When you think of a fashion show in Paris or Milan, you're just as likely to think of rows upon rows of influencers clamouring for the perfect Insta story as you are to focus on the clothes themselves.

However, a new immersive exhibition sponsored by Vogue shows that this was not always the case. King's Cross "projection storytelling" venue Lightroom's newest exhibit takes us back to the earliest days of the runway show, in the latter half of the nineteenth century, when couture was an altogether more intimate affair.

Omar Mansoor, the creative director of luxury brand OM London and a former fashion history lecturer, explained: "Runway shows in the past, or salon shows as they were called, were very exclusive events, with no more than 30 or 40 people. Now, you always need three or four rows of celebrities for no reason."

The Lightroom exhibit utilises Vogue's extensive archive to demonstrate not just the exclusivity of fashion shows of the past – though there is plenty of that on display, from Balenciaga banning journalists in the 1930s to Coco Chanel hosting shows in her front room – but also how that mentality has weaved its way into contemporary fashion.

"The most radical thing someone can do at a fashion show is put away their phone", proclaims the exhibition voiceover, referencing a notable 2024 The Row show which replaced smartphones with pen and paper. In the absence of any footage, a virtual charcoal pencil sketches designs across the Lightroom projection.

Lightroom assistant producer Hope Delicata echoes these sentiments. "The one thing I'd bring back from those early runway shows," she says, "is no phones!

"Designers are now designing and creating fashion shows in response to how good they look captured on an iPhone and to create viral moments. I feel we've lost some of that authenticity and focus of those early shows."