Impressionism and Fashion

The Booming Fashion Industry and Circulation of Styles

Stéphane Mallarmé
The Latest Fashion

Men and women wishing to keep up with the current fashions could consult a number of specialist fashion magazines that disseminated and commented on the creations of fashion houses, milliners, tailors and those of the department stores. (*Le Louvre, Le Bon Marché, La Ville de Saint-Denis*, etc).
In fact the department stores offered not only the elements to create an elegant outfit but also high quality complete dresses and hats whose styles rivalled those of the best dressmakers in Paris (Mrs Maugas, Ghys, Roger, Camille, etc), who began to call themselves "couturiers". Following the example of the internationally renowned House of Worth, established in 1858, there was a proliferation of fashion houses between 1875 and 1885.

A crucial figure in developing the designs was the industrial designer, who, from simply creating prints and embroidery, had expanded his field in the 1840-1860s to include making women's clothes. He supplied a lithographed outline of a dress, coat, short cape, etc, that the manufacturer or fabric wholesaler would complete by attaching samples. From these figures, the designer could create increasingly complex styles that would in fact become patterns that he sold to the couturiers or the department stores, and which would then be circulated in magazines and catalogues. The best known of these designers were Charles Pilatte, Emile Mille, Etienne Leduc and Léon Sault.

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The Phenomenon of Fashion

Crinoline Dress

Crinoline dresses were regarded as the epitome of fashion under the Second Empire. The market for steel-hooped petticoats grew spectacularly at this time, and resulted in a large number of new patents. The bodice and skirt that made up these rounded dresses were mostly produced as separate pieces. In the 1850s, the bodices worn in town, over a corset and buttoned up at the front, had a small basque and flared pagoda sleeves.
From the 1860s on, sleeves became narrower. Formal bodices – worn to the theatre or a ball – had wide, low necklines, small cap sleeves, and came down to a sharp point to flatter the waist.

Décoratifs, Paris / Jean Tholance

However from 1866, the trendsetters were starting to move away from the crinoline, considering it ordinary and too uncomfortable. They favoured dresses with trains and shorter, looped up dresses, a style that would reach its ultimate expression in the *poufs* a pannier dress style with large side puffs, and in the *polonaises* dress style. Bodices became shorter. The new fashion that developed from 1870 put more emphasis on the curve of the waist, and placed the fullness of the skirt at the back, supported by a hooped petticoat - the *bustel*. So having been overwhelmed by masses of cumbersome fabric, women were now wearing a complex arrangement of flounces, drapes and panels of fabric that combined lace, velvet, plush and trimmings, with the bust still tightly bound in a whalebone bodice. This long, slim silhouette was at its peak from 1876 to1878.

Anonymous
Black Dress with Mme Roger label
© Photo Gilles Labrosse

Prospérie de Fleury and her Dress

Albert Bartholomé
In the Greenhouse
© Musée d'Orsay, dist. RMN-Grand Palais / Patrice Schmidt

The painter Albert Bartholomé (1848-1928) and his wife Prospérie (1849-1887), known as Périe, daughter of the Marquis de Fleury, made an elegant couple. They were friends of the arts and inclined to be a little haughty. The painter Jacques-Emile Blanche (1861-1942) depicted the salon where Périe "was so welcoming to commoners, bohemians, intellectuals and dinner guests alike, that evenings spent discussing music, painting and books, and especially politics where Degas, a staunch nationalist, set the tone with an authority accepted by everyone (except Mary Cassatt, the free-spirited American artist), seemed to take place in a world apart, one unique to Paris".

Bartholomé presented the portrait of his wife at the 1881 Salon, entitled *In the Greenhouse*. This painting was offered to the museum in 1990 by the Société des Amis du Musée d'Orsay. The following year, the Bailly Gallery gave the museum the white cotton dress printed with polka dots and violet stripes worn by the model.
On the death of his beloved wife, in 1887, the artist gave up painting and took up sculpture on the advice of Degas. His first work as a sculptor was the poignant tomb for his wife (Bouillant Cemetery, Crépy-en-Valois) before he went on to achieve fame with his famous Monument for the Dead in the Père-Lachaise cemetery, inaugurated on 1 November 1899.

The dress, that the artist kept almost as a relic, consisted of two parts. The stiffened bodice, with a polka dot pattern and three-quarter sleeves striped like the turned back collar, is lengthened to form a tunic which is drawn up in two panniers on the hips, forming two panels bordered with pleated flounces at the back under a large flat bow of violet faille. The skirt is striped, drawn in at the back and fully pleated. The outfit is embellished with violet faille bows and round glass buttons.

Anonyme
Dress worn by Madame Bartholomé
© Musée d'Orsay, dist. RMN-Grand-

Women at Home

Summer Outfit
© Stéphane Piera / Galliera / Roger-Viollet

Clothing for the woman at home varied according to the time of day. From wearing very little – a simple dressing gown for the "morning" that required her to wear a corset – she would move on to a morning dress, and then a more elegant outfit for the afternoon.
For morning dresses, and for summer dresses, light cotton or jaconet was used, in fine stripes or printed with flowers, dots or ribbons.
All the elegance of the dress, cut very simply – loose fitting jacket or bodice buttoned up at the front and a gathered skirt – lay in the arrangement of the decorative flounces and in the quality of the styling achieved through starching and delicate pressing. The department stores sold dresses that were partly made up – in other words, embellished with flounces and braids but not sewn up, so they could then be tailored to fit the client.

For the cooler seasons and when receiving guests, she would wear a silk town dress decorated with ribbons, and adorned with flounces, ruching and lace. Unlike the lighter morning or summer dresses, making a town dress required the skills of a tailor, a seamstress or the dressmaking department of the Paris shops.
With its low, square neckline and adorned with velvet and Chantilly lace, the black dress worn by Mrs Charpentier in Renoir's painting is a beautiful example of the kind of dress the mistress of the house would wear to receive visitors when she was holding a salon. Such dresses as these might sometimes have been worn to the theatre or to a dinner.

Pierre-Auguste Renoir
Portrait of Madame Charpentier and her Children
© The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Dist. RMN-Grand Palais / image of the MMA

See and Be Seen

Edouard Manet
La Parisienne
© Nationalmuseum, Stockholm, Sweden / The Bridgeman Art Library

There was a whole range of eveningwear depending on the occasion and the age of the woman.
The dress worn to a grand dinner was different from a ball gown, and the attire for an opening night at the Opera was nothing like the clothes worn to a late-afternoon theatre production, which a woman might attend wearing her town clothes and a hat.

Dresses for dinner and for the theatre usually had a higher neckline and did not reveal the shoulders, which were covered by richly adorned three quarter sleeves. A typical feature of these dresses was the difference between the front and the back: drapery drew in the skirt at the front, while a train bordered with flounces opened out behind. From 1867-1868 onwards it was considered elegant to let the skirts trail along the floor.

For balls and evenings at the Opera, dresses had low, off-the-shoulder necklines, and elaborate hairstyles were adorned with jewellery or flowers. These dresses had to be silk, but there was a great variety ranging from tulle and tarlatan to the heavy figured silks and velvets.

The fabrics could be combined, and ribbons, lace flounces, ruching and ruffles added for certain styles. But the fabric alone, with its patterns and texture, could also ensure that a dress was original, even more so as two types of material were often used, one with a figured weave and one velvet, in contrasting colours or in different shades of the same colour.

Eva Gonzalès
A Box at the Theatre des Italiens

In private

Edouard Manet
Nana

A woman's silhouette during the 1870s was influenced by two accessories: the corset, which drew in the waist and accentuated the bosom, and the bustle, which supported the looped up sides of the "polonaises" on the hips.
o protect against painful whalebone marks, a woman would first slip on a sleeveless chemise over which she put the busk of the corset, fastening it at the front with hooks and eyes, before pulling the laces tight at the back, tying them in front, and then slipping them under the large hook sewn into the bottom of the corset to prevent the laces and petticoats from riding up.

She then put on a linen corset cover, and pulled on stockings held up by garters at knee height. She would then put on a pair of linen knickers, a horsehair or whalebone bustle, and finally a petticoat with drawstrings and flounces to support the skirt.

At the *Bonheur des Dames*

Capote Bonnet

Every woman who went out during the day had to wear a hat: a bonnet with a rigid (capote) or folding (cabriolet) brim in velvet or woven straw, natural or dyed, embellished with lace, silk or velvet ribbons and flowers in taffeta or silk velvet. Gloves, which had the advantage of making the hands look smaller, were also of the utmost importance.

An entire set of gestures and attitudes developed around these practical accessories - parasols, walking sticks and canes, fans – that added to one's "countenance". In winter as in summer, evening shoes matched the dress, had a small covered heel, and were always open-fronted and trimmed with a silk flower or a bow of lace and ribbon.
All these details helped to create the image of the Parisian lady, who was defined not by her social status but by her meticulously elegant clothes.

The Parisian Man of the World

The choice of clothes for men was particularly limited in the second half of the 19th century. Colour disappeared and was replaced by plain dark shades; woollen cloth replaced velvet, silk and brocade. Moreover, it became usual to adapt the same outfit for use on different occasions. The Parisian man, once he had stepped out of his dressing gown, wore two outfits in turn: one for the day and one for the evening.

The overall look of men's clothes changed very little. The upper body was tightly fitted into a jacket or frock coat, both invariably in dark colours, sometimes double-breasted, and whose tails varied in length. The short jacket was only worn at holiday resorts. On the other hand, the paletot jacket, a sort of short overcoat, was adopted at this time, the cut requiring no great skill.

Gustave Caillebotte
n a Café
© RMN (Musée d'Orsay) / Martine Beck-Coppola

James Tissot
The Circle of the Rue Royale
© Musée d'Orsay, dist. RMN-Grand Palais / Patrice Schmidt

There was a greater range of fabrics used for trousers, always cut wide, available in a large number of patterns, including stripes, checks and hound's tooth motifs. These were worn with a slight crease, and a break on to short boots with heels that varied in height. A top hat was the headwear of choice, and a cane, umbrella and gloves completed the outfit for the man who was ready to go out. But above all else he was judged by the cleanliness of his cuffs and shirt collar – either straight or winged – and by his tie which had to be of a certain width.

Artists and Men of the World

Gustave Caillebotte
Paris Street, Rainy Day
© The Art Institute of Chicago. Photography © The Art Institute of Chicago

In 1858 Théophile Gautier attacked a certain type of artist who claimed that black suits and jackets were an obstacle to creating masterpieces: "Are our clothes so ugly? Do they not have a meaning, little understood, sadly, by those artists steeped in old-fashioned ideas? With their simple cut and neutral colours, they allow the eye to be drawn to the head, the seat of intelligence, and to the hands, the tools of the intellect and a sign of breeding".

A few years later in 1863, Ernest Chesneau proclaimed, "If a great painter, a*lumiériste*, is bold enough to depict modern life, and if he is truly a painter, if he does not mock his subject, if he has courage and a touch of genius, he will create a masterpiece from our black suits and our paletot jackets." And in 1868, Emile Zola congratulated Frédéric Bazille, on his ***Family Reunion***, for believing that one could be "an artist by painting a frock coat"..

It was never an easy task. The very same author in his novel *The Masterpiece* (1886) describes the anguish of the painter Claude Lantier when he comes to depict the black velvet jacket of the character in his large scale painting entitled *Plein air*. But for this one failure, how many stunning successes have there been? The frock coats and top hats in conversation by Degas, Caillebotte's dreamers and flâneurs, thoughtful husbands and lovers by Manet, Monet and Renoir, Bazille looking distinguished in his frock coat

Frédéric Bazille
Family Reunion
© RMN-Grand Palais

or jacket, his hands handling his hat, cane and umbrella quite naturally, as well as a cigar or a cigarette.

(Musée d'Orsay) / Hervé Lewandowski

Enjoying the Open Air

Claude Monet
Women in the Garden
© RMN-Grand Palais (Musée d'Orsay) / Hervé Lewandowski

For the Impressionists, the representation of outdoor leisure activities was closely linked to the world of fashion. Whether it was the parks of Paris, suburban gardens or even the forest of Fontainebleau, these spaces were perfect for displaying fashionable clothes, as demonstrated in 1865-1867 by two great manifestos of the "new painting" that extol the fleeting beauty of a summer's day: Monet's *Luncheon on the Grass]* and *Women in the Garden*

A tight-fitting, high-waisted bodice, a mid-length jacket or even a loose fitting "sack" jacket coming down as far the crinoline skirts, which, in the 1860s tended to be flatter in the front and fuller at the back. Trains, which were even worn on days out in the country, were drawn up by a system of cords revealing the petticoats. The most common motifs were stripes, broad or thin, blue or green, dots, braided arabesques, with dark piping or trimmings.

But this was also the era when plain white prevailed. In 1868, Lise Tréhot, Renoir's model and mistress, emerges from the undergrowth in a white muslin dress, leaving us to imagine the delicate flesh beneath the low cut dress and sleeves. But the silhouette changed as we see in the long slim figure of the young girl from Montmartre on *The Swing*, who is also wearing white muslin but embellished with blue bows. Nevertheless the clothes still capture the play of light and shade, even at the risk of losing some detail.

Pierre-Auguste Renoir
The Swing
© Musée d'Orsay, dist. RMN-Grand Palais / Patrice Schmidt

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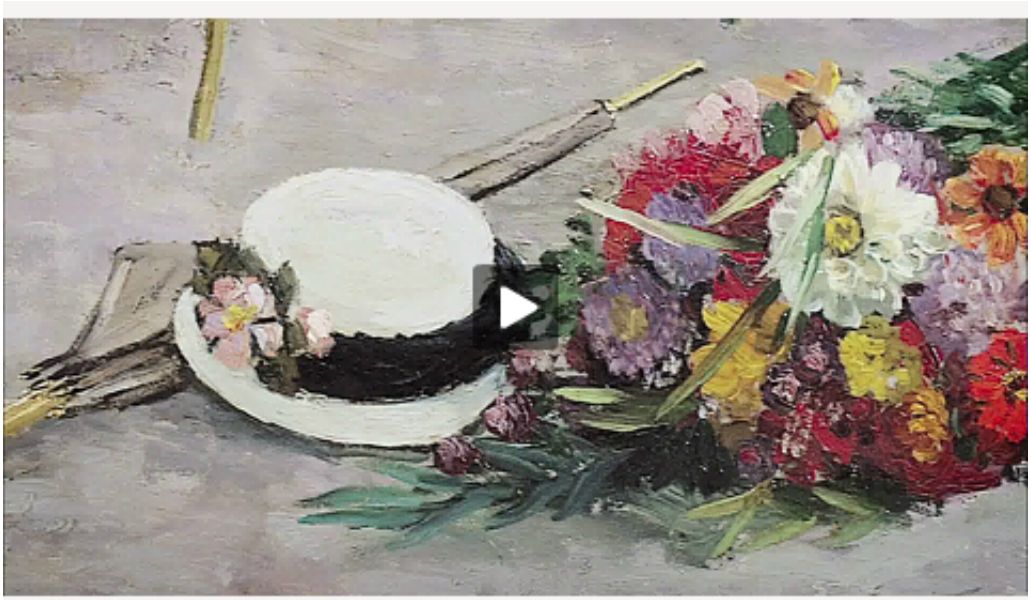

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