



# HAUTE COUTURE

The exhibition is made possible by CHANEL and JEFFREY MAYER

MM86191

See MM 86193



MM 86190

## HAUTE COUTURE

This exhibition celebrates the art and history of the haute couture, the consummate form of fashion. Every stitch and every detail is made by hand, and the garment is fitted to the particular measure and preference of the client. Couture engages the designer with the client in the traditional manner of patrons of art and architecture.

The haute couture was founded in the epoch of a new modernism in the 1850s and 1860s. The invention of the sewing machine and a disposition to uniform sizes and commonalities in dress and visual culture were the natural opposition to couture's emphatic and deliberately archaic insistence on the handcrafts of fashion. Nonetheless, the haute couture has set the standard of advanced dress for nearly a hundred fifty years.

In the 1860s, dresses by Charles Frederick Worth determined the court and bourgeois mode for crinoline-inflated volumes. Fifty years later, another couturier, Paul Poiret, offered a radically new form of dress: he departed from the structured exoskeleton or armature to create a soft cylinder, a form inspired by the East. That such innovations arose in the couture and "trickled down" to ready-to-wear clothing with great popularity certifies the role of the couture in design evolution and progress. Subsequent fashion changes—including the "New Look," the chemise, the mini, and even the extravagance of the 1980s—have all been inaugurated in the couture.

The haute couture has never become entrenched, haughty, or superannuated. It is a striving, frequently avant-garde, aesthetic catalyst. Its abiding faculties in perfect measure and details of numerous handcrafts enable the couture designer to render the newest ideas in the best of techniques. The haute couture is, as it began, a dream of quality in an era of industry. It persists in providing us with a paradigm of the most beautiful clothing that can be envisioned and made in any time.

## THE ATELIER: DRESSMAKING

Each couture house is divided into two ateliers, or workshops. The designer presides over both ateliers, and each may require additional technical work external to the couture house, including embroidery, featherwork, and fringe. But the couture's essential division is between dressmaking (*atelier flou*) and tailoring (*atelier tailleur*) of suits and coats. In this gallery, dressmaking is demonstrated: its goal is to render soft form. In Madeleine Vionnet's dressmaking of bias cut and fluid materials, the result is supple but specific to the elasticity of the fabric and the fit of the client. Similarly, for such designers as Grès, Chanel, and Lanvin, the soft but sure elements of dressmaking render distinct form as lithe as the ideal human body.

Dressmaking depends upon many of the most traditional arts that were recorded by Diderot in the eighteenth century. The haute couture's codification of dressmaking is in the designer's creation of discrete models of periodic timeliness and compelling novelty. The designs are each, in a sense, a Platonic ideal. Yet when a design is chosen by a client, it becomes enriched by the particularity of the individual fit and the fulfillment of the dress as perfectly made for the patron.

Dressmaking is soft sculpture appointed to the body. Its challenge is delicacy in technique and definition in form.

## 1. Madeleine Vionnet

Bias-cut day dress, ca. 1932

Ivory silk crepe

Vionnet found ingenious ways to conceal the critical shaping of a dress—fusing front and back and articulating principles of the body without explicit structure—within what seemed to be only minor devices of decoration. Here, chevron faggoting in fine-thread drawnwork creates arrowheads that reiterate the direction of the grain.

*Gift of Mrs. T. Reed Vreeland, 1961 (CI 61.3.2)*

## 2. Madeleine Vionnet

Day dress, 1926-29

Marion silk crêpe

The unexpected challenge of couture design in the late 1910s - 1920s was to create forms out of soft fabric without reliance on any underlying structure. It is as if sculpture has been reconstituted from an art of mass to an art of legerdemain and supple balances, as it would become over the decades. But Vionnet mastered first and most successfully the possibilities of minimal structures imposed on soft fabric to set up a deliberate fulcrum of volume and balance. A day dress achieves stability in the dynamic of silk crêpe rendered as a lattice, just enough structure in tiny pin tucks to set off differing tensions to the bias. Below the lattice, Vionnet created a seam to which she attached the knife-pleated skirt.

*Gift of Mrs. Aline Bernstein, 1945 (CI45.103.2)*

## 3. Yves Saint Laurent

Evening dress, fall/winter 1987-88

White silk charmeuse

Though known paramountly for his tailoring, Saint Laurent has elaborated on dressmaking techniques. Dressmaking's great tour de force is to manipulate a single piece of fabric in divers appearances and tensile strengths. In a short dress, Saint Laurent demonstrates the virtuoso effect of a single piece of fabric on the bias twisted and gathered into an applied bow. From such orchestration of the fabric, he also achieves a modernist ideal of creating a dress with only one seam and the lone piece of cloth. In such accomplishment, this dress is perhaps a less overt reference to modern art than the "Mondrian" dress, but nonetheless fulfills an aesthetic goal of modern art.

*Gift of Mrs. Oscar de la Renta, 1994 (1994.192.7)*

## 4. Madame (Alix) Grès

Evening gown, 1958

White silk jersey

Grès, working earlier as Alix, created dresses in shafts of fabrics, the divers fluting of which served as a body entasis like the architectural model of a classical column. Seaming together fabric vertically to be continuous from hem to neckline, Grès pleated and tucked the materials into a shaping suitable to the body: the same fabric is buoyant and fluid when release-pleated from the waist down; Grès simulated a waist seam by tight tucking that continues through the bodice; and she crowned the dress with volutes and twists that extend the same fabric that is so liquid and ample at the bottom.

*Gift of Mrs. Leon L. Roos, 1973 (1973.104.2)*



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**THE ATELIER: DRESSMAKING**

Each costume house is divided into two parlors, or workrooms. The designer presides over both parlors, and each may require additional technical work related to the costume house, including embroidery, leatherwork, and lace. For the costume's essential distinction is between dressmaking (which fits) and tailoring (which tailors) of suits and coats. In the atelier, dressmaking is democratized. Its goal is to render suit form. In Madeleine Vienne's dressmaking of bias cut and fluid materials, the result is supple but specific to the elasticity of the fabric and the fit of the client. Similarly, for such designers as Greil, Chanel, and Lanvin, the suit has one element of dressmaking: neither distinct from the suit nor the dress.

Dressmaking is a craft of the most technical arts that were reserved for the elite of the aristocracy. The haute couture's craftsmanship is a result of the designer's creation of discrete models of dressmaking, which are made in a workshop. The designs are made, in a workshop, when a design is chosen by a client. If the design is chosen by the particularity of the individual fit and the fabric of the dress, the dress is made for the person. Dressmaking is a craft of the most technical arts that were reserved for the elite of the aristocracy. The haute couture's craftsmanship is a result of the designer's creation of discrete models of dressmaking, which are made in a workshop. The designs are made, in a workshop, when a design is chosen by a client. If the design is chosen by the particularity of the individual fit and the fabric of the dress, the dress is made for the person.

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## 5. Hubert de Givenchy

Day dress top, ca. 1967

Oatmeal wool tweed double knit

To view a couture inside out is to see all the luxury that the client alone would know and feel. Aesthetic consideration extends even to the closure with a chiffon-covered snap and hand-stitched piped buttonholes.

*Gift of Diana Vreeland, 1979 (1979.435.9a,b)*

## 6. Hubert de Givenchy

Day dress, 1963-67

Oatmeal wool tweed double knit

The relaxed attitudes of the 1960s could be achieved in couture day wear. Hubert de Givenchy excelled in a style associated with such nonchalant style paladins as Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis and Audrey Hepburn. Learning from his mentor, Balenciaga, Givenchy offered a seemingly unstructured two-piece dress indebted to the Balenciaga sack, and dubbed his "split-level." For necessary articulation of details, he employed "souplesse" instead of a tailor's dart, allowing a supplementary soft fold of material to give shape to these unassuming and chic tops.

*Gift of Diana Vreeland, 1979 (1979.435.10a,b)*

## 7. Pierre Balmain

Evening dress, summer 1946

Black and white striped voile with white linen, black silk twill with jet bead embroidery

While the overskirt of black silk twill is most visible, an underskirt that has been stiffened with a broad canework band generates the shape that is influenced by the ample silhouettes prevailing in the late 1940s.

*Gift of Mrs. John Chambers Hughes, 1958 (CI 58.34.26a-c)*

## 8. Jacques Griffe

Cocktail dress, spring 1951

Gunmetal silk organza

Griffe, who had worked with Vionnet, permitted the graduated structural elements to become ornament. Far more grandiloquent than Vionnet and, in the manner of the 1950s, returning to crinoline-like shaping and picturesque resplendence in fashion, Griffe created a full skirt with welt tucks that encase bands of horsehair. One feature of this period is that the horsehair progresses very subtly from narrow to wider, demonstrating the sophisticated resources of the couture. Arguably, every skill of the couture flourished in the 1950s, and dresses seem to celebrate the métiers in an almost self-conscious flamboyance.

*Gift of Mrs. Byron C. Foy, 1953 (CI 53.40.14a-f)*

Gabrielle Chanel

Day ensemble, ca. 1927

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Pink and black floral-printed silk chiffon and beige wool tweed

Chanel excelled in soft tailoring. This particular coat-and-dress ensemble blends dressmaker techniques with the definite finishes of the tailor. The fabric is reinforced with ornamental overstitching in a manner which, seeming decoration, is structural trussing. In fact, this soft tailoring became the token of the Chanel suit in the designer's sustained evolution until her death in 1971.

*Isabel Shults Fund, 1984 (1984.31a-c)*

MM 86 204

## THE ATELIER: DRESSMAKING

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**Madeleine Vionnet**  
1876-1941  
The dress is made of silk and is a masterpiece of bias cut and fluid materials. It is a perfect example of the soft sculpture of dressmaking.



## 1. Jeanne Lanvin

Robe de style, 1924-25

Ivory and black silk taffeta trimmed with pink and black silk velvet rosettes

High art, and haute couture with it, has often been erroneously associated with the sovereign disposition. But haute couture has also been conditioned on the relationship between couture ideas and the will of the client. A client seeking a demure profile might ask for one décolletage treatment, while another might demand an alternative. A designer would allow variation only in modules, but a couture garment often becomes a synergy of client and couturier. In the two dresses shown here, one was clearly for a less audacious client.

*Gift of Mrs. William B. Given Jr., 1979 (1979.122.1)*

## 2. Jeanne Lanvin

Robe de style, 1924-25

Ivory and black silk taffeta trimmed with pink and black silk velvet rosettes

Lanvin created a rich *Gesamtkunstwerk* of couture techniques in her characteristic robe de style fashion. The designer's prerogative can hardly be seen to suffer even with the patron's wishes evident in this and the adjacent modification of the same style. The harmonious combination of embroidery and pink and black velvet ribbon rosettes (with black stitches as the shadows of the flowers) unequivocally dominates both versions. Usefully, the designer only inverts the same sleeve pattern piece for the two different styles.

*Gift of Mrs. W. R. Grace, 1956 (CI 56.49.1)*



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1. Emanuel Ungaro

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Evening dress (with toile), 1988

Blue silk gazar

Having worked for Balenciaga, Ungaro returned to the master in a collection inspired by Balenciaga with extravagant ballooning shapes. From this deliberate renaissance of Balenciaga, Ungaro evolved his own approach to sculptural form. In this example, a spiraling sleeve terminates in an interior rose and the shirred body of tacked gathers is a habitual form for the designer. Even the choice of textile for the dress is probably influenced by Balenciaga who loved the form-holding silk gazar.

*Gift of Anne H. Bass, 1993 (1993.345.14)*

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1. **Cristobal Balenciaga**

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**Evening ensemble, ca. 1962**

**Moss green Indian sari silk with woven gold trim**

A client provided Balenciaga with an Indian sari and asked the designer to create a dress.

Balenciaga rendered couture technique to the flat textile, cutting apart the woven edging and appliquéing it to form a border for the whole of the garment. In this way, he respected the Indian source but addressed the textile as if it were a couture fabric. India, and in particular the tradition of the sari, had long captivated the West. Bias draping of the 1920s and 1930s was influenced by the sari. That Balenciaga pursued the idea in the 1960s is late evidence of this long tradition.

*Gift of Mrs. Ephraim London, 1994 (1994.573a,b)*

2. **Christian Lacroix**

**Evening gown (with toile), 1987**

**Red and black chine silk taffeta**

Recognized widely for the pouf dresses he created for Patou, Lacroix maintains his skills as a knowledgeable, assimilating historicist in this gown. What history provided as a bustle in the back in the nineteenth century is converted and subverted to be a bubble at the front, bolstered by drapery swags. The narrow underdress has fabric twisted and coiled into an appliqué, a hidden detail for the private pleasure of the client. Like the eclecticism of the prior century, Lacroix's historical absorption is not academic, but interpretative and constantly novel.

*Courtesy Christian Lacroix*

3. **Christian Lacroix**

**Evening dress, 1990**

**Green changeable silk taffeta with black lace and point d'esprit**

The ability of the seamstresses to introduce form into the most fluid materials can be seen in the lace cupping at the shoulder. Reinforced by a collage of point d'esprit and re-embroidered lace, the cap of the sleeve forms, even in the absence of an arm, a shaped dome.

*Courtesy Hamish Bowles*

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1. Jeanne Lanvin

MM 86082

Evening dress, ca. 1930

Light green silk taffeta and silk net

A silk tulle skirt is obscured by bias ruffles, bringing the relatively flat bias construction of Vionnet to a more three-dimensional application. Other bias bands crisscross at the neckline, joined imperceptibly to the body of the dress by a narrow web of tulle.

*Gift of Mrs. Jill L. Leinbach and James L. Long, in memory of their mother, Mrs. Jane P. Long, 1986  
(1986.377.1a-c)*





MM 86082

MM <sup>see</sup> 86208 ← <sup>see</sup> MM 86209 → | ← MM <sup>see</sup> 86080 → ← MM <sup>see</sup> 86081 → ← MM <sup>see</sup> 86084 →

Gabrielle Chanel

MM 86 209

Evening gown, 1936

White Chantilly lace and silk net

Silk net has been treated in a labor-intensive manner with ruffles Shirred in, set by heat, and the Shirring thread removed. Designer of no-nonsense and men's-tailoring-inspired sportswear, Chanel was not oblivious to the beautiful benefits of the virtuoso hand-sewn details of the couture. If Vionnet was, in the 1920s and 1930s, the chief designer of configuration achieved through delicate but strategic hand sewing, Chanel was nonetheless aware of how much form could be achieved by the smallest stitch, even in this case with the thread subsequently removed.

*Gift of Mrs. Stephen M. Kellen, 1978 (1978.165.16a,b)*

Chanel by Karl Lagerfeld

Evening gown and cape, spring/summer 1995

Red silk chiffon

In a hand-stitched Shirring worthy of Vionnet or Grès, needle and thread are passed through to create fine gathers for both a gown and a cape. Structure is discovered in technical prowess. No further decoration is necessary beyond that inherent in the process of making the dress. In this, Lagerfeld demonstrates one of his special preoccupations of allowing the couture process to become the form of the garment, an idea akin to contemporary art.

*Courtesy Chanel*

MM 86209



**Chapel by Karl Lagerfeld**  
 Evening gown with long sleeves, all-over ruffles, and a high collar. Made of silk. 1980s.

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**Chapel by Karl Lagerfeld**  
 Evening gown with long sleeves, all-over ruffles, and a high collar. Made of silk. 1980s.

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**Gianni Versace**

**Evening dress, 1995**

**Nacreous coated silk and clear vinyl**

While couture design employed many industrial materials in the 1960s, these were used more as signifiers of Pop and absorptive sensibilities rather than as materials accommodated to the design purpose. Versace, employing industrial substances to innovative purpose in the couture, merges traditional crafts with the materials new to the couture. Moreover, the transparent vinyl works to reveal craft and to make the industrial gesture even more audacious by being without concealed flaws or imperfections. Versace's use of vinyl renders the work process fully visible in the proud tradition of couture.

*Courtesy Versace*

MM 86208



## THE HISTORY OF THE HAUTE COUTURE

Deeply established in its techniques, the haute couture nonetheless sets the chronology of fashion through its landmark achievements. From the ebullient gowns of the Second Empire through a plastic dress of 1995, couture has created the standards and concepts of modern dress. We could not be modern without the spirals and Cubist cones invented by Poiret and Callot Soeurs. We could not imagine our time without Chanel's critical "little black dress," simple yet consummately achieved, or the body newly disclosed by Vionnet and Grès.

Throughout history, the haute couture has been resolutely fresh and exploratory. Embracing such silhouettes as the "New Look," Dior's clients were in league with a bold designer, and together they influenced the way women dressed in the 1940s and 1950s. Even as fashion in the 1960s and 1970s attended to the impulses of the new in media, music, and pop culture, couture remained its top form, allowing for such graphic conceptualism as Saint Laurent's "Mondrian" dress and the shifts from mini to maxi lengths.

More recently, the haute couture--and fashion in general--has earned its expansive place in culture not by sovereignty, not by telling women what to wear, but by aesthetic innovation and imagination. Thus, Chanel by Karl Lagerfeld displays a trompe l'oeil adornment as a gleeful virtuosity, Patou by Christian Lacroix rediscovers eighteenth-century silhouette and opulence, and Gianni Versace creates a future in plastics reconciled with skills of the hand.

### Gallery 2: History, 1860-1920

#### 1. Émile Pingat

Ball gown, ca. 1860

Ivory silk faille with black Chantilly and silk blonde lace trim

In the 1860s, when a broad expanse of shoulders was de rigueur in formal dress, a heavily-structured bodice was required to allow the decorative cap sleeves to remain in place. As historian Ann Coleman points out, "From Pingat's first decade of activity, the 1860s, more formal evening gowns survive than do ephemeral Worths; perhaps Pingat selected fabrics of greater stability." Perhaps, too, Pingat understood dress as engineering, a structure for minimal bodices and an armature of cloth required for the umbrella-like forms of the skirts.

*Gift of Mary Pierrepont Beckwith, 1969 (CI 69.33.12a-c)*

MM 86078

#### 2. Émile Pingat

Ball gown, ca. 1860

White net over ivory silk satin with gold cording and gilt bead trim

Among the inaugural group of couture designers of the 1850s and 1860s, Worth is unquestionably the best remembered, perhaps for the long history of the house he founded. Yet other houses created couture: Worth's most formidable competitors were Doucet, Laferrière, and Pingat. Historian Ann Coleman accounts, "His [Pingat's] clothes, murmuring elegance rather than shouting affluence, demand close inspection inside and out."

*Gift of Mary Pierrepont Beckwith, 1969 (CI 69.33.1a,b)*



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## 3. Charles Frederick Worth

Ball gown, ca. 1892

Pink silk damask with crystal embroidery

In instances of the elaborate patterns *à la disposition*, woven to ultimate configuration as a dress, the House of Worth created with great invention. Moreover, the textile is so rich and dense that the couturier has allowed the selvage, as thick as grosgrain ribbon, to be its own finish, embellished with silver seed beads and crystal embroidery. In this decision, the couture garment expresses a startling truth to its process, yet without mitigating its sumptuous effect.

*Gift of Orme Wilson and R. Thornton Wilson, in memory of their mother, Mrs. Caroline Schermerhorn Astor Wilson, 1949 (TSR 49.3.25a,b)*

## 4. Charles Frederick Worth

Ball gown, ca. 1887

Pale green and ivory silk satin, and yellow, pink, and ivory silk chiffon with embroidered sunburst pattern

The "fabric riot" of opulence in the 1880s was perhaps only paralleled by the same in the 1980s. Worth's velvets, trims, and pattern or patterns were the fashion of the era. A gown *à la disposition* with elaborate surface embroidery of sun and clouds manifests Worth's juxtaposition of various weights of extraordinary textiles with a very subtle palette and startling textile combinations. The primary view is from a distance, but the gown is also rewarding to visibility and tactility close up to its couture skills.

*Gift of Orme Wilson and R. Thornton Wilson, in memory of their mother, Mrs. Caroline Schermerhorn Astor Wilson, 1949 (TSR 49.3.28a,b)*

## 5. Jean-Philippe Worth

Ball gown, 1900-1905

Ice blue silk satin embroidered in scrolling floral motif

Jean-Philippe Worth succeeded his father as designer for the House of Worth, creating to great favor the stiffened, slightly archaic, rococo revival of the turn of the century. The house continued its virtuoso technical achievements, as represented in this example, in which metallic thread is couched to render baskets and scrolling ribbons, and ivory marquisette is cut into circles and pulled in at the perimeter to make the soft three-dimensional petals that are then applied to the fabric. As the twentieth century began, these designs recalled the eighteenth century. Their artisanal opulence implied the conservative impulse of the couture opposed to the novelties of a new era.

*Gift of Mrs. Walter H. Page, 1979 (1979.251.4a,b)*

## 6. Jacques Doucet

Evening gown, ca. 1907

Cream silk chiffon, lace and taffeta with silver metallic lace and crystal embroidered trim

Doucet, the house at which Vionnet trained, was more attuned to the eighteenth century and lace than any other in Paris. The soft Doucet touch extended to meticulous tailoring and extraordinary evening toilettes, as sheer as any until Vionnet would develop her bias softness in the 1910s and 1920s. Of Doucet, who indulged a dix-huitième sensibility but also bought Picasso's *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* in 1909, historian Caroline Milbank has said, "His ensembles were as romantic and opulent as the dresses in the eighteenth-century Watteau and Fragonard canvases he loved so well."

*Gift of Miss Marie Louise Constable, 1951 (CI 51.13.1)*



7. Callot Soeurs

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**Evening gown, 1910-14**

**Beige cotton net embroidered with gold, silver, pink, and copper sequins and beads**

Attuned to the Orientalism of the decade, the Callot Soeurs reined the silhouette to a cylindrical wrap, effortless in lingerie-weight fabric. Yet for its innovations, the work of the Callot Soeurs does not stint the couture's roster of technical skills. Here, sequins vary: some are punched into a filigree pinwheel, others are hammered flat; in some instances metal is overlaid onto faceted crystal. But even this ornamentation is not entirely for the pleasure of heterogeneity, but for the calculated and magical effects of such varied surfaces seen in evening and candle lights.

*The Jacqueline Loewe Fowler Costume Collection, Gift of Jacqueline Loewe Fowler, 1981 (1981.380.2)*

8. Callot Soeurs

**Evening gown, 1909-10**

**Fuchsia and gold silk brocade with purple net and gold lace**

Enamored of the East and determined to see apparel more simply for its display of soft textiles, Callot Soeurs was one of the most important couture houses to advocate the new Cubistic cylinders of fashion as early as 1909 and 1910. It was unquestionably an advanced, even avant-garde, sensibility, achieved in gentle wrapping rather than a carapace of anatomical distortion.

Maverick patron Rita Lydig wore the velvets and laces of this couture house adding to the aura of both their fame and infamy.

*Gift of Agnes Miles Carpenter, 1940 (CI 40.27.2)*

9. Paul Poiret

**"Sorbet" gown, 1913**

**Ivory and black silk satin with seed-beaded appliqués**

In the braggadocio of claiming to liberate women from the corset, Poiret factually overstated his role but realized the importance of his modernization of the clothing ethos. Influenced by the Orientalism of the 1910s, Poiret took unstructured lengths of fabrics and wrapped them around the body in flagrant opposition to Edwardian structure and tailored formation. On the lampshade overskirt are signature Poiret roses; their finesse is apparent in the caviar-size seed beads applied to backing and appliquéd to the dress.

*Courtesy Hope B. McCormick Costume Center, Chicago Historical Society, Gift of the Costume Committee*

1. **Jean-Philippe Worth**

Wedding gown, 1896

MM 86193

**Cream silk damask**

Employing a textile design that mirrors itself from selvage to selvage, Worth created a dress pieced into a perfectly symmetrical image at the center. The absorption of image to hourglass silhouette further demonstrates Worth's mastery, as the ultimate dressmaking is constituted in the smooth, custom-made fit of this gown. Tiny hand-stitched cartridge pleats at the shoulder create huge leg-of-mutton sleeves that offset the fit, which cleaves to the period's ideal silhouette of narrow waist and bell-shaped fullness of the skirt.

*Gift of Miss Agnes Miles Carpenter, 1941 (CI 41.14.1)*

2. **Jeanne Hallée**

Evening gown, 1913-14

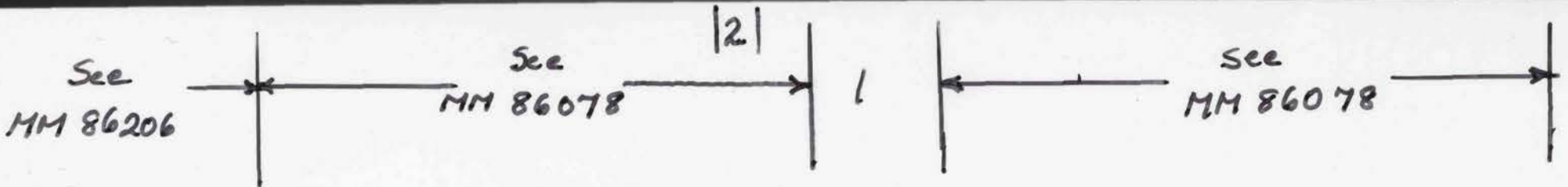
**Green figured silk faille, blue silk georgette**

Peacock colors in a Renaissance pattern suggest romantic yearnings for the past in the years just before World War I. Fashion's revolution, like art's, was already well-established. By 1913, an eclectic European historicism returned to smooth the disjunction between radical dress by Poiret and Callot Soeurs and the traditional standards of couture style. Hallée offered the unblest peacemaking of a compromised modernity.

*Gift of Mrs. David J. Colton, 1964 (64.7.5a-c) (C.I.64.7.5a-c)*



MM 86193



## BOOKS

Left: **Drésa** (1869-1929)

“S’il ne Vient Pas, Nous Serons Treize...”

Right: **Georges Lepape** (1887-1971)

“Le Manteau de Pourpre”

Gazette du Bon Ton: Art, Modes & Frivolités, February 1914

Pochoir on paper

Purchase, Irene Lewisohn Bequest, 1995

**Pierre Brissaud** (1885 - ?)

“Au Pré Catelan”

Gazette du Bon Ton: Art, Modes & Frivolities, June 1914

Pochoir on paper

Purchase, Irene Lewisohn Bequest, 1995

**Georges Lepape** (1887 - 1971)

“Longchamp(1) on Elle a Gagné”

Gazette du Bon Ton: Art, Modes & Frivolités, Summer 1915

Pochoir on paper

Purchase, Irene Lewisohn Bequest, 1995

Left: **Anonymous**

“Quelques Silhouettes de dos dans les Collections d’Hiver”

Right: **Anonymous**

“Créations en Vogue”

Art-Gout-Beauté: Feuilletts de l’Élégance, November 1926

Pochoir on paper

Purchase, Irene Lewisohn Bequest, 1995

Left: **Anonymous**

“Création Beer”

“Création Doucet”

Right: **Anonymous**

“Création Lucien Lelong”

“Création Martial et Armand”

Art-Gout-Beauté: Feuilletts de l’Élégance, August 1926

Pochoir on paper

Purchase, Irene Lewisohn Bequest, 1995

**Suzanne Runachen** (b. 1912)

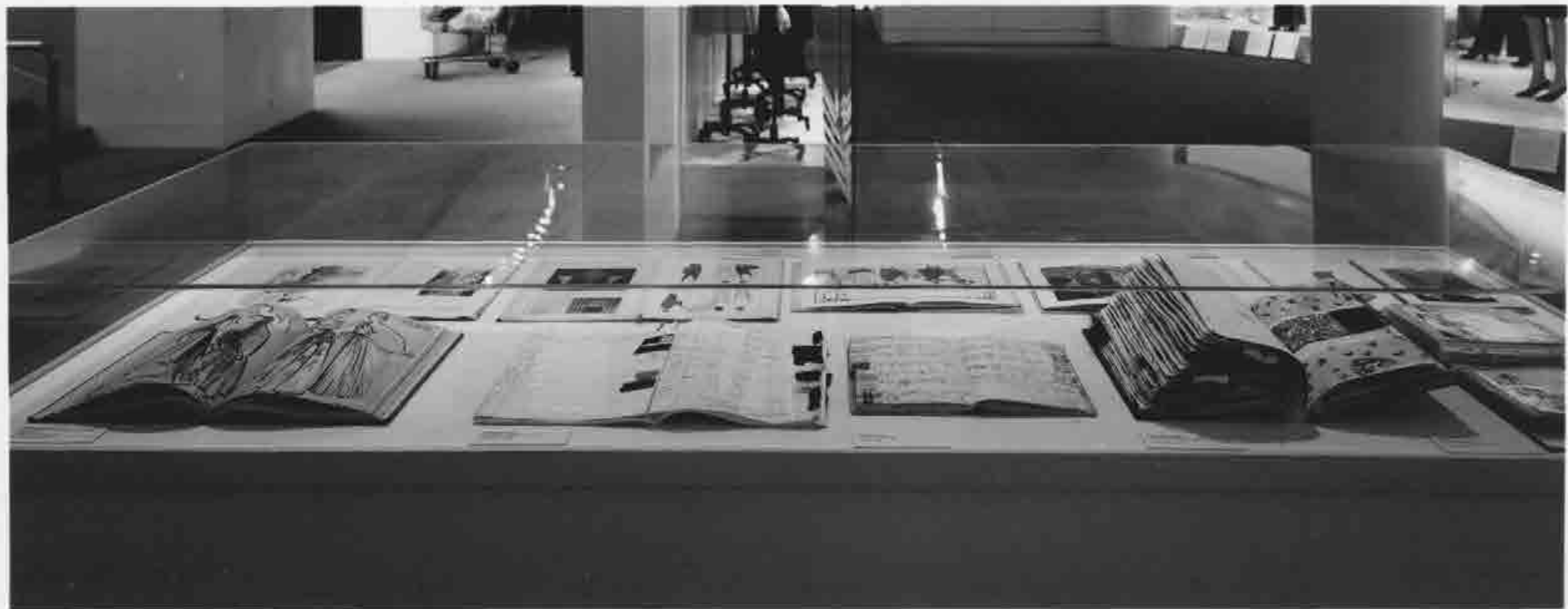
“Mad Carpentier, Marcel Roches, Jacques Fath, Pierre Balmain”

Prestige de la Qualité, 1946

Gift of Carlyle Dress Company, 1952

Left: **Georges Barbier** (1882 - 1932)

“Les Colchiques”



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Right: **Georges Lepape (1887 - 1971)**

"Les Collier Nouveau"

Gazette du Bon Ton: Art, Modes, and Frivolités, January 1914

Pochoir on paper

*Purchase, Irene Lewisohn Bequest, 1995*

**French**

**Judith Barbier Modèles**

**Pan: Annuaire du Luxe à Paris An. 1928**

*Purchase, Irene Lewisohn Bequest, 1995*

Left: **Simone A. Puget**

"Les Lys Rouge"

Right: **Bernard Bautet de Manuel (1884 - 1949)**

"Le Choix"

Gazette du Bon Ton: Art, Modes, & Frivolités, April 1914

Pochoir on paper

*Purchase, Irene Lewisohn Bequest*

**Georges Lepape (1887 - 1971)**

"Les Chose de Paul Poiret"

Pochoir on paper

*Purchase, Irene Lewisohn Bequest, 1995*

## 1. Madeleine Vionnet

Evening gown, 1936-37

Black silk satin with faux ivory belt buckle

Vionnet exposed her composition with characteristic subtlety. The wide cylinder of bias cut is pulled in at center front, radiating from and anchored by the buckle. To the casual observer, the effect is superficial and the buckle may seem applied decoration. Strategically placed at the nexus of bias construction, the center front is the dynamic convergence of the dress as a composition. In such a gesture, Vionnet was a dauntless modernist.

*Gift of Madame Madeleine Vionnet, 1952 (CI 52.18.2)*

## 2. Lucien Lelong

Dinner dress, spring 1940

Pale turquoise silk jersey with gold embroidered belt

While Grès designed in circumstances suggesting the isolation of an artist's studio, Lelong surrounded himself with assistants of individual talent. He served as springboard for many young designers: this dress is said to be by Christian Dior, who would have his own *maison de couture* only after the war.

*Gift of Bettina Ballard, 1958 (CI 58.7.7a,b)*

## 3. Alix Grès

Dinner dress, ca. 1939

Pink silk jersey

By the 1930s, use of bias had become a convention of evening wear. Grès used a fine-gauge silk jersey to achieve liquid bias-like effects, often with reference to the "wet" drapery of classical sculpture. Grès's implied classicism accorded to the period's interest in Greek and Roman examples for theater, poetry, and the visual arts. Significantly, Grès created a trenchant and minimalist modernism within the semblance of classical style.

*Gift of Mrs. John A. van Beuren and Mrs. Samuel M. V. Hamilton, 1977 (1977.210.21)*

## 4. Madeleine Vionnet

Evening gown, summer 1938

Pale gray-blue crepe completely embroidered with rows of fringe in scallop motif

Though there are separate specialists for applied braid and fringe, known as the *crépinières*, Vionnet chose in this instance to employ an embroidery of individual graduated lengths of silk thread passed and looped through the fabric, with each thread forming two drops of fringe. The scallop arcs constitute the sole decoration of the dress.

*Gift of Madame Madeleine Vionnet, 1952 (CI 52.18.4)*

## 5. Mainbocher

Wedding dress of the Duchess of Windsor, 1937

Dove gray (originally blue) silk crepe

Mainbocher was known for his sense of decorum, creating a garment impeccable to and proper for the occasion. If there was a reticence to his design, as opposed to the modern experiments of others in the 1930s, it was because he sought an unerring gentility. Decoration was held to a minimum, and Mainbocher favored refined feminine forms (petal-shaped collar, shirring, small thread loop closures, curving bias seams). Even the gloves were specifically designed to accommodate the wedding ring. While, due to a defect in the stability of the dye, the dress has uniformly lost its "Windsor blue," it retains the willful seamliness of a marriage in world view.

*Gift of the Duchess of Windsor, 1950 (CI 50.110a-d)*



MM 86194

← See MM 86197 → 12 11 | See MM 86197 | 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 | → See MM 86206 →



6. **Elsa Schiaparelli****Suit, 1938****Navy blue wool****Shoe Hat, Fall/Winter 1937-38****Black wool felt**

While Schiaparelli was herself not a tailor and was scorned by arch-rival Chanel for her lack of skills, she presided over one of the great tailoring ateliers responsible for the definitive broad-shouldered and formfitting suits and jackets of the 1930s. The designer's conceptual embellishments were based on this tailoring foundation. In some instances, the tailors spoke for themselves, as in this example, a suit with breast pockets incorporated into the dimension of the bust.

*Suit: Gift of Mrs. J. R. Keagy, 1974 (1974.338.1a,b)*

*Hat: Gift of Rose Messing, 1974 (1974.139)*

7. **Christian Dior****"Bar" suit, spring 1947****Beige silk jacket with black wool skirt**

The triumph of Dior's "New Look" was to restore Paris after World War II as the sovereign city of fashion. Reportedly, Diana Vreeland, then of Harper's Bazaar, asked a young colleague visiting in Paris just after the war to bring back a silk rose of the couture. Seeing the beauty of that rose, Vreeland acknowledged that Paris was revenant. Thus, not only the aura of glamour was restored, but also the artisanry that might be appreciated by a connoisseur of fine clothing. Symbol of the new, the Dior "Bar" suit also reveals the hand stitching at the inside of the collar and hand-stitched self-covered buttons of the atelier *tailleur*.

*Jacket: Gift of Mrs. John Chambers Hughes, 1958 (CI 58.34.30)*

*Skirt: Gift of Christian Dior, 1969 (CI 69.40)*

8. **Pierre Balmain****Afternoon dress, ca. 1950****Black silk velvet, brown and black wool plaid**

A drape-front skirt releases into fly-back panels that suggest the 1950s interpretation of the 1880s silhouette. By the 1950s, fashion was inexorably aware of fashion history and would ever after be challenged by creative recourse to its past. Less than half a century later, the dress with fly panels would seem so talismanic of the 1950s that it could be as readily associated with the 1950s as with the 1880s in an evolving history, ever more recondite and stratified.

*Gift of Friends of the Costume Institute, 1978 (1978.491.4a,b)*

9. Jacques Fath

Dress, 1952

Gray and black wool

Though the garment would look like a belted dress, it is in fact of two pieces with the bodice cut like a surplice jacket with criss-crossing front panels that extend over the skirt. Fath's tailoring was often willfully complicated and even tortured, answering perhaps too readily to post-War affluence and the opportunity to embellish. *Paris-Match* reported in March 1950 that "the two names most frequently on the lips of *Tout-Paris*" for the haute couture were Dior and Fath.

*Gift of Mrs. Irene Stone, 1967 (CI 67.12a-c)*

MM 86194

10. Jacques Fath

Ball gown, ca. 1952

Black silk velvet with ivory silk satin, white mink, and gold metal trim

Known for flattering dinner dresses that set off the head and shoulders with an audacious décolletage, Fath created a cantilevered outer bodice with a modest ivory satin underbodice. The extended plane of the outer bodice is like the soaring shapes of Saarinen buildings, establishing an artifice within the canon of modernist restraint. Fath played with the contrast--of matte and shiny, of ivory and black, of white fur and gold bullion--as a rich textural perimeter for the dress.

*Gift of Mrs. Giorgio Uzielli, 1984 (1984.606.3a,b)*

11. Cristobal Balenciaga

Day dress, 1955-56

Dark brown wool jersey

In the 1950s, as the couture made fashion news and mandates, Balenciaga achieved leadership status in mid-decade with the chemise. While still structured, but floating over the body, the fluid effect of the chemise became in Balenciaga's exaggeration the sack dress, forsaking the waist and anticipating the 1960s shift. In conceiving the chemise, Balenciaga applied lessons of suppleness he had long employed in his collars. Inspired by the kimono collar, he created a distinctive bias roll collar pushed back from the neck. In integrating this collar with the chemise silhouette, he pitched the amplitude front and back, allowing the yielding, floating form of the collar to complement the softness of the dress.

*Gift of Mrs. William Rand, 1964 (CI 64.4.3)*

12. Cristobal Balenciaga

Suit, fall 1959

Toast-colored wool bouclé

By the 1960s, every woman, whether she knew it or not, was wearing a version of Balenciaga boxy suit composed of critical elements: bracelet-length (7/8) sleeves; huge ornamental buttons on the jacket; rolled collar; and narrow skirt. The suit flattered almost all women as the boxy jacket suited any bust size and the bulky upper shape made any waist and skirt seem pencil thin by comparison. Balenciaga could exercise every nuance of fit in the couture, but as the concept was disseminated, it became a design universal with or without couture's refinements.

*Gift of Mrs. Lawrence H. Carmel, 1962 (CI 62.42a,b)*

1. **Jean Patou****Sport ensemble, ca. 1925****Pink and black silk satin playsuit with black satin maillot and cape**

While Chanel has become the remembered name, in the 1920s Jean Patou was as important as Gabrielle Chanel in introducing ideas of the new woman sponsored by sports vigor and design simplicity. His garments were designed with a post-World War I ideal in mind: woman enfranchised and empowered. In particular, Patou held the New World as a model of the new woman. He imported a cohort of American women to serve as mannequins; even his evening wear had the simplicity of a tennis shift and depended on elaborate embroidery as sole improvement on the mechanics of sportswear.

*Courtesy Sandy Schreier*

2. **Gabrielle Chanel****Day ensemble, 1926****Black wool jersey and silk satin**

The "little black dress," archetype of clothing's penchant for social reversal and political change, assumes the hitherto plebeian material of jersey as a plausible field for genteel finishing. In all of its layered details, a simple material becomes elegant through superior technique: the binding, pleating, and hemming of the skirt, and the hand-sewn belt epitomize the poverty de luxe, a luxury most keenly felt amid penury. Chanel's appropriations from riding habits and menswear demonstrate the same penchant to find utility and to refine the motif through exemplary execution. As she borrowed such apparel aspects, she inevitably brought the original association as a frisson to the new use.

*Purchase, Gift of New-York Historical Society, by exchange, 1984 (1984.28a-c)*

3. **Edward Molyneux****Evening dress, 1926-27****Cream silk georgette embroidered with iridescent paillettes**

The flapper dresses of the 1920s coexisted in couture and ready-to-wear, the latter often gaudy, the former continuing the linear interests of high-style dress of the 1910s. Molyneux was a modernist designer of consummate good taste, walking a fine line between the refinements of couture style and a modernist aesthetic and the ambition to be socially and culturally advanced in the age of Anita Loos and Gatsby. Sequins in vertical strips are overlaid with loose lengths of georgette picoted along the edges for a delicate shimmer on vertical filaments.

*Gift of Mrs. Adam Gimbel, 1942 (CI 42.33.3)*

MM 86206



**Black Dress**  
1920s  
Black dress with a white collar and a white belt. The dress is made of a dark fabric and has a simple, elegant design. It is a classic example of the 1920s fashion style.

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1. Yves Saint Laurent

"Mondrian" day dress, fall 1965

Red, blue, white, yellow, and black wool jersey

As the sack dress evolved in the 1960s into a modified form, the shift, Saint Laurent realized that the dress's planarity was an ideal field for color blocks. Knowing the flat planes of the 1960s canvases achieved by contemporary artists in the lineage of Mondrian, Saint Laurent made the historical case for the artistic sensibility of his time. Yet he also demonstrated a feat of

dressmaking, setting in each block of jersey, piecing in order to create the semblance of the Mondrian order and to accommodate the body imperceptibly by hiding all the shaping in the grid of seams.

*Gift of Mrs. William Rand, 1969 (CI 69.23)*

2. Hubert de Givenchy

Dinner dress, ca. 1959

Black wool crêpe

In the argot of suburban domestic architecture of the 1950s, Givenchy created a "split-level," modifying the elements of the Balenciaga suit with boxy jacket and narrow skirt. Givenchy cleaves to the body, but keeps a soft top with ease at the bust, an angled and forgiving waist, and elegantly narrowed skirt. Givenchy had begun such dresses in his first collection in 1952. His final couture collection in 1995 continued and concluded the series.

*Courtesy Mary Levkoff*

3. André Courrèges

Day ensemble, 1965

White and red-orange wool and nylon knit

Developing from his training and sensibility achieved at Balenciaga, Courrèges applied the surgical cut and strict tailoring to the geometric planes of 1960s fabric. The thrown-back rolled collar derived from Balenciaga, as does a responsiveness to comfort. While attuned to fashion of the very young as inspired by Mary Quant and Pierre Cardin, Courrèges retained Balenciaga's flattering attention to the details that obscure age.

*Gift of Kimberly Knitwear Inc., 1974 (1974.136.9a,b)*

4. Pierre Cardin

Tunic ensemble, 1967

Black wool crêpe with silver leather, white wool knit

Cardin envisioned a *Barbarella* cinematic futurism of bold space women and men. His clothing of the 1960s was utopian, expecting that knit undergarments (and emerging pantyhose) would function as universal clothing with tunics and other conventional forms only serving as semaphores and individual expressions on the outside. Cardin's faith that clothing would determine society became an idea commercially exploited and extended and licensed, but it was a visionary principle in an epoch that reached to the stars and dreamed of intergalactic wardrobes.

*Gift of Pierre Cardin, 1977 (1977.25.2a-c)*

MM 86197



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← See MM 86207 →

11 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

5. Emanuel Ungaro  
Ensemble, 1969

**White elasticized net with allover appliqués of white braid trefoils**

As fashion's last absolute decree entered its concluding phase, skirts became shorter and shorter until they atrophied into short shorts, or, in the phrase of the day, hot pants. In a couture playsuit with matching leggings, the elastic fabric has been hand-appliquéd with white braid. In the youth-impassioned tumult of the time, there was equivocation between Warhol superstar and couture client. As self-consciously insurrectionist as the political gesture is, the craft of the garment is, like Chanel's "little black dress," traditional.

*Gift of Mrs. Leonard Holzer, 1970 (1970.89.1a-c)*

6. Paco Rabanne  
Mini dress, ca. 1967

**Gold vinyl**

A micro-mini by Rabanne presumes undergarments as certainly as nineteenth-century dress. Stretch body stockings and knit bodysuits constitute the required underpinnings for the 1960s. Ironically, while the nude body was the seductive assumption of such attire in the 1960s, the new clothing was worn with the essential modesty of the stretch underwear bodysuit.

*Gift of Jane Holzer, 1974 (1974.384.33)*

7. Yves Saint Laurent  
Pantsuit, 1970

**Brown wool gabardine**

By 1970, variable skirt lengths had only engendered the impatience of women buying couture and ready-to-wear clothing. Pants provided a viable alternative and surcease from further slides of skirts up or down the leg. Saint Laurent was the couturier most ready to offer pants, having systematically presented them, first as part of his smoking ensembles, since the mid-1960s. In the 1970s, Saint Laurent would explore Chinese, Russian, and Gypsy pretexts for pants, establishing an authoritative iconography of women empowered in pants.

*Gift of Mireille Levy, 1984 (1984.163.4a,b)*

8. Christian Dior by Marc Bohan  
Suit, 1969

**Black and white wool tweed**

Almost immediately, the response to very short length in the late 1960s was the militant dropping of the length to below the knee, grazing the upper calf, and the effective avoidance of all skirt-length determinations in pantsuits. The long-length maxi proved, in its lack of success, to be a

trauma to the couture, becoming a challenge to the supposed ultimate authority of fashion. The maxi was the last fashion rule; pantsuits--and cognate menswear borrowings--survived to constitute the revolution and resolution of late-1960s fashion.

*Gift of Kay Kerr Uebel, 1992 (1992.153.1a,b)*

9. Yves Saint Laurent  
Evening ensemble, fall/winter 1976-77

**Red silk crepe, red silk faille, green silk taffeta**

Fashion design in the early 1970s was dominated by ready-to-wear and sportswear, both because of new standards of casual behavior and because of the expanded interest of the bourgeoisie in fashion. In this climate, in which some mistook the couture's renewed synergy with popular fashion design as its demise, Saint Laurent created a reactionary collection intended to revive the couture, using the most luxurious fabrics, feathered turbans, passementerie ties, and horsehair-braid-reinforced petticoats.

*Gift of Bernice Chrysler Garbisch, 1979 (1979.329.7a-c)*

10 Yves Saint Laurent

MM 86197

Evening ensemble, fall/winter 1976-77

Red silk chiffon with gold stripes, green silk faille, red silk taffeta

Saint Laurent refreshed the couture, making it seem desirable and distinctive in a time of ready-to-wear leadership. Acclaimed by the International Herald Tribune as "a revolution" and "the most dramatic and expensive show ever seen in Paris," Saint Laurent's Russian collection of fall/winter 1976-77 was counterrevolutionary to the 1960s. With this collection, luxury was no longer taboo for the 1970s.

*Gift of Bernice Chrysler Garbisch, 1979 (1979.329.6a-d)*

11. Patou by Christian Lacroix

One-shouldered evening gown, spring/summer 1987

Raspberry silk taffeta

While lastingly known for his eighteenth-century-inspired pouf dress, Lacroix made the most inflated version of the dress only when he was the designer for Patou. There and at his own house, Lacroix combined luxury and insouciance, enamored as he is of all the artisanal trades, fringe, bead, embroidery, etcetera. The opulence of Lacroix is attained by his strong sense of vibrant color and pattern mix exacerbated by his willingness to call in all the opportunities of couture technique.

*Gift of Comtesse Thierry de Ganay, 1994 (1994.278)*



1. **Chanel by Karl Lagerfeld**

**Trompe l'oeil evening gown, 1983**

**Black silk with multicolored beads and gilt embroidery**

In his first collection for the house of Chanel, Lagerfeld demonstrated his respect for the tradition of the designer and his special capacity to bring new animation to the design. Playing on Chanel's favored look and her mingling of real and costume jewelry, Lagerfeld created a tour de force of jewelry impression, integrating the embroidered likeness of jewelry into the dress. Lesage embroidery makes a kaleidoscope of radiant jewelry all the more brilliant in its conceptual memory of Gabrielle Chanel.

*Courtesy Chanel*

MM86207

2. **Gianni Versace**

**Evening gown, 1995**

**Vinyl with crystal embroidery**

Like the *jeune fille* dresses of Christian Dior in the 1950s, with their convincing gradation by hand from massive populations of flowers at the center to a less dense articulation below, Versace has employed the sense of artisan's hand to provide a rain of singularly situated crystal beads on the clear field of vinyl. The scattered field may imply the caprice and certainty of the hand of the artisan, hand of God, as if the winter sky.

*Courtesy Versace*

3. **Gianni Versace**

**Evening gown, 1995**

**Nacreous polyvinyl chloride and clear vinyl**

Like the Chanel "little black dress," in which mundane materials are transformed by couture handwork, the Versace gown finesses industrial-weight vinyl into a crystalline overskirt evocative of nineteenth-century silhouette, but realized as a Crystal Palace of twentieth-century material. To manipulate the cumbersome vinyl with the handwork of the couture is a self-imposed challenge to merge new technology and old technique. Further, Versace gives jeans pockets and double-stitched detailing in blue thread to a dress in which Madonna has been photographed--a synthesis of contemporary culture and couture tradition.

*Courtesy Versace*

MM 86 207



**3**

**2**

**1**

**Black Dress**  
Christine Lavin, 1964  
Black silk, long-sleeved, floor-length dress with a high slit.

**Black Dress**  
Christine Lavin, 1964  
Black silk, long-sleeved, floor-length dress with a high slit.

**Black to Red Ensemble**  
Christine Lavin, 1964  
Black silk, long-sleeved, floor-length dress with a high slit.

**Black to Red Ensemble**  
Christine Lavin, 1964  
Black silk, long-sleeved, floor-length dress with a high slit.

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2

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## APPLIQUÉS AND PIECING

MM 86199

Reliance on the hand, as opposed to the machine used in ready-to-wear manufacture, accounts for the sumptuous tucking and delicate layering of couture construction. A modern garment is almost inevitably an aggregate, a composite of materials and skills. The haute couture's piecing and appliqués are evident in joinings and surfaces rich in their revelations of construction.

Inserted pieces in a Patou suit are infinitely complex in their pattern conceived as a jigsaw of texture and body geometry which create perfect accord and fit. Vionnet tucked all of her structure into the honeycomb of a cocktail dress, covertly shaping while overtly giving design pleasure.

### Case 2: Appliqués and Piecing

#### 1. Jean Patou

Suit, ca. 1937

**Black wool gabardine with silk grosgrain inserts**

Patou constructed a tailored suit as if it were a jigsaw puzzle. Formed as a gabardine suit with all the pattern pieces wholly constructed, the silk grosgrain diamonds were inserted, replacing gabardine squares. Each diamond is composed of four mitered elements. By this analytical technique, the suit is integrally conceived, and the front of the suit reveals the wool ground as a full surround.

*Gift of Mrs. Stephen M. Kellen, 1978 (1978.165.20a,b)*

#### 2. Elsa Schiaparelli

Jacket, fall 1937

**Black silk and mohair, white leather**

The Duchess of Windsor, who favored Schiaparelli tailoring and dressmaking, wears her model of the jacket in a famous photographic portrait by Cecil Beaton. Of particular interest in this jacket in The Costume Institute are that the original basting stitches establishing the grain-lines of the sleeve and back of the jacket, which have been left in place. The client may have planned and

insisted upon alterations outside the house of Schiaparelli. It would have been exceedingly rare for an unfinished garment to have been given to a client.

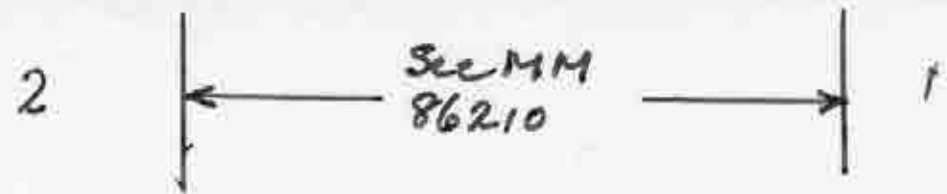
*Gift of Mrs. J. R. Keagy, 1974 (1974.338.6)*



APPLIQUES AND FINISHING

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1. **Madeleine Vionnet**  
**Cocktail dress, 1936**  
**Black silk organza tucked in a honeycomb pattern**  
 Vionnet offered an ultimate performance in lithe equilibrium with a bodice constructed of one piece, seamed at the waist. All shaping is created by the graduated hexagons. Thus, Vionnet imposed form through the illusion of embellishment but carefully concealed a system of minuscule adjustments into the design of the tucking. This sublimated essential structure is akin to modern architecture's streamlined vocabulary of ornament to serve compositional needs.  
*Gift of Mrs. John Chambers Hughes, 1958 (CI 58.34.15)*
  
2. **Valentino**  
**Skirt, ca. 1992**  
**Black wool, black patent leather**  
 Versed in Renaissance architecture, Valentino creates with the full dimensionality and power of a formidable doorway in a palazzo. The oscillation between matte and shiny surfaces, like the leather, metal, and wood of a portal, establishes a texture.  
*Courtesy Mrs. Thomas L. Kempner*
  
3. **Chanel by Karl Lagerfeld**  
**Evening suit, fall/winter 1986-87**  
**Black silk satin**  
 Quilted triangles are carefully worked into the Chanel tailor's pattern pieces, extending the shoulder and carving the waist into a carapace of silk. The mitered triangles subsume the conventional seaming and darting into symmetrical patterning.  
*Courtesy Chanel*
  
4. **Jeanne Lanvin**  
**Dinner dress, ca. 1924**  
**Ivory hammered silk satin with black silk satin appliqués**  
 Seeking in both the new cylindrical silhouettes and in her characteristic robes de style to adorn flat planes with the new designs associated with Art Deco, Lanvin developed a repertoire of motifs at once modern and decorative. Black cutouts are stitched by hand to a contrasting white dress. The design is even further integrated into the dress by the stitching's being hidden under the edge of the appliqué, thus making it appear a pieced rather than an applied patterning.  
*Gift of Mrs. Carter Marshall Braxton, 1980 (1980.92.1a-c)*
  
5. **Paul Poiret**  
**Coat, ca. 1919**  
**Black silk and wool blend with white leather appliqués and white fur trim**  
 In the 1910s, Poiret introduced an avant-garde sensibility into the couture. His penchant for the opulent gesture, lush fabrics, fur, and feathers was part of his grandiose *Gesamtkunstwerk*, inspired by stage and Orientalist extravaganza. He was also capable of more subdued garments. In the case of this day coat with leather appliqués, the leather is cut into a delicate filigree and couched by hand onto the wool to create a graphic lattice of white over black. The cylindrical silhouette and standing collar suggest inspiration from Chinese or Near Eastern robes and coats.  
*Gift of Mrs. David J. Colton, 1961 (CI 61.40.4)*

MM 86210



For  
more fabric with white lace  
that is in  
medium or overpards  
see the picture for the  
size of the fabric  
© 1935

Joanne Larvin  
New York, N.Y.

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**THE ATELIER: TAILORING**

Tailoring, or *tailleur*, is the couture dedicated to coats and suits, working these stiffer fabrics for day wear with the same imagination of the haute couture's most extravagant confections for evening and fantasy. The relative restraint of tailoring is not a lesser achievement. Tailoring proceeds from cutting segments that constitute the pattern; its expertise continues in assembling the pieces to a perfect fit, a simulation of line and regular shape conforming to the human body--and to a specific body.

Tailoring may accommodate embellishment. Schiaparelli's Surrealist embroidered jackets and Poiret's appliqué in black and white, elsewhere in this exhibition, are examples of tailoring replete with ornament. Yet the triumph of tailoring may be like the satisfaction of a superb still-life painting: a silent, analytical understanding, sedately joyous in the gusset that expands space in understated grace on a Cardin coat or the structural tuck of a sleeve that makes a Lanvin jacket by Claude Montana a likeness to architectural detailing.

Tailoring is the haute couture's quiet contentment. A Chanel suit, a softened tailoring evolving over decades, is a place of secrets, a cache of technical attainments to make the suit look good and to make the client look and feel good.

**Case 1: Tailoring****1. Lanvin by Claude Montana****Suit, spring/summer 1990****Turquoise blue wool, black wool gabardine**

Montana, a ready-to-wear designer recruited to the couture by Lanvin, is noted for his aggressive imposition of edifice-like forms on the body. He seems to create a Le Corbusier structure in dress. When Montana worked with a couture atelier, he emphasized his interest in tailoring, but with seemingly simple effects that could only be accomplished by the most skilled hands.

*Courtesy Josie Natori***2. Pierre Cardin****Day coat, fall 1966****Plum wool**

One of the first designers to embrace a futuristic geometry, Cardin referenced fashion to contemporary dress and to an ideal of clothing for the future. He offered a streamlined future that was, in the post-Sputnik epoch, inflected by science fiction and a quixotic dream of Space Age technology and amelioration. The diamond-shaped gusset at the waist reflects a treatment of cloth that began with Vionnet.

*Gift of Mrs. Charles Wrightsman, 1968 (CI 68.78.5)***3. Cristobal Balenciaga****Coat, ca. 1966****Yellow and orange wool plaid**

Balenciaga is the preeminent tailor of the couture, as Vionnet might be described as the greatest dressmaker of modern couture. Yet Balenciaga often set himself a special tailor's test: he loved to

have the garment stand away from body, thus taking form to and from the body, but seemingly separated from it, like a cantilevered balcony in the architecture of the day. Even in these exercises of suspended shape evident in a generously hovering coat, the tailoring penchant betrays itself in the way Balenciaga aligns the plaid and hides shaping darts and seams into the pattern.

*Gift of Countess Edward Bismarck, 1981 (1981.249.3)*



**THE ATELIER: TAIL**

Tailoring, or *savoir*, is the collection for day wear with the collection for evening and achievement. Tailoring procures expertise continues to assure regular shape conforming to tailoring may accommodate jackets and Poirer's applique examples of tailoring capture the satisfaction of a superb joyous in the gossamer that exact structural back of a sleeve that to architectural detailing.

Tailoring is the haute couture tailoring evolving over decades to make the suit look good in

MM 86083





4. Gabrielle Chanel

Suit, 1929

Navy blue wool twill

Chanel's early suits were radical in their tailoring in that they were done in materials of very light weight, so that the tops suggested sweaters more than jackets. The sweater's cling becomes the Chanel jacket's adhesion to the body and its accommodation of masculine tailoring to the female form and style. In further revelation of process and materials, Chanel employed the selvage (a woven textile's edge) to create boundaries of the garment, as if in distinct economy of using the normally unexposed sliver. This rags-riches paradox is ever important to Chanel, as likewise in her "little black dress."

*Gift of Mrs. David Acheson, 1984 (1984.154.1a-c)*

MM 86083

1. Christian Dior

Coat with scarf, 1948

Black wool, light blue wool

In the paradoxical combination of looking back and championing the new, Dior's "New Look" combined tailoring reminiscent of the late nineteenth century with fine detailing seen in the insertion of light blue wool in the collar as well as facings of the cuffs. The light blue is pieced and inserted to look like an extended facing, harkening back to earlier dress, but assuming the principle of modernist decoration through minimal composition.

*Gift of Mrs. Phyllis Lambert, 1954 (CI 54.6.7a,b)*

MM 86079

2. Chanel by Karl Lagerfeld

"Gilles" Jacket (with toile), spring/summer 1985

Ivory silk crêpe

As the eighteenth century was a source of constant inspiration to Chanel in the 1930s, the Watteau-inspired collection introduced a romantic historicism that extended even to the atelier tailleur. The stiffened form of the toile suggests the rigors of cut characteristic of the house, but it is only in its final fluid form that the Chanel signature of luxurious ease is seen.

*Courtesy Chanel*

3. Gabrielle Chanel

Suit, 1970

Ivory wool bouclé, ivory silk crêpe

A suit from one of her last collections illustrates a final form of the evolution of the archetypal Chanel suit. Loosely woven bouclé is lined in silk; Chanel hides a gold chain between the lining and the bouclé exterior; she demonstrates attention to detail in double buttonholes, the outer hand-stitched, the inner carefully piped; and the gored skirt has a drop lining, also gored, with the seam allowances hand-bound in both instances. From beginning to end, the 1920s to her death in 1971, Chanel explored the suit as a paradigm of pragmatic comfort and luxury.

*Gift of Beatrice L. Eytan, 1994 (1994.568.2a,b)*

MM 86079



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## GLOVES

MM 86196

At first, couture clients sought out accessories specific to their new purchases from the craft masters of Paris. Increasingly, through the twentieth century, the couture has incorporated all the accessories of dress into a vision of the well-dressed woman.

1. **Gabrielle Chanel**  
Gloves, 1957  
Pale gray doeskin  
*Purchase, Gifts from various donors, 1993 (1993.414ab)*
2. **Christian Dior**  
Gloves for late day dress, 1951  
Black kid with faggoting  
*Gift of Mrs. Byron C. Foy, 1953 (CI 53.40.40cd)*
3. **Roger Vivier for Christian Dior**  
Shoe, 1957  
Silver bullion and rhinestone embroidered white net  
*Gift of Valerian Stux Ruybar, 1979 (1979.472.23b)*
4. **Alexandrine**  
Gauntlet gloves, ca. 1930  
White and black kid  
*Purchase, Irene Lewisohn Bequest, 1976 (1976.148.7ab)*
5. **Alexandrine**  
Gloves, 1887  
Orange kid with brown piped leather  
*Gift of Miss Elizabeth R. Hooker, 1962 (CI 62.35.15ab)*
6. **Christian Dior**  
Evening gloves, ca. 1950  
Fuchsia silk satin and silk knit  
*Gift of Vera Gawansky, 1990 (1990.297ab)*
7. **Roger Vivier for Christian Dior**  
Shoe, ca. 1959  
Black lace with jet bead embroidery  
*Gift of Germaine Cromwell, 1977 (1977.277.18b)*
8. **Boucicault**  
Gloves, ca. 1878  
Cream kid with pearl clasp closures  
*Gift of Theodore Fischer Ells, 1975 (1975.227.21ab)*
9. **Alexandrine**  
Gauntlet gloves, ca. 1930  
White and silver kid with darkened silver thread embroidered white suede appliqué  
*Purchase, Irene Lewisohn Bequest, 1976 (1976.148.8ab)*



MM 86196

See MM 86083 & 86079

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12 46 9 11 13

- 10. Mainbocher  
Gloves (and additional glove with ring finger opened) worn by the Duchess of Windsor for her wedding, 1937  
Pale gray (originally blue) silk crêpe  
*Gift of the Duchess of Windsor, 1950 (CI 50.110b-j)*
- 11 Jouvin  
Gauntlet gloves, late 1940s  
Black and white kid  
*Purchase, Isabel Shults Gift, 1995 (1995.20ab)*
- 12 House of Worth  
Gloves, ca. 1930  
Tan kid  
*Gift of Deborah Barrett, 1979 (1979.227.3ab)*
- 13 J. Suzanne Talbot  
Evening gloves, ca. 1930-35  
Black silk satin with gold bullion and seed pearl embroidery  
*Gift of Lady Mendl, Mrs. Ector Munn and Mrs. Harrison Williams, 1946 (CI 46.4.9ab)*
- 14 F. Pinet  
Shoe, ca. 1930  
Black silk and gilt leather  
*Purchase, Irene Lewisohn Bequest, 1973 (1973.260.56) (1973.260.5b)*

### HATS

The modists, the milliners, were the complement of the haute couture. A client would customarily take croquis of her orders to her milliner to commission a hat of coordinating material and color. Many couture houses, however finished their own ensembles with hats created within their workrooms.

Caroline Reboux  
Cloche, 1923-25  
Black silk velvet with hand-tied black ostrich trim  
*Gift of Julia B. Henry, 1978 (1978.288.26)*

Elsa Schiaparelli  
Hat, 1950  
Royal blue silk velvet with matching twisted split quill feathers  
*Gift of Mrs. Byron C. Foy, 1953 (CI 53.40) (CI 53.40.12d)*

Amicy-Boinard for Worth  
Hat, 1924  
Black fur felt with black and white tie-dyed ostrich  
*Gift of Mrs. Robert S. Kilborne, 1958 (CI 58.67.16b)*

André Courrèges  
Hat, 1965  
Straw with navy blue silk grosgrain ribbon  
*Gift of Mrs. John Chambers Hughes, 1967 (CI 67.21.5)*

**Cristobal Balenciaga**  
Pillbox hat, ca. 1964  
Pink silk velvet  
*Gift of Janet Sloane, 1979 (1979.87.34)*

**Paul Poiret**  
Hat, 1928  
Light blue felt with gilt metal wire  
*Gift of Mrs. Francis Henry Taylor, 1942 (42.148)*

**Gabrielle Chanel**  
Hat, ca. 1957  
Navy blue felt with gardenia  
*Gift of Mrs. Stephane Groueff, 1976 (1976.370.5ab)*

**Paulette**  
Cocktail hat, ca. 1955  
Black horsehair, point d'esprit, and copper seed beads  
*Gift of Mrs. William Rand, 1975 (1975.145.13)*

**Manguin**  
Evening hat, ca. 1950  
Gold bullion embroidered black net with fake topaz  
*Gift of Mrs. Byron C. Foy, 1953 (CI 53.40.27)*

**Madeleine Panizon**  
Cloche, ca. 1920  
Pale gold horsehair braid on gold silk net  
*Gift of Aline MacMahon, 1952 (CI 52.30)*

**Jeanne Lanvin**  
Picture hat, ca. 1920  
Pale gray horsehair with yellow, pink, and pale apricot ostrich and silk rose trim  
*Gift of Elizabeth A. Tilson, 1975 (1975.303.3)*

**Madeleine Panizon**  
Cloche, ca. 1924  
Gold embroidered black silk backed net  
*Gift of Mrs. Aline Bernstein, 1946 (CI 46.22.2)*

**Pierre Balmain**  
Pillbox hat, fall/winter 1962-63  
Black silk twill with passementerie and jet trim  
*Gift of David W. Campbell, 1977 (1977.144.2)*

**Jean Patou**  
Slashed and folded cloche, 1926  
Black fur felt  
*Gift of Marguerite Parmly Hanford Jordon, 1958 (CI 58.38.2)*

**Maison Lewis**  
Hat, 1923-25  
Black straw with black and white silk rattail, braid and aigrette trim  
*Purchase, Janet A. Sloane Gift, 1992 (1992.12.2)*

Nature's spider and bird are constantly surpassed in the haute couture's willful webs of lace and extravagant plumages. Fashion's objective is not verisimilitude but hyperbole, to be even more wondrous than nature.

Lace is a delicate strategy of the haute couture. It works to reveal and conceal at the same time, affording apertures to skin or another layer of fabric, but also animating the surface. Less obviously, lace grants a slight pliability, its openwork flexing and resilient.

The feathers of the haute couture are a fictive aviary, partially dyed, shaved and shaped, tied, and elaborated. Sometimes a peaceable kingdom of various textures, and occasionally a ferocious pillow fight of diverse feathers and furs, the haute couture's feathers provide soft finial or fringe to the construction of a garment.

#### Gallery 4: Lace and Feathers

1. **Madeleine Vionnet**

Evening gown, 1937

**Black lace, black tulle**

Different patterns of lace cut and stitched together in carefully graduated scallop shapes establish the fit of bodice and skirt. Arcs of lace allow Vionnet complete control over shaping, while seeming to be merely decorative crescents. The piecing of tulle and lace also enhances tactility since both serve as sumptuous surface.

*Gift of Mrs. John Chambers Hughes, 1958 (CI 58.34.17)*

2. **Madeleine Vionnet**

Evening gown, 1939

**Black cotton lace with velvet appliqués over silver lamé**

A bias lamé underdress is visible through the veil of a lace overdress with velvet. Seeking the unity of the garment and the integrity of cloth, Vionnet found simplification even in lace, adding only a small panel at the waist to the one-piece bodice. Thus, even in the sheerest and inherently particled garment, Vionnet insisted on the largest possible element.

*Gift of Mrs. Harrison Williams, 1952 (CI 52.24.2a,b)*

3. **Cristobal Balenciaga**

"Baby Doll" dress, 1957

**Black lace**

Balenciaga's propensity for lace ruffles is generally taken to be an allusion to the tiered flamenco skirts of the designer's Spanish heritage as reinforced by the imagery of Goya. Indeed, the designer used Spanish art as a recurrent source of inspiration. Even as he extrapolated from the fit of flamenco to the swaying cone of the "Baby Doll" silhouette, Balenciaga employed the ruffle tiers as an attenuated memory of Goya and fashion history. The tiers are reinforced by loosely woven horsehair.

*Gift of Mrs. T. Reed Vreeland, 1973 (1973.20)*

4. **Balmain by Oscar de la Renta**

Evening dress, 1994

**Black lace**

In the mid-1990s, fashion has returned to defined form, but it can do so in the couture with a sense of legerdemain and soft surface. Balmain by de la Renta provides a perfect example, building out from the structure of a nude corselet: a light and transparent yoke reinforced with nude silk binding supports the heavily reembroidered lace body.

*Courtesy Mrs. Sid R. Bass*



### LACE AND FEATHERS

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The feathers of the haute couture are a little costly, partially dyed, shorn  
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 haute couture's feathers provide soft bird or wings to the construction of a garment.

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See MM  
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See MM 86212

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1. **Cristobal Balenciaga**

Evening dress, 1950

**Black lace**

Black lace seems most ethereal. Yet lace's inherent elasticity yields to fit and is body conscious with a minimum of cuts. In this example, all intrusions into the lace configuration are blended into the pattern, especially at bust darts, for the effect of wholly effortless shape. Black lace summons Balenciaga's memories of Spanish art and dress. Black was his obsessive color.

*Gift of Mrs. Irina Pabst, 1994 (1994.580.5)*

2. **Yves Saint Laurent**

Evening dress, 1969-70

**Bird of paradise feathers on beige silk organza**

Saint Laurent showed respect for the natural beauty of the feathers but created a new beauty as each has been hand-stitched to a nude organza base. The dress then is the gossamer creation both airy and aery, a rara avis of creativity.

*Gift of Baron Philippe de Rothschild, 1983 (1983.619.1ab)*

3. **Hubert de Givenchy**

Evening gown, ca. 1967-68

**Light green silk shantung**

Short segments of ostrich quill are attached vertically to create a feathery waterfall.

*Gift Bernice Chrysler Garbisch, 1977 (1977.329.4)*

4. **Hubert de Givenchy**

Evening gown, ca. 1968

**Salmon-colored silk with feathers**

The feathers of this dress are stripped down to the tip to create an artificial profile. Indicative of the couture in seeking an improvement even on nature, these contrived feathers elaborate on the feather's natural shaping to create a self-conscious artifice. The shorter feathers have been anchored into a scallop pattern that overlaps to imitate a scale or coat in nature, but there is no

element left to chance or to nature's carelessness. The longer plumes are affixed at the stem to be tremblant and animated on the dress.

*Gift of Mrs. Claus von Bülow, 1971 (1971.79.4)*

5. **Christian Dior by Marc Bohan**

Coat, 1989

**Brown mohair with turkey feathers**

The froth of brown mohair is extended in zones by long turkey feathers attached on their tips in clusters. The broad bands of the turkey feathers only amplify the magnitude of a splendidly rhetorical coat. In a world sensitive to endangered species and animal rights, a coat from turkey feathers could seem as rustic and politically correct as it is flamboyant and exceptional.

*Courtesy Iris Barrel Apfel, Attata Foundation*

6. **Cristobal Balenciaga**

Evening ensemble, ca. 1960

**Brown chenille with black and brown ostrich feathers**

Balenciaga's most characteristic color association was black and coffee. In an exceptional application of this favored combination to featherwork, individual filaments of black and brown ostrich feathers are glued down in an interspersed pattern akin to a soft porcupine.

*Courtesy Kay Kerr Uebel*

7. **Balmain by Oscar de la Renta**

Evening dress, 1995

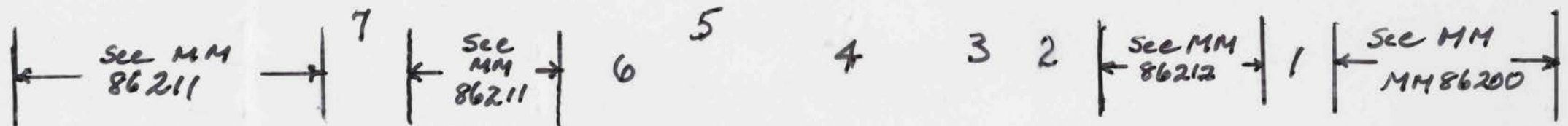
**Pink feathers on pink silk tulle**

Each feather is painstakingly overlapped to create a full pelt. The airy ground fabric is completely covered and obscured in what appears to be a wholly weightless and magical dress.

*Courtesy Balmain*



MM 86201



1. **Hubert de Givenchy**  
**Evening dress, ca. 1966**  
**Dark brown silk broadcloth with ostrich feathers**  
 Shaved ostrich feathers, their filaments stripped and dyed, form an animated field of soft colors. The plumage does not attempt to simulate nature, but to create a more extravagant artifice. Like the optical effect of an Impressionist painting, the dress is seen distinctly at a distance, but as a complex accretion at close range.  
*Gift of Bernice Chrysler Garbisch, 1977 (1977.108.3a-c)*
2. **Cristobal Balenciaga**  
**Evening gown, fall 1965**  
**Pink dotted silk tulle with ostrich feathers**  
 Filaments of ostrich plume are separated and individually applied with glue to a point d'esprit ground. Anchored upward and arcing against the grain, the feathers create a surface animated by the slightest motion. The tremblant feathers activate the gown, fulfilling Balenciaga's special commitment to creating clothing that is most effective in motion, rippled by air.  
*Gift of Mrs. Charles Wrightsman, 1966 (CI 66.54.5)*
3. **Chanel by Karl Lagerfeld**  
**Evening dress, fall/winter 1995-96**  
**Black silk chiffon, Lycra spandex, stripped black feathers**  
 In this example, each feather is split in half down the central quill and twisted to form spidery ellipses, incommensurate with any in nature's aviary, more kinetic than the feather in the wild. What Lagerfeld discovers in the feather is the essence of the feather's coil, coat, kinesis, but each in its Platonic pith. Nature is surpassed in these enhanced feathers, deliberately overstated, especially in the context of the other filmy and stretchy textures of the dress.  
*Courtesy Chanel*
4. **Christian Dior by Gianfranco Ferré**  
**Evening coat, 1991**  
**Black and white Mongolian goat with ostrich feathers**  
 Mongolian goat is augmented by curled and uncurled black-and-white ostrich feathers. The first impression is of a mottled uniformity, but the eye becomes attracted to the greater painterly complexity of organic materials rendered into artifice. The effect is both the massiveness of the overall shape and the diverse complications of its spuming form.  
*Courtesy Iris Barrel Apfel, Attata Foundation*
5. **Jean-Louis Scherrer**  
**Evening coat, ca. 1983**  
**Black feathers, gold painted feathers**  
 Within a dense field of black feathers, Scherrer inserts gold feathers stripped except for their gilded tips. In using gold-tipped feathers that protrude beyond the dense layer of black feathers, Scherrer adds a fibrillating, fragile outer layer of shimmering highlights.  
*Courtesy Iris Barrel Apfel, Attata Foundation*



**Jean-Louis Scherrer**  
Evening dress, ca. 1922  
Black feathers, gold painted leather  
Hidden in dense field of black feathers, Scherrer  
inserts gold feathers arranged except for their  
golden tips. In using gilded feathers that  
contrast toward the dense base of black feathers,  
Scherrer adds a sparkling, fragile outer layer of  
glittering highlights.

**Christian Dior by Gabrielle Ferae**  
Evening dress, ca. 1952  
Black and white Mongolian goat  
with ostrich feathers  
Mongolian goat is suggested by curled and  
uncoiled black-and-white ostrich feathers. The  
flat impression is of a curled ostrich, but the  
flat becomes attached to the greater primary  
complexity of organic, undulating ostrich  
feathers. The effect is both the movement of the  
curled shape and the dense combination of  
the swirling form.

**Chanel by Karl Lagerfeld**  
Evening dress, ca. 1980  
Black silk tulle, latex, ostrich feathers, black  
leather  
In this example, each feather is held in hand  
down the central shaft and secured to form spirals  
along the circumference, with step to reduce its  
length, more elastic than the leather in the wild  
What Lagerfeld does with the feather is the  
reverse of the feather's curl. Tulle is stretched  
these ostrich feathers, delicately combined,  
especially in the context of the other long and  
shifty masses of the dress.

**Balmain by Dior de la Biene**  
Evening dress, ca. 1950  
Dark brown silk tulle with ostrich feathers  
Each feather is individually secured and  
held flat. The very ground level is completely  
covered and obscured in what appears to be  
white, weightless and motionless.

**Cristobal Balenciaga**  
Evening dress, ca. 1950  
Black tulle with ostrich feathers  
Masses of ostrich feathers are separated and  
individually secured with goat hair points of support  
to give the bottom a curved and raised against  
the upper margin. The handwork feathers  
movement is giving Balenciaga's special  
effect in motion applied by the

**Hubert de Givenchy**  
Evening dress, ca. 1950  
Dark brown silk tulle  
Shaved ostrich feathers, a  
and dried, form an entire  
the plumage does not get  
but to create a more subtle  
the optical effect of an  
dress is seen distinctly as  
complete impression of the

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## 1. Yves Saint Laurent

Evening ensemble, spring 1963

Reappliquéd white silk organdy guipure

The patron saint of lace makers is Saint Anne, mother of Mary. Maternal and feminine, immaculate and important, the traditions of lace making have been associated for centuries with the finest in dress. Lace embellishments to court dress for both men and women were evidence of power displayed through a craft. Hand-appliquéd lace defies the machine aesthetic and convenience in as palpable a form as any. The white-on-white relief of guipure is a small allover sculpture articulating the surface of a very modest, even elementary, silhouette. Saint Laurent knows that ethereal handcraft garniture is most effective when combined with an unpretentious modern structure.

*Gift of Mrs. Charles Wrightsman, 1964 (CI 64.59.7a,b)*

## 2. Gianni Versace

Evening dress, fall/winter 1991-92

Pink quilted silk satin, silk georgette, lace

Setting the most complex and concentrated tasks for the expertise of the couture ateliers, Versace brings satin in trapunto into immediate conjunction with pleated lace. Versace's work in the haute couture is conditioned by his long achievement in ready-to-wear clothing: he dares the haute couture to surpass any other kind of clothing creation.

*Gift of Versace, 1993 (1993.52.1)*

## 3. Gianni Versace

Evening dress, fall/winter 1991-92

Pale blue quilted silk satin, silk georgette, lace

Although lace with its elasticity and suppleness is customarily worked as a flat panel, Versace creases it into narrow pleats and delights in applying an unexpected effect upon one material privilege of the couture. Always inclined, even in his ready-to-wear, to challenge the possibilities of the medium, Versace's couture work summons its own tests of technique.

*Gift of Versace, 1993 (1993.52.2)*

## 4. Louiseboulanger

Evening dress, 1928

Beige silk satin with ostrich-feather trim

Feathers of the 1920s swayed with the new music and dance, benefited from Orientalism's panache and bent for the exotic, and allowed clothing to be more fluid and flexible than ever. Here, the feather trim is individual filaments of ostrich plume knotted together to form longer strands. Each is dyed a different tone for the effect of an ombré cascade. The feather in nature is a beautiful form, but Louiseboulanger's feathers are purposely governed and distilled beyond natural beauty to achieve a trim synthetic and sophisticated.

*Gift of Mrs. Wolcott Blair, 1973 (1973.6)*

## 5. Cristobal Balenciaga

Evening gown, 1959

Purple silk gazar, feathers

Learning from flamenco dresses, Balenciaga liked gowns that rose at the front and trailed to the back, allowing a dancer's forward motion to fill the cup at the back with air and to whip around animatedly. If Balenciaga's gowns were more genteel, they allowed air entering at the front with a wearer's motion to pull the long back to a billowing volume. The flamenco dress had ruffles in the front and other dance dresses might even show petticoats at the front, but Balenciaga chose dyed-to-match feathers at the hem high in front.

*Gift of Louise Rorimer, 1980 (1980.338.6)*

MM 86212



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## EMBROIDERY

To the cynic, embroidery may seem only the icing on the rich cake of the haute couture. But embroidery is intrinsic to much couture tailoring and dressmaking. Its appearance is superficial, but its role is essential. Couture embroidery provides references to other cultures and their embellished forms and offers the narratives and mysteries, like those of Schiaparelli inflected by Surrealism and historicism. The wondrously innocent fields of flowers created by Rebé for Christian Dior define his *jeune fille* of renewed impressionistic delight and Dior's covenant with the eighteenth century. Lesage's art-simulating and storytelling work for generations of designers, from Schiaparelli through Saint Laurent, Chanel by Karl Lagerfeld, and Lacroix, creates marvelous trompe l'oeil kaleidoscopes and magical images assumed to the body.

Embroidery gives the haute couture a special opportunity to create spectacular effects. Embellishment resonant with memory and history and provocative glimpses make these mosaics of the body an intense part of the architecture that is the haute couture.

Like every other element of couture, embroidery returns us to the skilled hand of the artisan. Radiant, rapturous beadwork illuminates the mission of the haute couture to provide an art jubilantly resourceful in technique and resolutely enterprising as our absolute art of apparel.

### Gallery 5: Embroidery

Jeanne Lanvin *Not in photo*

Robe de style, summer 1924

**Black silk taffeta with green silk and sequin embroidered medallions and silver corded net**  
Chinoiserie roundels that intimate the most elaborate past of the Chinese court, alternately resembling embroidered Manchu court badge motifs or the glinting scales of Mongol armor interpreted in Western embroidery, animate a robe de style by Lanvin. Dabbling with the ambiance of historicisms, heavy with paillettes and beads, Lanvin also introduces a play with gravity, mingling the apparently heavy and weightless. A folded layer of ivory silk tulle that has been corded with silver metallic thread suggests the rainbow hem of a Manchu robe.

*Gift of Mrs. Albert Spalding, 1962 (CI 62.58.1)*

1. Elsa Schiaparelli

Evening jacket, 1939

**Black silk velvet with gold bullion and mirror embroidery**

Schiaparelli's interest in neoclassicism and the eighteenth century is evident in her jacket with embroidered hand mirrors bracketing buttons cast as Hellenic deities. But even in this elegant consideration of rococo style, a surrealist provocation intrudes in the fractured surface of the "shattered" mirrors. Schiaparelli's mirrors are both of art-historical heritage and of a contemporary sensibility responding to a world on the verge of war.

*Gift of Mrs. Pauline Potter, 1950 (CI 50.34.2)*

2. Elsa Schiaparelli

Evening cape, 1938

**Black silk velvet embroidered with gold sequins in a design inspired by the Apollo Fountain in the Parc de Versailles**

In an instance of couture's sui generis pertinence to each individual, Schiaparelli's velvet cape refers to the propensities of Lady Mendl (known professionally as Elsie de Wolfe) for the spectacular and the eighteenth century and celebrates the Apollo Fountain and its proximity to this stylish client's house in the Parc de Versailles. Designer Schiaparelli and client-interior designer Elsie de Wolfe in combination represent a lively interest in art rendered into modern living.

*Bequest of Lady Mendl, 1951 (CI 51.83)*



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MM 86195

2A Yves Saint Laurent

Evening ensemble, 1989

Silk braid embroidered fuchsia silk gazar, orange crepe-backed silk satin

A brilliant colorist repeatedly attracted to Matisse, Saint Laurent attaches his adventuresome palette even to the silk braid. In ready-to-wear, designers cannot count on perfect color fabrication or match in most details such as braid. In couture, the palette is most refined, depending on the resources of braid makers, embroiderers, and costume-jewelry makers to work in impeccable color harmony.

*Gift of Anne H. Bass, 1995 (1995.431.1a-d)*

3. Balmain by Oscar de la Renta

Evening coat, 1995

Black horsehair braid, colored rhinestones and sequins, and cock feathers on nylon organza

Horsehair ribbon is formed three dimensionally into channels that encase loose stones and sequins. Together with the cock feathers attached at shoulder, everything is in motion in this coat. The function of feathers in the haute couture is to animate, giving kinetic energy to clothing. De la Renta has given the same aspect to embroidery, demonstrating that he recognizes the power of flux, fantasy, and motion.

*Courtesy Balmain*

4. Elsa Schiaparelli

Evening jacket, 1938

Plum red silk crepe with sequin and bead embroidery

Among the unique items in which the haute couture can indulge are buttons. Schiaparelli was known for making the most chaste tailored clothing wholly carried by extraordinary buttons. Ateliers could create buttons carved, cast, filigreed, graduated in size, or otherwise infinitely varying. Later, Balenciaga would do the same with a single large button at the fulcrum of a coat or suit. In this evening jacket, the embroidery is lavish but almost outdone by its composite, lacquered, iridescent red-violet cicada buttons.

*Gift of Mrs. J. R. Keagy, 1974 (1974.338.2)*

5. Elsa Schiaparelli

Evening ensemble, 1937

Dark green satin-backed crepe gown, dark green silk velvet jacket with gold tinsel and bead embroidery

Introducing sinister and Surrealist-inspired themes to the arts of embroidery, Schiaparelli created an art of conceptualism and concupiscence. Flowers trapped in "amber" buttons are a decoration of equivocal or complex beauty. Known for collaborations with Salvador Dali and Jean Cocteau, Schiaparelli was also capable of creating her own idiosyncratic Surrealism independent of these artists.

*Gift of Julia B. Henry, 1978 (1978.288.19a-c)*

1. **Hanae Mori**  
**Evening dress, 1995**  
**Multicolored butterfly patterned black silk chiffon with seed bead embroidery**  
 The butterfly is Mori's signature, as it was James McNeill Whistler's. The metamorphosis into beauty is a paradigm for fashion. Mori's historical role as the first designer from Japan to enter the couture is indicative of the long tradition of the couture, from the time of Worth, to assemble in Paris the great designers of the world in a cosmopolitan environment supported by the *petites mains*, or artisans, of this elite industry. Mori has reconciled traditions of East and West without compromise. Rather, her design suggests the instinctive synergy of East and West.  
*Courtesy Hanae Mori*

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2. **Christian Dior**  
**Ball gown, ca. 1952**  
**White silk organza embroidered with all-over pattern of grasses and clover**  
 Almost as if accommodating pictorial perspective to the field of a dress, Dior-art-conscious and a former dealer in paintings--set embroidered clover and grasses over a dress with the luxe of richly impastoed Impressionist painting and with the supposed spontaneity of hand and optic of Jackson Pollock. Its counterpart in ready-to-wear would probably seek homogeneity; the haute couture strives, through the artisan's hand, for heterogeneity.  
*Gift of Mrs. David Kluger, 1960 (CI 60.21.1a,b)*

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3. **Valentino**  
**Suit, ca. 1991**  
**Ivory wool**  
 Valentino conceives of a woman's suit in the manner of a man's eighteenth-century ensemble. The embroidery is made à la disposition, as it would have been then. The subtle tone-on-tone embroidery attaches three-dimensional petals to the bas-relief pattern with the effect that the flowers seem to emerge from the wool ground.  
*Courtesy Mrs. Thomas L. Kempner*

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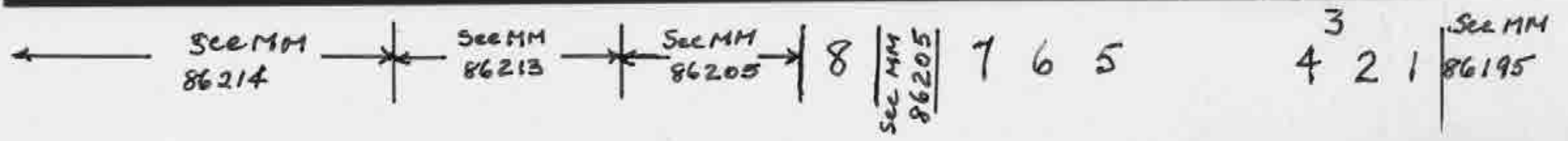
4. **Christian Dior**  
**Cocktail dress, spring 1952**  
**White silk organza heavily embroidered with a floral motif**  
 The designer set exacting tasks for his embroiderer, Rebé. The embroidery is set in a nuanced spacing of elements with the densest application at the waist, thinning as it falls away to the hem. This seemingly organic application, simulating a diminishment in nature, is further enhanced by Rebé's repertoire of embroidery stitches to create a dimensionality of the surface. The effect is optically then like a meadow's variegation.  
*Gift of Mrs. Byron C. Foy, 1955 (CI 55.76.20a-d)*

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5. **Hubert de Givenchy**  
**Evening gown, ca. 1962**  
**White silk satin and pink net embroidered with pink crystals and feathers**  
 Combining elaborately couched silver and crystal embroidery with a fringe of ostrich filaments and individually glued feathers, Givenchy created a tiered register of luxurious forms. The proximity of exceptional textures enriches the waist of the gown. In the lushness of the overblouse and its pendant feathers, Givenchy created an uncertain placement of the waist, even while directing our attention to this zone.  
*Gift of Mrs. John Hay Whitney, 1974 (1974.184.1a-c)*



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**6. Pierre Balmain****Evening gown, fall/winter 1954-55****Ivory silk satin and taupe silk taffeta with pearl, seed bead, sequin, and shell embroidery**

Balmain depended on the close relationship of embroiderer and couture atelier in a dress of carefully pieced contrasting fabrics over which the beader created an eighteenth-century-style embellishment. The opulence of the gown depends on its layered complexity, first rich in textile and then made even more luxurious in a top layer of embroidery.

*Gift of Mrs. David Rosenthal, 1960 (CI 60.30)*

**7. Yves Saint Laurent****Evening dress, 1983****Silver and brown sequin and seed bead embroidered silk**

Pushing embroidery from a decorative device of the surface to a place of structural conceit, Saint Laurent uses the embroiderer's skill to obliterate all the seaming required for a skintight fit.

Referencing the naiad, or even the fish itself (sometimes known as the sardine dress), Saint Laurent had a prototype in nature, but his penchant is always for the artifice, the supreme

creation that in this case is the integrity of the dress that appears indivisible, yet flexible and formfitting. Made to the client, the couture always offers a perfect fit; Saint Laurent hyperbolizes even the couture to create the dress as an iridescent skin.

*Courtesy Yves Saint Laurent*

**8. Antonio Canovas del Castillo****Evening coat, ca. 1968****Gold braid and Mylar embroidered silk net with clear and topaz rhinestones**

The embroiderers for the haute couture are constantly assessing a range of materials to add to the familiar beads and sequins. In the 1960s, even this most rarefied craft of couture accommodated many unexpected materials, partly from the decrement of old materials and partly in enthusiasm for experiments in new materials. In this case, gold Mylar is used, like the fragments of Schiaparelli mirrors, framed out by conventional embroidery. Mylar as a new resource for embroidery is tested along with gold braid and sequins.

*Courtesy Iris Barrel Apfel, Attata Foundation*

## 1. Valentino

Evening ensemble, 1990

**Brown and gold voided silk velvet, silk satin, and gold sequin embroidered silk velvet**

The haute couture enjoys the capacity to create textiles specific to the pattern desired by the designer. Valentino used different but related textiles and enhanced the variation by submitting the skirt to the embroiderer for over-sequining. Valentino is frequently inspired by architecture, especially portals, which may be an impulse in this ensemble in its suggestion of a coffered field of metal bosses.

*Gift of Anne H. Bass, 1995 (1995.431.4a-d)*

## 2. Chanel by Karl Lagerfeld

Evening suit, fall/winter 1986-87

**Black sequin, gold seed bead, and black chenille embroidered black silk**

In embroidery that simulates the interior quilting of a classic Chanel jacket, Lagerfeld makes a clever allusion to Coco Chanel. In making conspicuous the Chanel chain and quilting, Lagerfeld takes the secrets of the couture for granted and flaunts his relationship to the past. The quilted surface and a binding resembling a black-corded gold chain in seed beads and sequins render iconic the devices of classic Chanel and render ironic the capabilities of the new master of the legacy.

Lagerfeld combines tour de force historicism with tour de force embroidery technique.

*Courtesy Chanel*

## 3. Chanel by Karl Lagerfeld

Evening gown, fall/winter 1995-96

**Black silk ribbon embroidered net**

Not only does silk ribbon create a dense meander within a field of silk net, but it is attached in a way that stands it on edge, making the net demonstrably three dimensional, as if it were a cage of continuous silk ribbon. Flattened, a ribbon encased in an embroidery screen could be relatively inert. The effect here is both spidery and as animated in painting-sculpture dilemma as a Frank Stella wall sculpture.

*Courtesy Chanel*

## 4. Hubert de Givenchy

Evening gown, 1963

**Coral cotton lace reembroidered with coral-colored beads and coral pieces**

Coral with matching glass beads is applied in high relief on the armature of a minimalist

Givenchy silhouette. A princess-seam dress skimming the torso, but flaring to the hem, is almost severe, but it is rendered rococo and ornate by the surface treatment. Givenchy's special trait was

to find an equilibrium between excess and the reductive. An austere form supports a heavily encrusted embroidery, making a gown that works both as an extravagance and as a spartan design.

*Gift of Mrs. John Hay Whitney, 1974 (1974.184.2)*

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## 1. Yves Saint Laurent

"Crocodile" evening jacket, 1986

Blue sequin and seed bead embroidered silk and royal blue silk satin

The new embroidery devised by François Lesage for Saint Laurent sets off large jewel-like sequins anchored at an angle in order to form the dimensional effects of the scaling of a crocodile against the inflection of small seed beads. The platelet sequins are hand-colored to emphasize the deepness of the relief. Couture fit is achieved in likeness to the animal skin, varying platelet scale at the sides.

*Courtesy Yves Saint Laurent*

## 2. Chanel by Karl Lagerfeld

Evening ensemble, spring/summer 1995

White and blue-black seed bead embroidered silk satin and black silk chiffon

Lagerfeld offers the deliberate paradox of a sailor's sweater from vernacular dress rendered in the luxury of couture. The designer's zeal for common clothing and popular themes, especially for the house of Chanel, where the acumen about menswear and practical clothing has always prevailed, does not vitiate his commitment to the excellence in design and technique of the couture. On the contrary, it is as if the juxtaposition of the two polar levels of fashion refines the couture's virtues and stimulates the couture's imagination.

*Courtesy Chanel*

## 3. Valentino

Evening ensemble, ca. 1992

Red sequined silk chiffon, Royal Stewart tartan patterned red silk crepe

Simulating the texture of a knit, Valentino uses flat and cupped sequins in alternating directions. Like Lagerfeld's sailor sweater, this example of embroidered pattern turns a conventional "knit" into an astonishment at the virtuoso skill of the embroiderer.

*Courtesy Mrs. Thomas L. Kempner*



**3**  
Dress by Karl Lagerfeld  
Cotton, silk, and wool. Spring/Summer 1990.  
This dress is a classic example of the  
designer's style, featuring a plaid pattern  
and a long, flowing skirt.

**2**  
Dress by Karl Lagerfeld  
Cotton, silk, and wool. Spring/Summer 1990.  
This dress is a classic example of the  
designer's style, featuring a striped pattern  
and a long, flowing skirt.

**1**  
Dress by Karl Lagerfeld  
Cotton, silk, and wool. Spring/Summer 1990.  
This dress is a classic example of the  
designer's style, featuring a textured pattern  
and a long, flowing skirt.

3

2

1



1. **Madeleine Vionnet**  
**Evening gown, 1932**  
**Ivory silk chiffon with rhinestone beading**  
 Isolating and punctuating the rounded forms of the body with rhinestone highlights, Vionnet restricts zones of ornament with a minimalist restraint. The twisting of the chiffon at the shoulders and décolletage suggest her impulse to wrap and drape in a continuous length of fabric.  
*Gift of Madeleine Vionnet, 1952 (CI 52.18.8ab)*
  
2. **Madeleine Vionnet**  
**Evening gown, winter 1930-31**  
**Ivory silk chiffon with silver sequin and seed beading**  
 Vionnet's propensity for fragile and body cleaving textiles are seldom substantiated with embroidery. In this instance, the combination of silk chiffon and scattering of beads suggests the ethereality and transparency that Vionnet more often attains exclusively through structure.  
*Gift of Madeleine Vionnet, 1952 (CI 52.18.3)*
  
3. **Gianni Versace**  
**Evening dress, 1995**  
**Vinyl with rhinestone embroidery**  
 Versace reduces a garment to its most basic form, a vinyl sheath where rhinestones provide brilliant, if scattered, coverage. And, even as the body is disclosed, fine lines of monofilament connecting the rhinestones in a web-like constellation expose the embroiderer's meticulous hand.  
*Courtesy Versace*
  
4. **Christian Dior by Yves Saint Laurent**  
**"L'Éléphant blanc" evening dress, spring/summer 1958**  
**White silk net embroidered with silver thread and rhinestones**  
 Creating the trapeze silhouette for Dior, Saint Laurent has a rigid understructure veiled under a flyaway cage. A boned corset anchors the dress but allows the delusion of a free-swinging cone. Seeking a shape for independence, though still tethered, the "Éléphant Blanc" dress also employs a shimmering embroidery on net that requires a finishing flourish to the thread work on a transparent surface. Thus, in both surface decoration and in structure, Saint Laurent gained the effect of ethereal, buoyant freedom while retaining structure. Saint Laurent has practiced and perfected this modernist wielding of couture construction and proficiency to seem unfettered.  
*Gift of Bernice Chrysler Garbisch, 1977 (1977.329.5)*

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**Golden Mesh Top, Silk Skirt**  
Designed by [unreadable]  
[unreadable]  
[unreadable]

**Black Mesh**  
Designed by [unreadable]  
[unreadable]

**Black and White**  
Designed by [unreadable]  
[unreadable]

**Black and White**  
Designed by [unreadable]  
[unreadable]



MM 86203