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Costume Institute

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VANITY FAIR



The Metropolitan Museum of Art



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Exhibition catalogues, whatever form they make take, deal primarily with the objects on view. This publication on the Costume Institute's exhibition *Vanity Fair* has a different emphasis. It may well disappoint those looking for a digest of the history of costume, chronologies, biographies, or stylistic analyses, though a check list will be published. Instead the text is concerned with the organizer of the exhibition—a lively, whimsical text about Diana Vreeland and her fabled flair. Why? Because we are not presenting an anthology of the collection but a personal choice, Diana Vreeland's choice. And capricious it may be, but not random. Diana's well ordered caprice has yielded a succession of vivid images, captured in exciting vignettes, and not, definitely not, a potpourri. That is what selection committees or plodding individuals turn out.

This is not so much an exhibition of clothes as of what Diana Vreeland can show us about clothes. Therefore, to help us understand the show, we asked Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis to tell us about Diana Vreeland and Polaire Weissman and Stella Blum to tell us something about the Costume Institute.

I think they have succeeded admirably.

Philippe de Montebello
Acting Director

The exhibition is made possible by a grant from International Telephone and Telegraph Corporation.

Photographs of the fashions from the Costume Institute are by Joshua Greene; those of the prints and other costume designs are by Seth Joel; the exhibition photographs are by the Museum's Photograph Studio. Brochure designed by Goslin/Barnett Inc.; printed by Colorcraft Offset Inc.

On the Cover: Engraving by H. Pauquet after a painting by I. Bar. French, 1693. Purchase, Irene Lewisohn Bequest. Frontispiece: Parasols from the Costume Institute's collection. French, European, and American, 19th and 20th centuries

On the Back Cover: Detail of an illustration from *L'Art et La Mode*, by Henri de Montaut. French, 1825–1889. The Elisha Whittelsey Collection, 51.624.3

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A VISIT TO
THE HIGH PRIESTESS
OF VANITY FAIR
by Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis

They presently saw a town before them, and the name of that town is Vanity; and at the town there is a fair kept called Vanity-Fair. It is kept all the year long; it beareth the name of Vanity-Fair, because the town where 'tis kept is lighter than vanity; and also, because all that is there sold, or that cometh thither, is Vanity. As is the saying of the wise, All that cometh is vanity.

This Fair is no new erected business, but a thing of ancient standing; I will show you the original of it.

Almost five thousand years ago, there were pilgrims walking to the Celestial City, as these two honest persons are; and Beelzebub, Apollyon, and Legion, with their companions, perceiving by the path that the Pilgrims made that their way to the City lay through this town of Vanity, they contrived here to set up a fair; a fair wherein should be sold of all sorts of vanity, and that it should last all the year long. Therefore at this Fair are all such merchandise sold, as houses, lands, trades, places, honours, preferments, titles, countries, kingdoms, lusts, pleasures, and delights of all sorts, as whores, bawds, wives, husbands, children, masters, servants, lives, blood, bodies, souls, silver, gold, pearls, precious stones, and what not.

And moreover, at this Fair there is at all times to be seen jugglings, cheats, games, plays, fools, apes, knaves, and rogues, and that of all sorts.

Here are to be seen too, and that for nothing, thefts, murders, adulteries, false-swearers, and that of a blood-red colour.

And as in other fairs of less moment there are the several rows and streets under their proper names, where such and such wares are vended; so here likewise, you have the proper places, rows, streets (viz. countries and kingdoms), where the wares of this Fair are soonest to be found: here is the Britain Row, the French Row, the Italian Row, the Spanish Row, the German Row, where several sorts of vanities are to be sold. But as in other fairs, some one commodity is as the chief of all the fair, so the ware of Rome and her merchandise is greatly promoted in this Fair: only our English nation, with some others, have taken a dislike thereat.

from Pilgrim's Progress, by John Bunyan

Diana Vreeland, whippet-boned, with black lacquered hair, looks like a high priestess, which in a way she is, and her temple is on the ground floor of The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

It is there she will celebrate her sixth exhibition since she joined the Museum in 1972. Made up of things she has chosen from the Costume Institute's unparalleled collection of over 30,000 articles of clothing, accessories, ornaments, spanning four centuries and five continents, its purpose is to show what clothes have meant to men and women down through time and its title is Vanity Fair.

"You know, I chose the title from *Pilgrim's Progress*," Mrs. Vreeland explained to a visitor a few weeks before the exhibition opened. She was in her small scarlet office in the Museum, sitting erect on a straight-backed chair behind a black desk. Dressed in black trousers and sweater, with a second black sweater knotted at the shoulder, she held a gold cigarette case in one hand and pointed one foot precisely forward, to reveal a narrow pointed ochre snakeskin boot.

"Vanity Fair means society, with its foibles, its weaknesses, its *splendeur*," she continued. "Society has *splendeur*. It is something the world envies, to be a member of society. What is the point of money without being in society?—whatever 'society' is in the time in which you live. It used to be birth and wealth. Today it's SCOOP and anything of talent."

She handed the visitor two stacks of typed pages. One was titled "Costume Breakdown," the other "Souk Breakdown, Miscellaneous Items for possible use in Souks."

"There are things in those that won't make the exhibit," she explained. "The choices are so vast. When the lights go on and the show is finished, that's when I change a lot, just before we throw open the doors."

A glance through the lists made clear that their contents were, for the most part, from a rarified world of court and capital, whose inhabitants had had the leisure and the money to indulge their fantasies and



The Flower Garden, colored etching by Matthew Darley. British, active 1754–78. Harris Brisbane Dick Fund, 41.25.4

Opposite: Shoes from the Costume Institute's collection. French and Chinese (top, center), 17th, 19th, and 20th centuries

their vanities.

"Do not be too hard on vanity," Mrs. Vreeland cautioned. "Vanity has given a discipline. 'Is that all you care about, clothes?' people ask me—as if I'd never had children, never had a husband." She smiled. "I happen to think vanity is a very important sort of thing."

She recalled Jean-Paul Sartre's play *No Exit*.

"Do you remember, at the end, those three characters are standing in a room? There is glaring light, no shadow, no place to ever be away." She turned her head and placed her hand to shade her face.

"This is forever, this is hell. And there is no mirror and you lose your face, you lose your self-image. When that is gone, that is hell. Some may think it vain to look into a mirror, but I consider it an identification of self."

She brought her hand down flat on a pile of three black loose-leaf notebooks on the right side of her desk.

"Have a look. These are our background albums, engravings, paintings, you know, the works."

To see Diana Vreeland at work is to be impressed by her research and attention to detail. She turned the plastic-covered pages, flipping past pictures of the towering eighteenth-century headdresses of *Les Incroyables*, past elaborate combs, hat-boxes, masks, fans, kimono racks, panniers, past engravings of arcades in Paris, London, Venice, where all these things and more were sold.

She closed the last notebook and handed the visitor a folder. Inside was a color photograph of a mauve and green Chinese jacket embroidered with peonies.

"Read what's on the back. You see, poets have always been moved by clothes, in every culture."

The legend read:

*The dress of spring dances for you
As the butterflies flit in tune with the
singing of the golden oriole.*

by T'au Pu (712–770 A.D.)
of the T'ang dynasty

Mrs. Vreeland stood up.

"Now," she said, "would you like to see

where the clothes are being assembled?"

She took a ring of keys from her desk, and with her hip-thrust-forward slouching walk, glided through the outer office. Two long, lean girls with silken hair were working at their desks, Ferle and Tonne, two more of the many acolytes Diana Vreeland has always welcomed and trained in her long career, which included many years as Fashion Editor of *Harper's Bazaar* and as Editor-in-Chief of *Vogue*, and now as Special Consultant to the Costume Institute. She parted glass doors into a vast warehouse space and turned left to a vault-like entrance.

Fitting a key into the lock, she opened the silent door, and flicked on the lights to reveal a low gray room. Facing her was a long table with shawls, feathers, parasols, and shoes lined up on it, and beyond that, racks of vivid clothes. She pointed to the row of parasols.

"The handles alone are jewels." There were long ones of ivory and short ones with carved coral tops.

"These were little 'spot' parasols to be held right in front of the eye. The handles were important because they were short and were seen."

She picked up an aigrette.

"Look at this. I'm mad for feathers, for no reason. I've always wanted to have a little black ostrich-feather wig, why not? Speaking of feathers, do you know what is the greatest treasure of the show? The birds of paradise that Pauline de Rothschild wore to Alexis de Redé's ball in Paris in 1966. It's a smock to the knee of the most luxurious plumage that one could possibly see in the world. I called up her *vendeuse* at St. Laurent to find out what she wore under it. It was an Oriental ball you know, and all the other women came with their stomachs showing. It was their big chance after Sardinia. But Pauline just wore this quivering smock all in beige. It looks perfectly terrible on a mannequin, like Cuckoo the Bird Girl, so we'll just show it on a hanger. Birds of paradise are forbidden here, but nothing is illegal in France, as we know."

She glanced at a row of shoes and pointed to a court pump with lacquered





Children's court dresses. Left: Satin embroidered with gold thread and colored silks; trimmed with tinsel galloon. Spanish, late 16th century. Fletcher Fund, 22.118. Right: Silk faille shot with gold; trimmed with silver tinsel braid. Spanish, 17th century. Gift of Irene Lewisohn, 37.62. Opposite: Men's waistcoats from the Costume Institute's collection. French, English, and American, 18th and early 19th centuries





heel.

"That is one of Roger Vivier's when he worked at Dior, two layers of tulle embroidered with black pearls and coral. It's quite transparent, which makes the toes so pretty."

She put the shoe back, turned around, and leaned against the table.

"These incredibly beautiful things... But you know, you have to demand them. You must wish for the most ravishing thing of beauty and quality because it's there to be had, even now. Keep the demand high. If there is no one who demands, then what the craftsmen know will disappear.

"I'll never forget, three weeks after the war was over, I got a message from Paris at *Harper's Bazaar*: 'We must give work to *les petites mains de la France*. Will you show embroidered gloves?'

'Never!' I said. 'Send me one perfect black organdie rose.' You see, that was France's first thought after the war, for her artisans, her *petites mains*."

Mrs. Vreeland led the way around the room for the tour of the racks. She ran her hand through the first rack of lingerie, peignoirs, nightgowns, camisoles, the way one runs a finger down the keys of a piano.

"A world of Valenciennes and threaded ribbon, isn't it? You know, the obsession of women isn't with themselves, it's to own something that's so exquisite. I mean the feel of a perfect piece of silk to a woman is a very exciting thing. It's the greatest projection of pleasure. And what's wrong with pleasure? What are we here for but for pleasure?"

Next came a rack of cotton high-necked dresses, rose, yellow, green.

"I call these our literary dresses. They all make me think of Charlotte Bronte and Jane Austen. They are really Louis Philippe, the 1840s. All of them ran around on little flat feet."

Then a blue satin dress with a bustle.

"This I call the Castiglione dress. She was the great demimondaine of the 1860s. Isn't it a marvelous blue? I think America knows nothing of blue. I'm going to take all the blue dresses and mount them together in a corner. You see, the colors were so

strong. The pink is so strong, the rose is so strong, the green is so strong. People were so remarkably knowledgeable about color in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries."

Who were some of the people who wore these clothes?

"There was Daisy Fellowes. She was the greatest fashion character of our time. We'll have her presentation dress. It's from the 1930s, the court of George V."

She moved to the next rack where silken Eastern dresses hung. The first one was a red silk robe embroidered with green butterflies. "This belonged to Madame Wellington Koo. Her heyday was Shanghai in the 1920s. Then her husband was Ambassador to Paris. She had the most beautiful, wonderful pearls. God, she was so rich, then she married Wellington Koo and he gave her this extraordinary life. This coat belonged to a member of her family. It was worn at the court of the Dowager Empress of China."

She touched a black velvet jacket embroidered with red roses. "And how about this? It is Queen Alexandra's riding jacket, made in Paris. She was beautiful, that's why England loved her so. And she was born royal, which they very rarely get in a queen. Absolutely penniless but royal."

Near the door was a rack of men's clothes.

"These are sporting jackets belonging to the Duke of Windsor. He was without question the most elegant man of his age. No matter what he wore, he always looked conservatively himself, though he was very splashy with color and combinations—shirts, vests, socks, foulards, the works. We will have his white tie and tails of the 1940s, with a boutonniere, a dark red carnation made of little feathers. He invented that and always wore it in the evenings."

She picked a swatch of material off the table, walked out the door and turned left. Three stark white mannequins were standing in her path. Two were in Turkish dress with harem trousers and one was all in black with layers of black veiling falling from her hat to her knees.

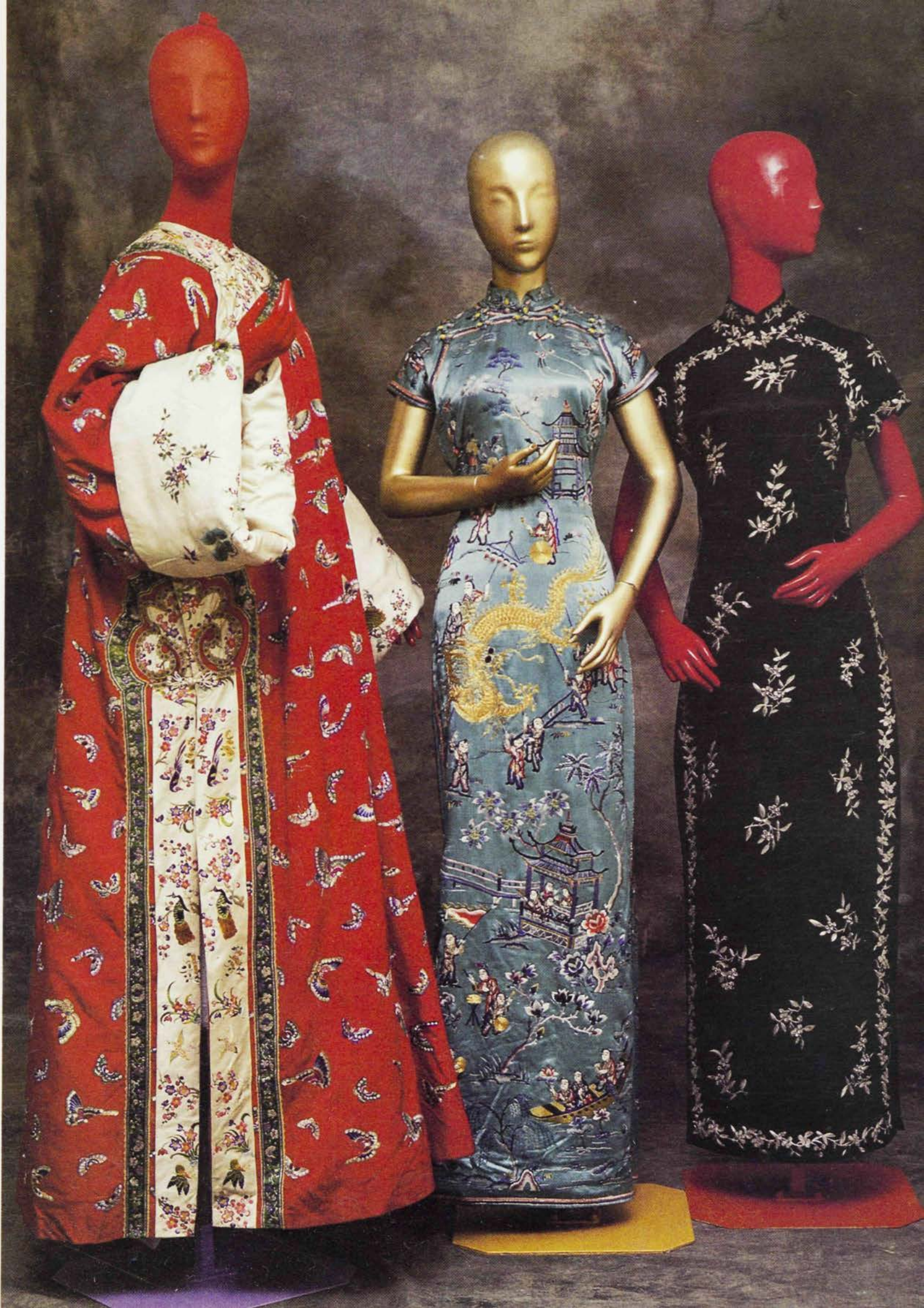
"A widow, look at all the different veils.



Far Left: Lounge suit. Made from a 19th-century paisley shawl, with the reverse side out. By Carraceni, Milan, 1964. Gift of Valerian Stux Rybar, 1974.255

Center: Morning gown. White dotted swiss over pink silk with ruffles of white point d'esprit net. American or European, 1898-1900. Gift of the Art Worker's Club, 45.68.19

Above: Detail of an illustration from *L'Art et La Mode*, by Henri de Montaut. French, 1825-1889. The Elisha Whittelsey Collection, 51.624.3



Chinese costumes. Left: Woman's robe. Satin embroidered with butterflies in silk floss; cuffs and bands of embroidered satin. Before 1911. Gift of Madame Wellington Koo, 1976.303.1

Two dresses (Chipao). Center: Satin embroidered in multicolored silk floss; bound in rose pink and dark blue. Right: Satin embroidered with couched silver thread and rhinestones. Both Shanghai, 1932. Worn by the donor. Gift of Madame Wellington Koo, 1976.303.2,3

Opposite: Women's costumes from Turkey and the Balkans. Dress: Silk brocaded in metallic gold with floral centers. Greek, late 19th century. Gift of Julia Acheson Thompson, 1976.379.2. Coat: Satin brocaded in silks and gold metallic; trimmed with gold braid and galloon. Greek or Albanian, 20th century. Gift of Emily Chase, 48.22.2. Robe (Yelek): Patterned silk edged with silk braid. Turkish, late 19th century. Indefinite loan from Mrs. Van S. Merle-Smith, L. 41.11.31





Mourning dresses. Adult's: Black silk faille trimmed with black satin-striped faille. American, 1876-1877. Gift of Theodore Fischer Ells, 1975. 227.4. Child's: Black bombazine edged with pleated ruffles. American, 1844. Gift of Miss S.B. Bradley, 39.89

Opposite: Kaftan. Velvet with stripes of emerald green, royal blue, and black; embroidered in gold with multicolored silk floss accents. Bukharan, 19th century. Purchase, Irene Lewisohn Bequest, 51.100

And we have a child in mourning, about five years old. Little Miss Tearjerker, I call her."

She strode up a ramp into a large dark green room.

"This will all be a great bazaar. It must delight the eye. All that is totally important to me is that a great, great prettiness goes on."

On into a red room.

"Here I think we'll have the Fortuny's—you know, those marvelous pleated dresses made in Venice. One will be on a mannequin and the rest will be coiled in a basket like rainbow sleeping snakes."

On to an antechamber of lapis blue. Mrs. Vreeland held out the swatch of blue and brown striped canvas.

"This is for the souks right here. We've ordered a thousand yards of it. We'll cover the walls and spray them with light coffee and water to give a little dankness. We'll have the street sounds of markets in the Near East—it's the first time I've ever used a musicologist—and Bach, which has a great mystery to it, to give a feeling of unknown places, secret dream places."

This hollow, empty basement with its dusty floors was still painted in the strong colors of her Russian costume exhibition of last year. Soon it would evoke ballrooms, boudoirs, harems, courts of empresses and kings. The high priestess stood still, looking around at the walls where her chapels would be.

On an ancient Egyptian papyrus there is "The Song Which is in The Chapel of King Inyotef: the Song of the Harper." The singer reflects that the tomb chapels of famous men no longer exist.

*The nobles and spirits too
Being entombed in their pyramids,
They built chapels, but their cult
stations are no more.
What became of them?*

.....
Follow your desire while you live.

*Place myrrh upon your head,
Clothe yourself in fine linen,
Anointed with real wonders
Of the god's own stores.*

*Increase your beauty,
And let not your mind tire.
Follow your desire and what is good:
Acquire your possessions on earth.*

*Do not control your passion
Make holiday,
But tire yourself not with it.
Remember: it is not given to man to
take his goods with him.
No one goes away
and then comes back.*

Some will come back for a moment. The fragile and entrancing possessions they left behind will evoke the spirits of forgotten men and women who breathed and loved and spent and danced through their lives' brief Vanity Fair.



Evening dress by Fortuny. Pleated silk trimmed with matching cords and glass beads. Venice, 20th century. Gift of Claudia Lyon, 1974.339

Opposite: Shawls from the Costume Institute's collection. Eastern Europe, France, India, and Kashmir, 19th and 20th centuries







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THE COSTUME INSTITUTE / THE EARLY YEARS

by Polaire Weissman
Executive Director Emeritus
The Costume Institute

Before the idea of a museum of costume had even been conceived, two sisters from New York City, Irene Lewisohn and Alice Lewisohn Crowley, developed an interest in costume that years later was to culminate in the formation of the Costume Institute. The Lewisohns were co-founders of the Neighborhood Playhouse, located on Grand Street, New York City. Their interest was in experimental theater and in the folkways and rituals of different peoples. In order to lend accuracy to their theatrical presentations, they were led to the study of original costume. Theater, for them, represented a synchronized interaction of many arts, one in which costume held an important place. Irene Lewisohn grew convinced of the need for preserving the costumes of all periods and people and considered it the legitimate role of the art museum to assume this responsibility. "All too soon," she once wrote "will these clothes, which grew naturally and organically from the climate and mode of life, be entirely displaced by the standardized contribution of the machine. Already they are difficult to find." Guided by the particular needs of their theater, the Lewisohns assembled a comprehensive selection of European, Near Eastern, and Asiatic costume that was to some day form an initial part of the Costume Institute's permanent collection.

In 1928 a small group of people with a special interest in textiles, theater, and fine arts in general, some of whom would later be among the founders of the Institute, organized a costume exhibition at the Fifty-seventh Street Art Center. Their primary objective was the establishment of an independent museum of costume. The initial response and interest were very great, but the Depression sadly supervened and the plan was put aside. Nine years later, in 1937, no one was any less convinced of the need for a costume museum, and so the idea was again advanced and well received. A small working committee was formed that consisted of various people who collected costume and a number of eminent professionals from the fields of the theater, architecture, law, textiles, and publishing. Each was happily endowed with

basic ingredients of taste, imagination, and enthusiasm for the arts. Their collective purpose is well expressed in a statement that they issued in 1937: "Now the time seems ripe and an organization is being formed to establish in New York City a center for the study and display of dress and accessories of all epochs and all peoples, which may serve industrialists, artists, art historians, craftsmen, and students of all kinds, as well as stimulate in the general public an awareness of the importance of dress in the development of the human race and the relation of this field of design to the present and future creative impulses in American Life".

With this goal as a guide and a charter in hand, the Museum of Costume Art, Costume Institute, Inc., was founded in the spring of 1937. The founders were Irene Lewisohn, who was to become the Institute's first President, Aline Bernstein, the theater designer, Clarence Stein, the architect and city planner, and M.D.C. Crawford, research editor of *Women's Wear Daily*. With them were Mary Rehan, an attorney who drew up the charter, Lee Simonson, a theater designer, and myself, who would become executive director charged with building up the collection.

What was begun that spring became a most extraordinarily difficult challenge. Aline Bernstein would often muse about what she called "an arc of trouble," which, she said, spanned the distance between an idea and its realization. That is just where we found ourselves for a good many years, and we even grew to relish it.

In 1937 it was perfectly clear that New York City had thoroughly come of age as a cultural center, replete with its many museums and great theatrical productions, its ballet and opera, galleries, concerts, radio, and of course its fashion. World political and economic conditions were fast making New York City the fashion capital and a clearing house for style in the United States. But there was still no museum farsighted enough to acknowledge the fellowship of costume with other branches of art. At least none was willing as yet to establish its own department of costume.

Illustrations of various fashions (shown clockwise): Detail from L'Art et La Mode, by Henri de Montaut, French, 1825-1889. The Elisha Whittelsey Collection, 51.624.3. Etching by Wenzel Hollar, British, 1607-1677. Rogers Fund, 20.81.3. Le Roi et La Reine des Nabob, French, 18th century. The Elisha Whittelsey Collection, 67.734.3. Etching by Wenzel Hollar, Rogers Fund, 20.81.3. El Enlace de Los Peintones, Brazilian, 1883. Gift of J.A. Weissberger, LY 48.7.16



True, there were some museums that had collections of costumes, but such collections were mere stepchildren to the departments of textiles, often poorly accessible to visitors and inadequately equipped for study and service. Most of the collection remained stashed away in cupboards and trunks. It therefore became a principal objective of the founders to secure the rights of autonomy to costume art.

With great enthusiasm, high hopes, and precious little capital, the Costume Institute began life in a tiny office and loft at 16 West 46th Street. The collection consisted principally of the Lewisohn-Crowley and Simonson costumes, but there was so little space that much of the collection had to be kept with the donors. Other costumes were pledged by Aline Bernstein for as soon as additional space could be obtained. The first three exhibitions were held at Rockefeller Center, two of them at La Maison Française and one at The International Building. They were all very brief runs, but they drew wide publicity and offers of support, among them an extremely generous one from Nelson Rockefeller. After reading the prospectus for the Institute, he sent us a very kind letter of encour-

The Toilet of a Modern Belle, hand-colored etching by W. Heath. British, 1829. Rogers Fund, 1970.538.15

Opposite: Lordly Elevation, hand-coloring etching by James Gillray. British, 1757-1815. Rogers Fund, 24.63.255

agement and a generous contribution. He also facilitated the Institute's relocation in 1939 to more ample quarters in The International Building.

The International Building was the first place that had space enough for us to apply basic design concepts and to experiment with installation plans. The general plan mapped out by the architect Clarence Stein, in close cooperation with the executive director, called for "an experiment in a new type of planning . . . in which the facilities and services for students and professionals would be separate from those used by the general public, yet fully coordinated with them." The principle was unique at the time and has since been widely emulated by other museums. The method is called live storage; it allows for costumes not on exhibition to be readily accessible for examination. Hung in large compartments or laid in capacious drawers, the costumes would be as close at hand as a book in a well-organized "open-stack" library. Other aspects of the plan called for designer rooms closely integrated with other facilities, a lecture workshop for students, a restoration room, library, exhibition galleries and administrative offices. It was to be many years before all aspects of the plan were to be implemented.

On May 24, 1939, the Institute presented its first exhibition in the new space. Called a *Cycle of American Dress*, it was an historical review of different periods in American dress, starting with the time of the Revolution. The exhibit was timed to coincide with the 1939 New York World's Fair. It was very popular.

The Costume Institute had scarcely gotten solidly underway when war broke out in Central Europe, bringing with it great indirect consequences for the new Institute. In 1940 Paris fell and with it the fashion capital of the world. American designers, cut off from the usual flow of French fashion, were suddenly on their own. New problems confronted them, probably the most difficult of which was to find the proper place for design that would be of interest to a nation in uniform. There were also the stringent wartime restrictions on

the use of fabric and metal, issued by the War Production Board. In response, the Institute undertook a series of special exhibitions intended to suggest ways of solving these problems. For example, an exhibition held in 1942 titled *The Coming Silhouette*, provided sources and inspiration for the so-called "slim look" that was very sparing in its use of material. In 1943 an exhibition called *Fastenings and Embellishments* illustrated various fastening devices through time, pointing up ingenious ways for designers to meet wartime regulations affecting zippers and other metal fastenings. These exhibits and others during this period of war, besides helping the fashion industry to fill a need, were also very well received by the general public. They gained us recognition and established an effective role for the Institute as a cultural link between art and the fashion industry.

Financially, the young Institute was hard-strapped. The advisory committee, in order to assist the Board of Directors, started a fund drive under the direction of the able and energetic Dorothy Shaver, then the president of Lord & Taylor. Soon a membership program for professionals and others was initiated, as was an admission-paid lecture series that was well subscribed. But still the pinch continued, and in 1943, for reasons of economy, the Institute withdrew from The International Building and set up in more modest quarters at 18 East 50th Street, where activities continued.

Inklings of an association with the Metropolitan Museum were first heard in 1945. The idea was earnestly advanced by industry leaders. The Director of the Metropolitan at the time was Francis Henry Taylor, who years before as Director of the Worcester Art Museum had held an exhibition of the Irene Lewisohn Collection, which of course was now part of the Institute. Francis Taylor was amenable to the idea and took it up with his trustees. Indeed the language of the Museum's charter sanctioned the arrangement in principle, where it speaks of "encouraging and developing the study of the fine arts, and the application of arts to manufacture and

Meddles In now, a marvellous proper Man,
"I'll have my Chambers lind with Locking Glasse,
And entertain a score or two of Tailor's,
To study Fashions to adorn my body.



practical life, of advancing the general knowledge of kindred subjects, and, to that end, of furnishing popular instruction." The Metropolitan was at the time planning its Diamond Jubilee, which seemed to provide an appropriate occasion for an enlargement of its facilities. The decision was made and on December 13, 1946, it was announced to the public. The merger was to be one of mutual benefit. The Institute was to function in close cooperation with the Museum's director, retaining its own corporate structure and board of directors. The Institute would bring with it a staff of five, a collection of some 10,000 articles of costume, a small library, a loyal membership, and a dowry that was put into an endowment. It also brought new scholarship and a lively approach to methods of exhibition and museum service.

Costume had long sought recognition as an art in itself, and its relationship to other forms of art had never been adequately explored. The move to a museum so very great and comprehensive as the Metropolitan, and the independence the Institute was subsequently to enjoy as a department of its own, held promise for a better understanding of the place of costume in the history of art. The Institute's premier exhibition surveyed 5000 years of dress and fashion, and drew from many departments for material. From the Egyptian collection came a statuette of an offering bearer in magnificent attire, gold sandals from Thebes, and jewelry from the court of Thutmose III. The American Wing supplied portrait miniatures from different periods, and the Department of Arms and Armor furnished a splendid selection of buckles, gauntlets, and breastplates. There were tiles from the Near East, statuary from Greece and Rome, Renaissance tapestries, and medieval sculpture. It was a generous collaboration of many departments and talents.

The public response to the move and to the exhibition was immediate and heartening. The newspapers called the merger a "landmark in the cultural progress of our city," a new "Mecca for the country's style leaders." The Institute was soon buzzing

with activity. The Live Storage Study Collection and the Irene Lewisohn Reference Library became an indispensable source for researchers from the theater and industry. Students and instructors from many schools of design came to attend workshop lectures that were geared to supplement standard curricula.

In 1948, in order to augment the income from its endowment, and to keep pace with the Institute's expanding activities, an annual benefit was inaugurated known as The Party of the Year. Sponsored chiefly by the fashion industry and other friends of the Museum, it was an immediate success and has continued to generate much of the funds that were used in the Institute's reconstruction and for the maintenance of the facilities.

By 1959 the Costume Institute had established itself as a valuable part of the life of the Metropolitan. In that year, therefore, the Institute disbanded its separate board of directors and other corporate vestiges of its early years and became fully incorporated with the Metropolitan, as the Museum's fourteenth curatorial department.

Today the Costume Institute collection is truly international in scope, spanning five continents and four centuries of man's history. Period and regional costumes portray men, women and children in the many pursuits of life—work and play, festival and ceremony, everyday and Sunday-best. Among them are gowns from the wardrobes of royalty and of notable persons of society and the theater, as well as an outstanding collection by distinguished French and American couturiers—in short the most comprehensive collection in the world. In forty years the collection has grown from a nucleus of 500 items from just three donors to some 30,000 articles from about 3000 donors. The majority of the costumes have come to us as gifts.

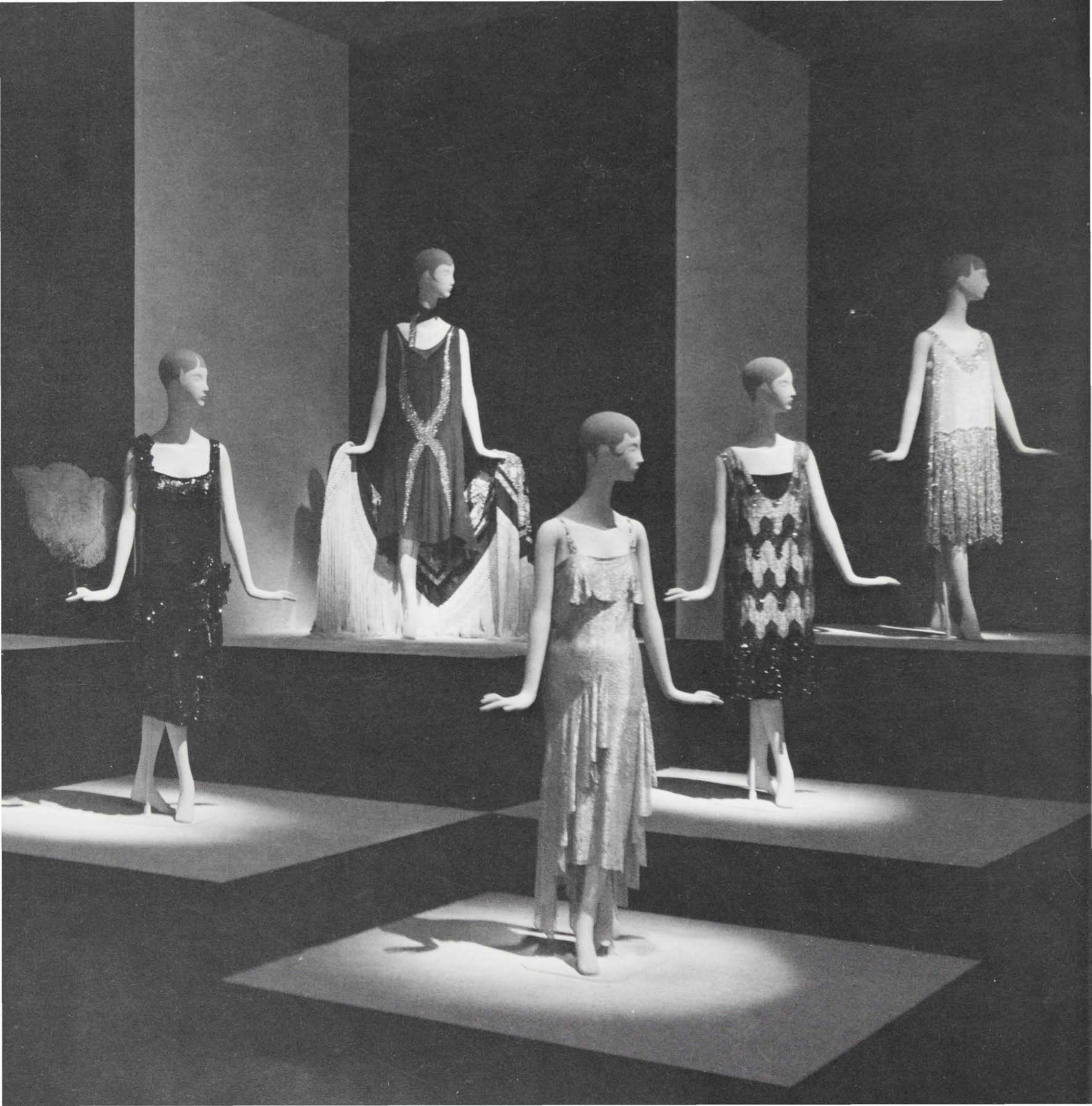
Years ago the former Secretary of the Museum, the late Henry W. Kent, a man who had provided helpful advice to the Institute during its formation, when he first heard speculation about the move to the Metropolitan, dubiously exclaimed, "I

sanction marriages but I fear divorces." Last spring the Costume Institute reached its fortieth year, and its thirty-first at the Metropolitan. Whatever Mr. Kent's good-natured doubts, the union has proved a sound one, a triple alliance of art, of industry, and public education. By the great efforts of its founders, the Costume Institute has been built on a solid foundation. We are deeply indebted to many, many people for their generosity and for their unstinting devotion of their time and talents to the goals of the Costume Institute. They include Estelle Hamburger, who guided the Institute through its infancy; Dorothy Shaver, who officiated at the wedding of the Costume Institute with the Metropolitan Museum and nurtured its further growth; Eleanor Lambert, who conceived the idea for The Party of the Year and who along with Melvin Dawley, Adam Gimbel, Andrew Goodman, Henry Callahan, and many more were responsible for the success of this benefit. To all of them go our heartfelt thanks. The path has not always been smooth but it has been a rewarding journey, full of adventure and challenge for us all. The Costume Institute can now look securely ahead. With Stella Blum as curator, and Diana Vreeland as special consultant, the future looks bright indeed. This is a capsule history of the Costume Institute as I have lived it. It covers only the first phase of its history—its birth, growing pains, and wedding. It does not take into account the most recent phase of expansion. This will be told in the following pages by Stella Blum, who has guided the Institute since 1972. We hope our visitors will find increasing enjoyment in the Institute's manifold activities.

Fashion Plate, an exhibition marking the opening of the new Costume Institute, October 21, 1971–January 15, 1972



THE MUSEUM OF FASHION, METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART
1000 FIFTH AVENUE, NEW YORK, N.Y. 10028
HOURS: TUESDAY THROUGH SUNDAY, 10:00 AM TO 5:00 PM
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1000 FIFTH AVENUE, NEW YORK, N.Y. 10028
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ADMISSION: FREE



4

THE COSTUME INSTITUTE /
THE PAST DECADE
by Stella Blum
Curator
The Costume Institute

Much of the first thirty years of the Institute's development was devoted to spanning the "arc of trouble," which was Aline Bernstein's name for that difficult distance lying between an idea and its realization. In 1967 the Costume Institute finally approached the realization of its "idea." The exhibition *The Art of Fashion*, which opened on October 25 of that year, received world-wide recognition, and the approbation of art critics and historians. By this time too, sufficient funds had been raised from the annual Party of the Year and from other sources so as to begin the physical reconstruction of the Costume Institute.

When major renovations of its facilities were begun, the department moved into smaller temporary quarters within the Museum. Even though there was to be no space for exhibitions or for continuing the educational activities, the interim four-year period was not an arid one. A survey was made of the collection in order to assess areas of need and to plan more systematically for future acquisitions. Some 1000 important items were added to fill in gaps and to enrich sparse areas. The basic structural decisions for the physical plant had been made, but the layout of the facilities, particularly the area housing the collection, still had to be carefully planned to provide the best possible storage facilities for costumes. Ideas for new exhibitions and programs had also to be developed.

In the fall of 1971, the Costume Institute moved into its newly renovated home and reopened with the exhibition *The Fashion Plate*. This exhibition pointed up the similarities and disparities between the ideal projected in fashion illustrations and the reality of its execution, as evidenced by the actual costumes from the collection. Next came *Untailored Garments*, which featured clothes from the Institute's regional collection and presented unfitted clothing made from textiles directly as they came from the loom. This was followed by *Sporting Life*, an exhibition of clothes especially designed for sports.

In 1972 Diana Vreeland joined the Costume Institute as Special Consultant for exhibitions. Her initial exhibition, *The World*

of Balenciaga, introduced a brand new approach to costume exhibitions. In a spectacular setting a fashion designer for the first time was given the focus reserved in museums for great artists. Mrs. Vreeland continued her innovative point of view in subsequent exhibitions, *The 10's, 20's, 30's; Inventive Clothes, 1909-1939; The Romantic & Glamorous Hollywood Design; American Women of Style*; and the extraordinarily popular *The Glory of Russian Costume*, which attracted the staggering number of 830,000 visitors.

Exhibitions are only one facet of the Costume Institute. Its prime asset and the core of all of its activities is in the area beyond the galleries where the permanent collection is maintained. There costumes are arranged for ready accessibility in specially designed rooms in which temperature, humidity, and air quality are all carefully controlled. This area is open by appointment for study and examination to all who have a valid interest in costume. Each year, over 4,000 students, scholars, and designers for the theater and fashion avail themselves of this opportunity. Keepers of costume collections the world over come to observe and learn the Costume Institute's system of storage, its methods of operation, and restoration techniques. In the six-year period since its reopening in 1971, nearly 20,000 people have sought answers to their costume problems in our Costume Reference Library. In addition to its departmental activities, the Costume Institute has recently become the headquarters of the newly founded Costume Society of America.

Through gift and selective purchases the Costume Institute today has one of the finest comprehensive costume collections in the world. In it are representative examples from every region of the world. Included are the magnificent robes from the Far and Middle East, colorful festive dress from European countrysides and clothes rich in symbolism from Latin America and Africa. The period collection of Western urban fashions reaches back into the sixteenth century, with examples of the parts of costumes and accessories. From the early

The Art of Fashion, an exhibition in the Harry Payne Bingham Special Exhibition Galleries of the Metropolitan Museum, October 23, 1967-January 1, 1968. View of the 1920s gallery

eighteenth century up to the present time every decade is well documented by clothes worn for life's wide range of special occasions: christening clothes, wedding gowns, court trains, ball gowns, mourning dresses as well as the attire worn daily for less spectacular moments.

What of the future? Our collection could be further enriched by examples from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. We would also like to expand our group of menswear from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. We are still looking for additional designs by such couturiers as Worth, Doucet, and Poiret as well as those from the 1920s and 1930s, by Chanel, Vionnet, and Schiaparelli. The Costume Reference Library is currently seeking to increase its collection of old fashion periodicals, costume photographs, designers' sketches and other pertinent material.

Because the manner in which human beings choose to dress and adorn themselves is as complex as man himself, themes for future exhibitions are nearly inexhaustible. This year's exhibit *Vanity Fair* will show only a sampling of the collection's holdings. Over the years, other aspects of the collection will be featured.

Now in its fortieth year, the Costume Institute is about to embark on yet another venture. In association with New York University, we are working to organize a Master's of Arts program in costume studies and design. If all goes as planned, this course may be implemented in September, 1978.

Although the Costume Institute's growth has been phenomenal, the vision of the founders scanned even broader horizons. With the challenge of an expanding field of study and a growing public appreciation of costume, their goals now appear within reach.

Opposite: White-linen shoe embroidered in blue, with a patten, which was worn out of doors to protect the shoe. French, first half of the 18th century. Gift of Mrs. Max Shott, 52.15.2.

Acknowledgements

Our sincere thanks to Halston for his great assistance and wonderfully generous contribution to help us with our show.

We are grateful to: Stuart Pivar for his great generosity in selecting and arranging the music for the show; Earl McGrath of Atlantic Records for his assistance in arranging the music for the show; Brian Barnard and Galey & Lord, a division of Burlington, for the great generosity of the gift of fabric to ornament two of our exhibition rooms; Don R. Beittel of Bloomcraft, Inc., for the great generosity of the gift of fabric, "Connoisseur," to ornament one of our exhibition rooms; Mae Clark of Hanes Hosiery for her continuing interest in helping us with the stockings that we need; Henry Glass & Company, Peter Pan Fabrics for donating fabric; Grace Costume for copying the mask of the white cat with turquoise eyes from Aurora's Wedding Scene in Tchaikovsky's Sleeping Beauty; Muriel Karasik Gallery for loaning a 50-year old Philippine Island straw basket; Pennaco Hosiery, Inc. for donating Point d'Esprit material; Poli fabrics for donating fabric; Lucinda Ballard for her interest and assistance; James Berry for his beautiful scarves; Mr. and Mrs. Luis Bullrich of Buenos Aires for the trouble they went to in helping us with the Argentine peinetas; Francesco Murature for providing the tracings, proportions, and photographs of the Argentine peinetas, and, who, in every way, made it possible for these combs to be copied; Richard Dayne for executing the copies of the Argentine peinetas; Ara Gallant for his advice on the decoration of heads; Harold Koda and Douglas Kwart for copying an 18th-century Italian umbrella, as the one in the Costume Institute is not strong enough to be exhibited; Kenneth J. Lane for supplying us with decorative jewelry throughout the exhibition; Margot Neilan of Japan House Gallery for assisting us with draping the Japanese Nō robes; Andre Oliver for his advice and for providing us with accessories for the modern men's costumes; Jerry Roe, Nick Cortes, and Gilbert of New Fashion Displays, Inc. for re-designing mannequins with oriental heads; Adel Rootstein for the generous loan of male mannequins; Andrea Stagoff for her butterflies; Susan Train and Fiona da Rin for searching Paris to purchase double-faced satin ribbon.

Special thanks to: Tonne Goodman for her never ceasing energy and consideration in helping in every way with our show.

A special note of thanks to the Exhibition Staff: Christie Brown, for her infinite trouble with the research, and Stephen de Pietri, Michele Burke, Vivien Duffield, Felicia Ferguson, Kevin J. Farley, Jaime Frankfurt, Jody Greene, Katherine Hunter, Sarah Lord, Averill Meyer, Anne Miller, Bea Miller, Madge Miller, Vanessa Murphy, Diana Pertak, Jocelyn Schwartzman, Denise Shapiro, Ralou Stern.

Our thanks to the following staff members of The Metropolitan Museum of Art for their advice and assistance: Charles Moffett, European Paintings; Helmut Nickel, Arms and Armor; Jean Mailey, Textile Study Room; David Kiehl, Prints and Photographs; Robert Arnold, Objects Conservation.

The Staff of The Costume Institute:

Stella Blum, Curator; Diana Vreeland, Special Consultant; K. Gordon Stone, Associate Museum Librarian; Judith Straeten McGee, Assistant Curator; Elizabeth Lawrence, Senior Restorer; Ferle Bramson, Assistant to the Consultant; Lillian A. Dickler, Administrative Assistant; Irja Zimbaro, Senior Housekeeper; Dominick Tallarico, Senior Departmental Assistant; Mavis Dalton, Associate Curator; Anne Seelbach, Curatorial Assistant; Paul Ettesvold, Lewisohn Research Fellow.

Volunteers for Restoration:

Lois Beard, Rhodes Blish Jr., Calvert Bodman, June Burns Bové, Marilyn Budzanoski, Curt Buhler, A. W. Bisset, Salvatore Cardello, George Carmany, Helen M. Clark, Jane Collins, Wendy Cohen, Howard Dale, Mila Delmhorst, Mary-Lyon Dolezal, Clothilde Daniels, Jean L. Druesedow, Susan Evans, Sabra Feldman, Virginia Wilcox Ferguson, Alexandra Fingeston, Joseph Fiore, Nora Fish, Cleopatra Flessas, Joan Friedman, Gail Frohlinger, Jennifer Gilmour, Peter Guernsey, Louise Goldsmith, Karen Gitlin, Frank Hartmann, William Hensler, Crystelle Hibbard, Judith Jerde, Giza Kent, Ilse Kessler, Betty Kirke, Nancy Klæe, Harold Koda, Thomas Lawrence, Ben Liebov, Edna Lonstein, Christine M. Magee, A. Hyatt Mayor, Carman Messmore, Irene Mak, Jane Miller, Phyllis Magidson, Anne P. Robbins, Mary Alice Rogers, Cinda Rosenberg, Harold Rouse, Kim Rosenthal, Jacqueline Beaudoin Ross, Lisan Sieroty, Judith Sommer, Anne V. Sullivan, Kathryn Schroeder, Bette Taylor, Ruth Thomasin, Maggie Vier, Ann C. Wiss, Beth Young, Esther Zisser.

List of acknowledgements is incomplete.



Le Grand Négre
des côtes à plumes

Robe en tulle noir à corsage
très haut et très serré. Les
manches sont en tulle noir
avec des plumes de paon
noires et blanches. Le
bas est en tulle noir avec
des plumes de paon
noires et blanches.

La Oiselle des Vieilles

Robe en tulle blanc à corsage
très haut et très serré. Les
manches sont en tulle blanc
avec des plumes de paon
blanches et noires. Le
bas est en tulle blanc avec
des plumes de paon
blanches et noires.

Le Sylvain des bois

Robe en tulle blanc à corsage
très haut et très serré. Les
manches sont en tulle blanc
avec des plumes de paon
blanches et noires. Le
bas est en tulle blanc avec
des plumes de paon
blanches et noires.

Petit Sphynx

Robe en tulle blanc à corsage
très haut et très serré. Les
manches sont en tulle blanc
avec des plumes de paon
blanches et noires. Le
bas est en tulle blanc avec
des plumes de paon
blanches et noires.



Pseudo-naissance

Robe en tulle blanc à corsage
très haut et très serré. Les
manches sont en tulle blanc
avec des plumes de paon
blanches et noires. Le
bas est en tulle blanc avec
des plumes de paon
blanches et noires.

Clayre nacrée

Robe en tulle blanc à corsage
très haut et très serré. Les
manches sont en tulle blanc
avec des plumes de paon
blanches et noires. Le
bas est en tulle blanc avec
des plumes de paon
blanches et noires.

L'Opéra

Robe en tulle blanc à corsage
très haut et très serré. Les
manches sont en tulle blanc
avec des plumes de paon
blanches et noires. Le
bas est en tulle blanc avec
des plumes de paon
blanches et noires.

Le grand tour

Robe en tulle blanc à corsage
très haut et très serré. Les
manches sont en tulle blanc
avec des plumes de paon
blanches et noires. Le
bas est en tulle blanc avec
des plumes de paon
blanches et noires.

Journaux

Robe en tulle blanc à corsage
très haut et très serré. Les
manches sont en tulle blanc
avec des plumes de paon
blanches et noires. Le
bas est en tulle blanc avec
des plumes de paon
blanches et noires.

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