

Medem Set to Portray Balenciaga (Exclusive)



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Barcelona's Distinto Films to produce

John Hopewell

(<http://variety.com/author/johnhopewell1/>)

MADRID — First Coco Chanel, then Yves Saint Laurent, now Cristobal Balenciaga (<http://variety.com/t/balenciaga/>), the master of them all.

The great Spain-born fashion designer will become the latest genius of Parisian haute couture to receive a big-screen portrait, in a still-to-be-titled movie directed by pre-eminent Spanish auteur [Julio Medem](http://variety.com/t/julio-medem/) (<http://variety.com/t/julio-medem/>) (“Sex and Lucia,” “Room in Rome”).

Medem is one of a select number of Spanish helmers whose movies have played in main competition at both Cannes (“Earth”) and Venice (“Lovers of the Arctic Circle”).

He is attached to direct from a screenplay by L.A.-based scribes Julia Fontana and Pablo Gomez-Castro.

The portrait is set up at Miriam Porte's Barcelona-based [Distinto Films](http://variety.com/t/distinto-films/) (<http://variety.com/t/distinto-films/>). Its credits include "The Wild Ones," which in 2012 topped Spain's Malaga Festival, the country's biggest national cinema showcase.

Nominated for an Academy Award and BAFTA for "Les Miserables," [Paco Delgado](http://variety.com/t/paco-delgado/) (<http://variety.com/t/paco-delgado/>) will serve as the film's costume designer.

Born in Getaria, a fishing village in the Basque country, like many Spaniards of singular genius – Salvador Dali, Luis Bunuel – Balenciaga, a near contemporary, only found full fame when he moved in 1937 from Spain to Paris, taking his cultural roots with him.

His sense of the cut and drape of cloth allowed him to design clothes as if he were an architect, creating designs that revolutionized women's silhouettes and are instantly recognizable today: the 1953 balloon jacket, 1957's baby-doll dress, and 1959's kimono coat.

Balenciaga designs were worn by Carole Lombard, Grace Kelly, Marlene Dietrich, Ava Gardner and Greta Garbo. Jacqueline Kennedy popularized his pillbox hats.

He was admired by Coco Chanel – who hardly admired any one – and revered by Christian Dior. It was Dior who once famously called him "The master of us all."

But Balenciaga was an eminently discreet man, who refrained from meeting his clients and gave only two known interview in his career.

Told in flashback as Balenciaga recalls his life on his retirement, which rocked the French fashion industry, in May 1968, the film focuses on the two decisive periods in Balenciaga's life: His upbringing in Getaria, the son of a humble fisherman and a seamstress, which gave him such a rich and innovative cultural baggage; and his most severe testing, as a crowned haut couturier in Paris during World War II.

“The film combines European and Hollywood taste. But it is not a conventional biopic,” Porte told Variety.

“Combining romance, political intrigue and glamour, it unveils the envies and friendships in the competitive world of haute couture in an occupied Paris.”

She added: “He was a hermetic Basque who stood up to Hitler’s plans to move the world’s fashion capital to Berlin, a man who, with everything against him, fought for the love which always united him to his friend, partner and companion, ...the only designer capable of facing down the legendary Coco Chanel, an admirer, rival and friend, to whom he confessed his greatest secrets.”

Porte aims to structure the Balenciaga movie as a co-production with France and Germany, and shoot in French or English.

A former development head at Distinto Films, Fontana works in development and fiction production at Participant Media.

Gomez-Castro has directed three shorts, written and produced by Fontana, the latest of which, “How Jimmy Got Leverage,” played the HBO NY Latino Intl. Film Festival.

Both are partners in L.A.-based production house LA Panda. Circle of Confusion’s Ashley Berns and Elana Barry rep Fontana.

Emilio Mayorga contributed to this article