The evolution of fashion in the Collection

Fashion is a way of differentiating ourselves. It allows us to exhibit our different attitudes to life; it can show off or hide our bodies; it can challenge or innovate; it can be modern or traditional. Fashion reflects the evolution of society over time. It is an integral part of our culture and therefore has a place in our museums.

The Thyssen-Bornemisza Museum invites you on a journey through the world of fashion. Through the paintings in the collection we can see the continual change in the language of fashion and its styles. As we walk through the rooms, we will discover the evolution of clothing: the fabrics, the textures, the colours, the shapes and the attitudes towards the art of dressing.

ROOM 3

JACQUES DARET
Tournaï, ca. 1400/1405–ca. 1468
The Adoration of Christ, ca. 1434-1435
Oil on panel. 59.5 x 53 cm
Inv. 124 (1935.17)

This painting by Jacques Daret, a contemporary of Roger van der Weyden, was created when the Duke of Burgundy was at the height of his power. It was a time when the artist was a favourite at the Burgundian court. The work depicts the story when Joseph went to look for two midwives to help the Virgin give birth. When they all arrived back at the stable Mary’s son had already been born. As the two women entered, the first immediately recognised the purity and virginity of Mary. However, the second midwife was less trusting and wanted to see proof of the miracle. She was punished with paralysis in her hands. The painting shows the moment in which the second woman is about to touch the Baby Jesus so that he can heal her.

In the 15th century a more resplendent period began, which gathered momentum when the first modern nations were formed. The agricultural revolution gave way to the generation of great extravagance and the emergence of guilds. Trade became more efficient, and with it grew the exchange of fabrics and adornments, which fired the inspiration of the tailors.

At this time the fashions became more sophisticated and exaggerated; clothes had pointed edges with an ornate, floral Gothic air. The thickness of fabrics in Flanders lent clothes a sombre and extravagant touch. Dresses followed the form of the body, outlining its shape. The waist was highlighted directly under the bust and a wide belt was worn to create vertical pleats on the skirt below. Skirts fell right to the ground, and the trains at the back of the dresses were of varying lengths depending on the wearer’s social class (the longer the train, the more socially elevated the lady).

Previously it had been considered immoral to uncover one’s head and show hair, but in the 15th century complex and imaginative headdresses began to be worn, more and more so as the century...
progressed. There were a number of different types of headdresses that had become fashionable: the crespine, which had a hairnet that allowed the hair to be plaited and twisted in two buns over the ears; à corné (with horns), padded rolls, turbans, and the hennin, a cone-like headpiece that had a veil sewn on to the upper part. The conical hennin was particularly popular in France, whilst the steeple hennin was very fashionable in England. The most eye-catching of all designs was the butterfly headdress, which was made up of a wire frame attached to a small cap to collect all the hair. The frame held a transparent veil that looked like butterfly wings.

In this same room you will find the painting Pieta Triptych by the Master of the Saint Lucy Legend. The figure to the left is wearing a cotehardie, a dress with a v-shaped décolleté trimmed with fur. Her sleeves are narrow and tight which was particularly fashionable at the time.

In Clothing the Naked by the Master of the View of Saint Gudula we see the different types of headwear that men wore during this period. The most common was the turban, which initially had been a long cone on which you could drape fabric in all sorts of different ways. Men of all social classes wore it throughout the century. The chaperone came later. This headdress simply could be worn and did not have to be specially arranged. As time went on, the chaperone became smaller in size until men who belonged to guilds only wore it. In the 19th century coachmen wore this type of headdress.

During this period men’s shoes had elongated toes, which were sometimes exaggerated. However, the civil and ecclesiastical authorities strongly disapproved of this fashion. Edward III of England even introduced a sumptuary law specifically stating that “No gentleman may wear shoes with a toe longer than two inches without incurring a fine”. However, this measure was ineffective and in his successor’s reign the toes of men’s shoes reached eighteen inches or more in length. They were called crackowes. Apparently, the name came from the time when Richard II married Anne of Bohemia (1382), and the Knights of the entourage arrived at the English court with exaggeratedly long pointed shoes. This style of shoe was fashionable for a long time, and to counter the instability that such footwear produced, their soles were made of wood.

THE NEW ARTISTIC STYLE OF THE RENAISSANCE came about largely due to the increased commercial prosperity in Italy. The new lines in painting were horizontal ones; shoes, necklines, and shapes in general, echoing the new style of architecture. Italian fashion quickly spread to the rest of Europe.

Renaissance painters looked to classical antiquity. The human figures were of ideal proportions, just like the one in this exceptional painting that is a splendid example of the 15th century portrait. The woman in the painting is Giovanna degli Albizzi who was married to Lorenzo Tornabuoni. She died two years later carrying her second child.

Her dress shows her elevated social station and the prevailing taste for sumptuous fabrics. In this case her dress is made of magnificent silk embroidered with intricate patterns. This type of fabric is called brocade and was made by weaving motifs with gold and silver threads.

The silk sleeves are slashed, according to the 15th century Italian fashion, with several openings that show the folds of her white shirt neatly tied under her dress. The neckline is square and the bust is corseted. At this time women began to wear corsets, a step that would change the aesthetic ideal of the female figure for the following four centuries. The corset was a whalebone structure that would squeeze a woman’s waist like a funnel to enhance her cleavage. From then on the fashion for women was very constrictive, forcing women to stay very straight pushing their shoulders back. Headdresses disappeared at around this time and hairstyles became...
more natural by reducing the volume and wearing ringlets to frame the face.

Other paintings in the same room allow us to assess the differences in European fashion. The figure in Portrait of an In- fant by Juan de Flandes, wears a Castilian costume typical of the period, independent of foreign influences. The most important Spanish contributions to fashion were the use of linen shirts, the farthingale (a hooped skirt), and chopines, women’s platform shoes that were originally worn by Muslims. The manner in which the Spanish ladies plaited their hair, by intertwining their hair with ribbon to form one plait, was also unique to Spain.

The austerity of the Spanish court is clear from the sumptuary laws introduced by the Catholic Kings to curb spending on luxuries and to maintain social order: “Those who are not aristocratic may not wear silks, furs or dresses reserved for the social elite.”

There is a dominance of the colour black, which was a sign of dignity, sobriety and authority of the person who wore it, as seen in the works of Antonello da Messina, Andrea Solario and Joos van Cleve. The black dye was produced by mixing tree gall and green vitriol, and as a result obtained a deep black hue. However, it faded over time and damaged the fabrics. Superior methods of dyeing black fabric reached Europe via the Spanish conquests of the New World and were distributed to the rest of Europe. For example, logwood was adopted by the Austrians and called the “Spanish dress” colour, as was cochineal; the dye that created the bright red colour that cardinals wore.

The wide variety of male portraits we have looked at also show the evolution of men’s hairstyles. At the beginning of the 15th century men would wear their hair long and loose with a fringe. However, by the middle of the century they wore more hats of various shapes: mortarboards with jewels and feathers, bonnets and chaplets.
THE REFORMATION IN THE 16TH CENTURY spread across Europe, especially throughout Germany, and brought about a more sober style of dressing.

Hans Baldung Grien was the most gifted disciple of Dürer. This is the only female portrait painted by Grien that has survived. The identity of the sitter is entirely unknown. Most probably it is an abstract representation, an ideal image of a lady, rather than a portrait of somebody in particular.

The woman wears a dark green velvet dress with a belt around the waist and very wide sleeves with folds of fabric that fall to the floor (train). Velvet, silks and brocades all adorn her figure. A gold chain and a pearl chocker decorate her square neckline. She wears a hat with feathers and a string pearl headdress that gathers her hair in a hairnet.

In the Portrait of Anne of Hungary and Bohemia by Hans Maler we see a similar style of headdress: a hairnet holding the hair in place under a hat decorated with pearls.

In paintings such as The Court Jester known as “Knight Christoph” by Hans Wertinger, the Portrait of Raprecht Stüpf and the Portrait of Ursula Rudolph by Barthel Beham and the Portrait of a Woman by Lucas Cranach we can see how men were beginning to wear a wider variety of clothes. The jerkin was still the most important piece in a man’s wardrobe, however on top of this he would wear a kind of overcoat called a schaube, which would usually not have sleeves and would be trimmed with fur. The schaube became the typical piece of clothing that the Humanists wore. Luther wore one and defined what the Lutheran clergy still wear today. The dress of a mayor was similar to the clothing worn by academics, but included a golden chain to be worn around the neck. This cape soon became an indispensable item of clothing. Initially it was mainly used for riding and outdoor activities, but during the second half of the 16th century it was used both outside and inside.

In Germany the colour red was used a great deal. In almost all of the portraits by Cranach of German princes, the sitters are wearing at least one item of red. During this period the lower classes were forbidden to wear this colour red and therefore it was often included in portraits to emphasise the nobility of the sitter, for example in the Portrait of a Woman aged Twenty-Six by an anonymous German Artist of the School of Lucas Cranach, the Elder. During the Peasants’ Revolt of 1524 in Germany one of the demands made by the rebels was to be allowed to wear red clothes like the aristocracy.

In the Portrait of Anne of Hungary and Bohemia by Hans Maler, the artist’s perception of Santa Casilda is modern, even though the protagonist is the daughter of an 11th century Arabian King who converted to Christianity and was martyred for her faith. Zurbarán does not wish to reflect the pain of her martyrdom; on the contrary, here he emphasizes the femininity of the 17th century woman, portraying her at the peak of her virginity, with majestic clothes of rich, flowing and colourful fabric, adorned with precious jewellery. She bears her martyrdom with holiness.

Zurbarán habitually attended the religious plays that were performed in Seville in order to gain inspiration for
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The saintly woman is wearing an orange toe guard, over which the velvet brocade dress is draped. The bottom border is embroidered with gold, pearls, emeralds, rubies, and garnet; the sleeve of the dress is finished with studs, a theatrical decorative element popular amongst painters.

At the back, a voluminous silver silk taffeta cape finished with gold thread bobbin lacework falls to the floor.

Zurbaran’s dresses have been an important benchmark and reference point for designers. In 1961 Balenciaga designed an evening gown inspired by Santa Casilda, and even Coco Chanel cited Zurbaran as one of the first fashion designers.

The artist was inspired by the fabrics that he had brought from Venice to design these outfits. In 17th century Spain such magnificent silks were not yet being produced. He chose the colours, combined the prints and treated the fabrics himself.

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consisting of wire, wooden or whalebone rings which ran round the inner edge of the skirt. This was originally a Spanish invention, and in fact Spain would set the trends in fashion during the following century as well.

**TOGETHER WITH FRAGONARD, BOUCHER** is the most noteworthy painter of the French Rococo style, a style that emerged in France and spread throughout Europe during the 18th century. The enormous prestige and splendour of Versailles dominated the world of fashion. At this time the height of fashion was considered to be, at least amongst the upper classes, French.

Boucher completed this masterpiece during his most productive period. It was commissioned directly by the Swedish ambassador to the court of Louis XV in Paris. *La Toilette* gives us a glimpse of a woman’s intimate space where we see her dressed in a *deshabillé*, which literally means ‘undressed’. This was the light garment a lady wore as she moved around her dressing room. It started out as the garment worn just before bed, but soon became something to wear in public. The boundary between the public and the private soon began to blur.

Of particular note are the slippers or heelless shoes, and is emblematic, fanciful, erotic and timeless design. Cinderella loses one and Manolo Blahnik ‘goes mad about them’. In the 18th century this was the footwear of choice to wear around the house. In fact, during the reign of Louis XV, almost every single type of shoe was invented.

The painting also portrays the hairstyles that were popular at the time. Hair was preened with rice powder and adorned with false curls and touches of white lace. Up until the time of the French Revolution wigs had been very popular. They were made from human hair, goat hair, horse hair, and vegetable fibres. On particularly smart occasions curls were added at the back forming a ponytail that was held in place by a black band, as we can see in the Portrait of Fran Carl von Soyer by George Desmareses. During the Rococo period wig makers were hugely important for the upper classes and they enjoyed the trust of their clients. When Mary Antoinette fled Paris she entrusted her personal jewellery collection to Leonard, her wig maker.

As the century progressed, clothing became lighter, simpler and increasingly more comfortable. One Parisian magazine wrote: “comfort appears to be the only thing which matters to women”. There were two historical events that helped make this change: the discovery of paintings at Pompeii and Herculaneum and the tumultuous French Revolution. From this point onwards women were released from wearing their crinoline dresses and restrictive structures, reflected in their freer poses in portraits. For example, this change in fashion can be seen in the Portrait of Madame Bouret as Diana by Nattier, in the Portrait of Ann Brown in the Role of Miranda by Johan Zoffany, or in Thomas Gainsborough’s Portrait of Sarah Buxton.
THOMAS LAWRENCE WAS THE LEADING portrait artist to emerge from the English school in the 19th century. Already at 21 years of age Lawrence was employed by monarchs and in 1794 was chosen to be a member of the Royal Academy.

The Portrait of David Lyon is an exemplary work of the highest quality finished during the last stage of the painter’s career. The artist placed the sitter in a broad, open, and tranquil environment giving him an air of distinction and elegance through his upright pose and formal dress.

The position of the subject’s hand in the portrait epitomizes the essence of Dandyism. As a result of the skill developed by English tailors in working with wool, men’s clothing fitted more tightly. Tailors took great pride in seeing that the clothes they created did not show a single fold. In this portrait we can see the subject wearing “Brummel” trousers, a tailcoat and redingote as well as a fur-trimmed frock coat that is tapered at the waist, framing the figure in the way that a fashionable garment was supposed to.

All sorts of oriental objects flooded into 19th century houses. As shown in this painting European women took to using such articles quite naturally. These new objects were made popular by fashion magazines and gave clothing a new air of modernity: Japanese style screens, bamboo furniture, exotic fabrics, ornaments and other articles such as fans, umbrellas, and porcelain objects were now widely sought after by the social and intellectual elite.

In The Kimono we see Merritt Chase’s wife looking at Japanese prints. Japanese artists caused quite a stir when they exhibited in Paris, especially amongst painters such as Monet, Renoir, Degas and Gauguin, as can be seen in the portrait that Monet painted of his wife wearing a kimono, or the poster which Toulouse-Lautrec prepared for the Moulin Rouge with its distinctive Japanese influence.

In the same room we can also see the Portrait of Millicent, Duchess of Sutherland by John Singer Sargent. The artist immortalized numerous models of the upper classes in Paris and London. The painting’s finely polished shoes have a narrow tip. However, as the century progressed shoes would become wider.

The extravagance and the colour of men’s clothes had disappeared. A dandy could be recognised from the cut of his clothes and from the way he wore his tie: the collar of the stiff, starched shirt pointed upwards towards the cheeks, which was kept in place by a muslin handkerchief that was tied at the front with a knot. It is said that some dandies were able to spend an entire morning perfectly entertained fixing and arranging their neckties.

They wore their hair short and uncombed and were clean-shaven, although on occasion they would sport sideburns and/or a moustache.

The image of a gentleman did not undergo any major changes until the 20th century. The men’s suit had become so boring that by 1850 it ceased to appear in fashion magazines. It is only through changes in tailoring and painted portraits that we are able to track any developments of the suit during this period.
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Women’s sports clothes were heavy and dark and were inspired by men’s jackets. The woman seen here in the painting is wearing a slim, tight-fitting jacket; the starched white coloured shirt fastens with a golden broach, a counterpoint to the otherwise stark, masculine appearance. The outfit is adorned with a top hat, under which the hair is held together tightly in a bun. In her hand the rider carries a whip firmly in a long leather glove that is finished with twenty buttons.

In the same room we find Berthe Morisot’s The Cheval Glass. Aside from being Manet’s sister-in-law, Morisot was one of the founders of French Impressionism and actively participated in the group’s exhibitions. This work, first exhibited in 1877, represents the world of feminine feeling, a recurring subject throughout the entire collection of her works. A coy, coquettish woman is seen preparing for the evening as she looks into her mirror, fastening and adjusting her corset. This garment is of course associated with feminine beauty, flirtatiousness, and the duty to remain slim as dictated by the norms of fashion. This particular article of clothing had both its advocates and detractors. Various studies of the period reveal that the use of the corset was associated with what were then new physical problems such as the dislocation of the womb. Despite its dubious reputation, one of the most profitable businesses at the time was corsetry for bridal gowns. At the end of the day, these corsets would go on to influence the bustiers of Christian Dior and Jean Paul Gautier.

This work belongs to an unfinished series of the four seasons that Manet painted during the last years of his life on request of what was then the Ministry of Fine Art. The artist accepted this commission in a state of ill health, and only managed to completely finish the first in the series, Spring. The Horsewoman was most likely intended to represent summer. Manet focused his attention on the wardrobe of his subjects, given that at this time fashion was the key to modernity (according to Baudelaire). The young Henriette Chabot, the daughter of a bookseller friend, is seen here wearing an extremely elegant dark ensemble. The artist’s impeccable technique in working with dark hues can really be appreciated here.

It was during this period that sportswear first appeared. Special clothing was designed specifically for tennis, cycling and riding. The end of the 1890s would see the (for those times) scandalous arrival of trouser-skirt, short baggy trousers that were otherwise known as bloomers.

The passion for riding of so many women was reflected in fashion magazines of the time. They clearly show how masculine fashion influenced women’s fashion, but only up to the waistline. A woman’s typical attire consisted of a top hat held in place by a chin strap, a man’s jacket and vest, and an enormously voluminous skirt which almost touched the ground, making it impossible to dismount from the horse without the assistance of a stable hand.

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The hat shops were located on Paris’ most elegant streets, and these same streets were in turn depicted on canvas. One of these is Rue Saint-Honoré in the Afternoon Effect of Rain by Camille Pissarro, which is on display in the same room.

In the painting we can see two different types of straw hats: the wide-brimmed hat adorned with flowers and feathers commonly used to shade oneself from the sun whilst strolling through the garden, and a bonnet, held in place with a chin flap, which completely shut off any peripheral vision. These designs were influenced by the commonly-used headwear of past centuries.

The parasol began to be used as early as 1830. From then on and for almost a century afterwards, parasols were indispensable for women. They lent an air of elegance, not only because of the richness and variety of the materials from which they were made, but because of the particular way in which they were carried.

Throughout the 19th century it was considered elegant to use them regularly. Together with the fan, gloves and the handkerchief, the parasol had its very own language.

Another example in the previous room, Woman with a Parasol in a Garden by Pierre-Auguste Renoir, illustrates the importance of the parasol for women.

...lovis corinth was a german artist who fell under the spell of the impressionists and travelled to Paris. Upon his return to Germany he was awarded a professorship at the Berlin Academy. Fashion Show was painted in Berlin four years before his death.

Fashion shows began as early as 1800 by the couture houses. At the beginning of the 20th century Paul Poiret first created the modern female figure in Paris with rigid, straight lines and skin-coloured stockings, rejecting the use of the corset. Poiret, was also a pioneer in that he was the first to launch his own perfume and to go on tours to promote his designs, for which he employed nine catwalk models. He even went so far as to design a suit, from start to finish, scissors and fabric in hand, in front of a live audience.

This painting captures a fashion show in progress: a model’s pose, covering her upper body with a scarf. The tubular dress made of yellow silk almost reaches her ankles. The tapering at the waist, which is characteristic of this particular decade, gives the body a cylindrical shape. In the course of just a few years a woman’s outfit went from weighing three kilos to only 900 grams. Once corsets were no longer worn the décolleté was fairly modest until the advent of the bra, when it was...
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Schiaparelli. These two rivals were more than just designers; they were both at the forefront of a new artistic movement, and were cohorts of the most important intellectuals of the time. Schiaparelli’s designs were influenced by surrealists such as Salvador Dali and Alberto Giacometti. Of particular note were her shoe hats. The Italian designer opened twenty-six workshops, with more than two thousand employees. In 1930 alone, it is estimated that her boutique turned over 20 million francs per year.

This remarkable painting is a magnificent example of Max Beckmann’s style. The portrait was exhibited in New York only once in 1938. In 1925 Quappi became his second (and final) wife. Work on the piece began in 1932 and was completed in 1934. Beckmann altered not only the date but also Quappi’s expression, making her smile much more comical to reflect the couple’s thoughts and worries of the impending Nazi rise to power.

During les années folles women abandoned the home deciding to lead a more active social life. It was a decade filled with dance and exuberance - the decade of the Charleston. The female shape became more rectangular, with a dropped waist – the leitmotif for fashion design.

Inevitably with the great crash in 1929 came the introduction of new cheaper fabrics. In turn this allowed greater ease of movement and allowed women to take part in athletic activities more easily. Synthetic materials became more widespread and in 1933 the first pair of shorts appeared on the tennis courts. This was quickly followed by the disappearance of stockings at Wimbledon, much to the horror of the spectators.

ROOM 39

MAX BECKMANN
Leipzig, 1884–New York, 1950
Quappi in Pink Jumper, 1932–1934
Oil on canvas. 105 x 73 cm
inv. 465 (1985.16)

THIS ROOM BRINGS TOGETHER A SERIES of portraits of modern women whose personalities are reflected. Through what they are wearing. This inter-war period saw the birth of a new style of woman.

The new feminine ideal was androgynous and women made concerted efforts to appear masculine. All curves were hidden. Breasts were covered up completely and hips were smoothed out as the woman entered the work force. Neat, short hairstyles were the fashion now. These later progressed to styles, such as the garçonne, that could be considered almost boyish, brought on perhaps by Victor Margueritte’s controversial Garçonne (1922), which tells the tale of a young woman’s struggle to break the chains of social norms and to lead her own independent life. These new hairstyles followed the head’s natural contours and were highlighted by the cloche style hat that was so fashionable at that time.

In Paris various fashion houses were forced to close upon the arrival of new female talent brimming with revolutionary ideas, such as Coco Chanel and Elsa Schiaparelli. These two rivals were more than just designers; they were both at the forefront of a new artistic movement, and were cohorts of the most important intellectuals of the time. Schiaparelli’s designs were influenced by surrealists such as Salvador Dali and Alberto Giacometti. Of particular note were her shoe hats. The Italian designer opened twenty-six workshops, with more than two thousand employees. In 1930 alone, it is estimated that her boutique turned over 20 million francs per year.

In the painting we see Quappi the seductress; she has applied makeup to her cheeks and her lips, has plucked her...
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Avoid them getting smoky as this might annoy their female companions. Very soon after this the *Fumoir* or smoking lounge appeared, a private place where men could get together to smoke, an activity that at the time was associated with luxury and exclusivity. Smoking tobacco had become fashionable after the conquest of the Americas, but at this time smoking cigarettes had become fashionable thanks to a massive wave of imported cigarettes from Turkey.

Women took up smoking in 1925, and as a result the smoking jacket ceased to be exclusively for men. In the 1930s the main trendsetters were models. No woman, with the exception of Marlene Dietrich in *The Blue Angel*, had been so bold as to sport such a manly outfit. As fashion photographer Helmut Newton had noted “there is nothing more sensual than a tall, svelte and strong woman walking around in a pair of high heels whilst wearing a smoking jacket borrowed from a man’s wardrobe”.

THE SMOKER WAS PAINTED IN CERET, A place in the French Pyrenees that had acquired the reputation of the ‘Mecca of Cubism’ because Juan Gris’ stay there had coincided with that of Picasso’s, to whom the former referred to as ‘maestro’. The geometric defragmentation seen here evokes Picasso’s series of Cabezas (heads) painted in the same year.

Thanks to the preservation of a preliminary sketch that included a dedication, it is widely believed that this may be a portrait of Frank Haviland. Haviland was a rich American and friend of the Steins who had just recently restored a monastery in Ceret where he had an important collection of African art in storage.

Upon analysing the angular fragments on the canvas and rearranging them mentally, we discover the image of a man wearing a smoking jacket and a top hat puffing away on a cigar.

This type of suit had originated in Great Britain in the 19th century, and was initially used specifically for smoking before being considered a staple piece of men’s clothing. This formal attire was normally made out of black fabric, with satin detailing on the jacket and trousers. Gentlemen would wear this particular jacket, their so-called smoking jacket, after dinner, instead of wearing their frock coats to avoid them getting smoky as this might annoy their female companions. Very soon after this the *Fumoir* or smoking lounge appeared, a private place where men could get together to smoke, an activity that at the time was associated with luxury and exclusivity. Smoking tobacco had become fashionable after the conquest of the Americas, but at this time smoking cigarettes had become fashionable thanks to a massive wave of imported cigarettes from Turkey.

In the same room we find portraits of other modern women who lived independently of their husbands and wore short skirts and synthetic stockings, such as Karl Hubbuch’s *Twice Hilde II*. There are also portraits of men that show the almost negligible evolution of the formal suit, the undisputed staple in every man’s wardrobe. The only part of the suit that changed over time is the jacket: double breasted, straight, and with a waistcoat as can be seen in Christian Schad’s *Portrait of Dr. Haustein* and Otto Dix’s *Hugo Erfurth with Dog*. 

**ROOM 41**

**JUAN GRIS**

Madrid, 1887–Boulogne-sur-Seine, 1927

*The Smoker (Frank Haviland)*, 1913

Oil on canvas: 73 x 54 cm

INV. 567 (1978.19)

“Sometimes all Max needs for inspiration for a painting of me is a piece of clothing”, writes Matilde Beckmann in her memoirs. This time it was a sweater and a pink turban that she had bought herself in Berlin. Throughout Max’s career he would paint more than fifty portraits of his wife. This piece was known as *The American*, named after the sensually posed, modern and sophisticated woman it depicts.
Calle Serrano called Casa Sonia. It was a roaring success, and they went on to repeat the same formula in Bilbao, San Sebastian and Barcelona. During this time they worked together with the Diaghilev ballet company, with Sonia designing the wardrobe and Robert the stage-sets. The Hotel Claridge in Madrid was the venue for many of their fashion shows.

In 1921, they returned to Paris where they created the famous Simultaneous Boutique, a hybrid space that was part art gallery and part clothing shop. This new concept, as Sonia had imagined it, was in line with the changing, turbulent social climate of the time.

Looking at the painting we see the models wearing simultaneous style dresses in vivacious prints. This type of garment, as with other forms of visual expression, was affected by the experimental tendencies of the avant-garde at the beginning of the 20th century. It was during this period that a concentrated effort was made for fashion to be recognized as art.

The Delaunays as a couple were pioneers of abstract art and claimed that the colour in painting was the generator of shapes and movement. They formulated the concept of Simultaneism based on the dynamics and contrasts of colour.

Although Sonia did have success as a painter, her major contribution was in the world of decorative arts and textile design. She worked with hand printed fabrics and carpets, created designs for curtains, umbrellas, furniture, cushions and lamps. She was immensely creative and she left her mark on fashion as well as interior decoration. The colour combinations she used broke the traditional mould, and by using a mix of different fabrics with varied textures she further contributed to this breakthrough. In a magazine in 1913 she wrote: "I want to create something new and modern where the colour leaps out of the frame".

When the First World War broke out it caught the Delaunays completely off guard while they were away on a summer holiday in Spain. In 1918, they settled in Madrid where they would stay until 1921. They opened their own boutique near the Hotel Claridge in Madrid was the venue for many of their fashion shows.

In 1921, they returned to Paris where they created the famous Simultaneous Boutique, a hybrid space that was part art gallery and part clothing shop. This new concept, as Sonia had imagined it, was in line with the changing, turbulent social climate of the time.

Looking at the painting we see the models wearing simultaneous style dresses in vivacious prints. This type of garment was, in reality, a work of art even though it was not on canvas. In 1913 Sonia designed her first simultaneous dress, which was soon followed by her poem-dress a few years later. The women who wore Sonia’s designs were living paintings, it was art on the female body, three-dimensional and it moved. Sonia met with resounding success in dressing fashionable actresses such as Gloria Swanson.

Brave, daring and visionary, Sonia Delaunay would go on to design prints used for automobiles by Citroën, and would be the first woman to see her paintings exhibited in the Louvre Museum during her lifetime.
THEMATIC ROUTES

The evolution of fashion in the Collection

IN THE YEAR 1938, AS THE NAZIS WERE approaching, Piet Mondrian abandoned Paris and moved to London. By 1940 he was living in New York, where he would live out the remaining years of his life. Paris fell, but fashion survived despite the scarcity of fabrics, restricted manufacturing capacity and manpower.

In the United States the war did not have as great an impact as in Europe and fashion evolved rapidly, which to a significant extent was due to the film industry. In 1944 a dress worn by Ginger Rogers in the film Lady in the Dark was labelled the most expensive dress in the world at the time, costing more than $35,000.

Mondrian fell under the spell of American culture, jazz, boogie-woogie, its dynamic metropolitan cities and the skyscrapers of Manhattan. His painting became less rigid as he gained freedom and rhythm as can be seen in New York City 3, painted a few years before his death.

At this time, thanks to the common sense of designers such as Coco Chanel, fashion centred around simplicity and functionality. Her no-frills designs reflect the geometric paintings of Mondrian as well as the pure lines Le Corbusier’s architecture. The legendary Chanel Nº 5 bottle itself incorporates all of her principles: design, reduced to a simple geometric form and number conveying a message of modernity. The essence of her style went on to influence the next generation, including Christian Dior and his disciple Yves Saint Laurent.

Mondrian’s abstract compositions, with their straight, simple lines would also inspire Yves Saint Laurent’s legendary 1965 collection, a huge commercial success and one that was copied ad nauseam.

The entire world applauded these creations that went beyond the previously established boundaries that lay between different artistic genres. Throughout their careers great designers would talk about their collections in the same way that Van Gogh, Matisse and Picasso had done about their paintings.

The idea of design and printed fabrics as works of art remains very much alive in the creations of current designers. Today, fashion is exhibited in museums and renowned fashion houses seek out artists who are capable of creating clothes that are real works of art.
1 Early Italian Painting
2 Gothic Painting
3 Early Netherlandish Painting
4 The Quattrocento (Italian art)
5 The Portrait (Early Renaissance)
6 The Villahermosa Gallery
7 Italian Painting (16th century)
8 9 German Painting (16th century)
10 Netherlandish Painting (16th century)
11 Titian, Tintoretto, Bassano, El Greco
12 Caravaggio and the Early Baroque
13 14 15 Italian, French and Spanish Painting (17th century)
16 17 18 Italian Painting (18th century)
19 Flemish Painting (17th century)
20 Dutch Painting (Italianate movements)
21 Dutch Painting (17th century: portraits)
A Italian Painting (17th century)
B Flemish and Dutch Painting (17th century)
C Views and Landscapes Gallery
D 18th century Painting
E-F 19th century American Painting
G Naturalism and the Rural World
H Early Impressionism
22 23 24 25 26 Dutch Painting (17th century: scenes of daily life, interiors and landscapes)
27 Still Lifes (17th century)
28 From the Rococo to Neoclassicism (18th century painting)
29 30 American Painting (19th century)
31 European Painting (19th century, from Romanticism to Realism)
32 Impressionist Painting
33 Pintura Postimpresionista
34 Fauve Painting
35 36 37 Expressionist Painting (20th century)
38 Expressionist Painting (the Blue Rider group)
39 Expressionist Painting
40 Expressionist Painting (New Objectivity)
J American Impressionism
K Late Impressionism
L Gauguin and Post-impressionism (1)
M Post-impressionism (2)
N German Expressionism
O Fauvism
P Cubism and Orphism
41 42 43 44 The Experimental Avant-gardes
45 The Synthesis of the Modern (Europe)
46 The Synthesis of the Modern (USA)
47 48 Late Surrealism. The Figurative Tradition and Pop Art

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