Barathea wool used for the tailcoat and pants.

The black cloak with an officer's collar incorporating shoulder pads is made from cashmere by Joshua Ellis, weaver since 1767.

The white cotton piqué used for the vest and bow tie was woven by the English House of Thomas Masson, founded in 1796.

The shirt is made of white poplin from the Italian house Albini, dating from 1876, and is fastened with mother-of-pearl studs.

In keeping with the tradition of the Académie Française, Antoine Compagnon's *habit vert* is accompanied by a sword. Conceived and designed by Boucheron, the sword was made entirely of glass, an extraordinary technical feat and an exercise in creativity that incorporates the references and symbols dear to the future Academician.

This common project illustrates the excellence of the Houses of the Kering luxury group and ties a strong link between Balenciaga's unique heritage and creativity, the savoir-faire of its Couture ateliers, and the extraordinary capacity of innovation and virtuosity of the oldest jeweler of the Place Vendôme.

Antoine Compagnon is a literary critic, writer and professor emeritus at the Collège de France, a specialist in particular of Marcel Proust. Born in 1950 in Brussels, son of General Jean Compagnon and Jacqueline Terlinden, Antoine Compagnon spent his childhood in London, Tunisia, and then Washington, D.C., depending on his father's assignments. He completed his secondary education at the Prytanée National Militaire de La Flèche, then entered the École Polytechnique (class of 1970) and became a civil engineer. At 25, his passion for literature caught up with him. This "quasi-autodidact in literature", as he defines himself, became a Doctor in French literature in 1977 and a Doctor of State in letters in 1985. After his first thesis, he returned to the École Polytechnique, but this time to teach there (1978-1985), as well as at the French Institute of the United Kingdom in London (1980-1981). In 1985, after his doctoral thesis, he became a professor at Columbia University in New York, before returning to France to teach at the University of Maine (1989-1990), then at the Sorbonne (1994-2006) and the Collège de France (2006-2020). He is the author of numerous books on literary criticism and history, on Montaigne, Baudelaire, Proust, and Colette, as well as several tales.