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**THE NATIONAL COLLEGE OF ART AND DESIGN**

*Department of Fashion and Textiles Faculty Textiles*

***CORSETRY - CLOTHS, CONTROL AND CONSTRICTION***

*By*

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*Submitted to the Faculty of History of Art and Design and Complementary Studies  
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## CONTENTS

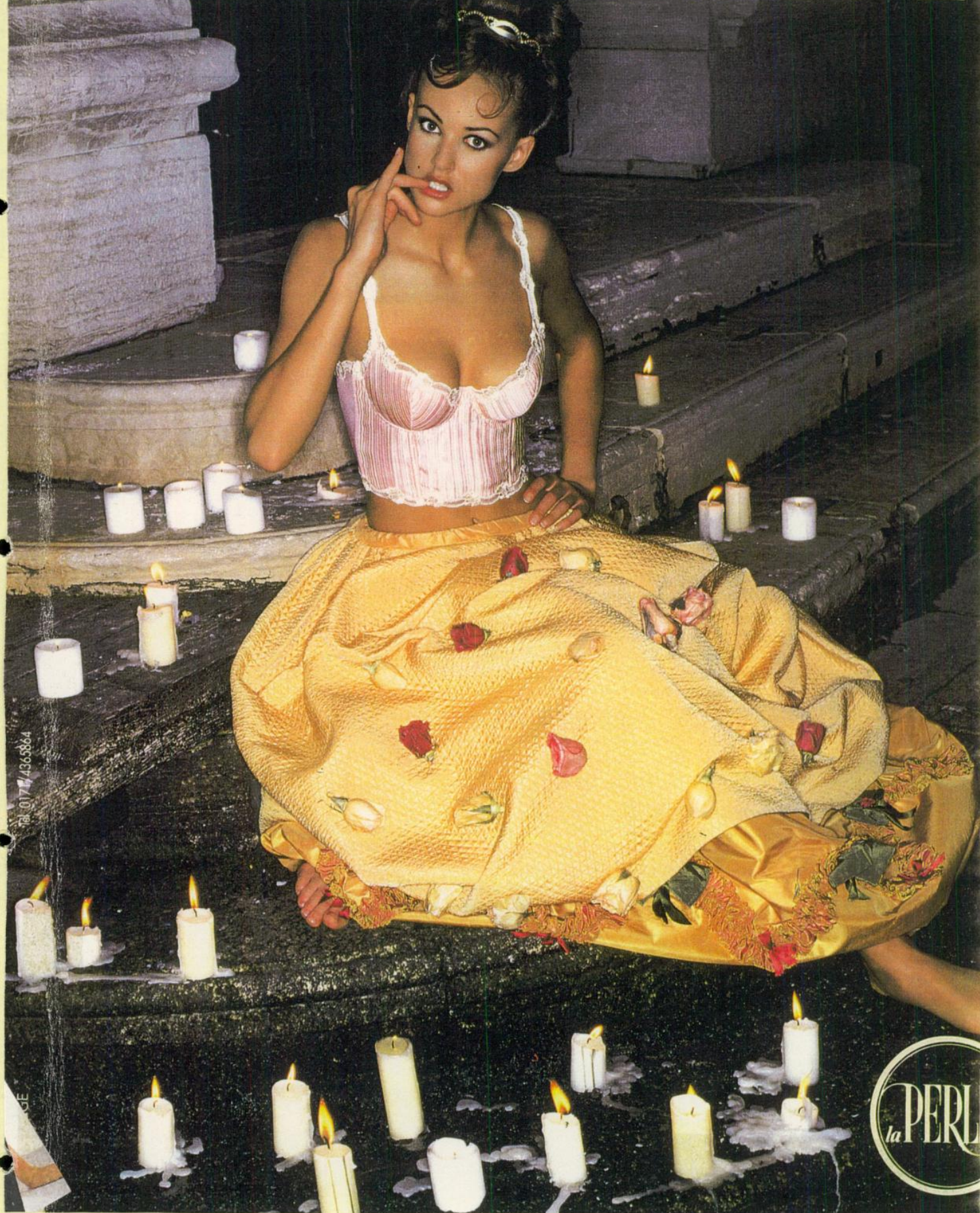
	<u>Page</u>
List of Plates	3-5
Introduction	6
Chapter 1	Corsets of 1800's and early 1900's, Fabrics, Materials, Construction and Structure.
	7-12
Chapter 2	Manmade Fibres and their effects on corestry in 1900's. New fibres and fabrics, the development of corsetry, control wear in the 1990's.
	13-21
Chapter 3	Underwear as Outerwear, Corsets on the Catwalk Tight Lacing today Corset Designers and their clients
	22-27
Chapter 4	Conclusion Bibliography
	28-30







# LA PERLA



TEL 0177/4365864

AGE



Fig 67





## PLATES

### FIG:

1. Corset structured by Whalebone.
2. Lacing systems in ealy 1800's
3. Metal eyelets
4. Use of embroidery in corsetry
5. Satin corset with bust curving forward 1896
6. S-bend corset 1902
7. Effect of S-bend corset undergown
8. Warner Bros Corset 1800's
9. Harness Electric Health Corset
10. Whalebone corset in cream silk and embroidery
11. Medical Maternity Corset
12. Corset for pregnat or nursing mother
13. Lighter, more breathable underwear.
14. Latex underwear
15. 1930's Corset
16. 1930's Lace Corset
17. 1930's Back Lacing Satin Corset
18. 1930's Front Lacing Corset
19. Black Corset 1948
20. 1960's "Merry Widow" black corsolette
21. 1960's Knickers with Lycra, Figure controlling
22. Figure controlling underwear Warners Nudes 1996
23. Wonderbra and Ultrabra
24. Playtex New Cross your Heart Bra 1996
25. Marks and Spencers corset style underwear
26. Tactel body
27. Dior dress complete with corset
28. 1990 Merry widow
29. Famous Film Stars exposing their underwear
30. Dior corsolette and Dress





31. Corset of Stretch fabrics as outerwear
32. Matching Gingham Bra and panties and jacket
33. Vivienne Westwood corset of 1980's
34. Jean-Paul Gaultiers pink corset for Madonna
35. Jean-Paul Gaultiers corset for Madonna's Blond Ambition Tour
36. Jean-Paul Gaultiers pink corset for Madonna
37. Vivienne Westwood corset of 1991
38. Fetish corset
39. Corset creating the perfect shape
40. Erotic discomfort 15 inch waist
41. Thierry Mugler 1991 corset
42. Azzadine Alai's corsets 1991
43. Collection of designer corsets May 1994
44. Versace cotton bodice
45. Hussein Chalayan surgical corset
46. Gianni Versace corset dress
47. Pearl in corset
48. Thierry Mugler corset 1992
49. Thierry Mugler PVC dress
50. Pearls corset
51. Pearls corset
52. Twenty seven year old Lauren 19 inch waist
53. Vivienne Westwood copper coloured corset
54. Christian Lacroix 1994 corset
55. Karl Lagerfeld corset for Chanel 1992
56. Dolce and Gabbana corset and dress
57. Dolce and Gabbana corset
58. Alexander McQueen corset
59. Black Pearl corset
60. La Perla bra
61. Underwired underwear







- 62. Extreme controlling of body
- 63. The Perfect form
- 64. Vivienne Westwood corset I tried in Brown Thomas
- 65. Corsetry introduced into swimsuits
- 66. Corsetry in evening wear
- 67. La Perla corset
- 68. Bras throughout the ages





## INTRODUCTION

Since I was a little girl, I have always been intrigued by corsetry from looking at the illustrations in fairytale books of beautiful women bound in corsetry and the very feminine allure it projected on them.

The subject of this thesis is corsetry both as underwear and as outerwear, I'm looking at corsetry and its emergence over time from purely natural fabrics through to the new man-made fabrics.

In looking at corsetry as a subject it is necessary to understand the history of underwear and corsetry so that a connection can be made to alter trends. The books I found most helpful in this area are Laurents' **A History of Women's Underwear**, Carters, **Underwear - A fashion History**, Ewings **Fashion in Underwear** and **The History of Underclothes** by C. Willett and Phillis Cunnington. These books give clear histories of underwear and corsetry. The latter part of my thesis has been sourced from magazine and newspaper articles, market research, television and my own investigation into fabrics and corsets that are available in the shops.

Having followed the progression of the various forms of corsetry in history, I have begun to look at the presence of underwear as outerwear at different times throughout the eighties and nineties, both in new fabrics and in tight-lacing.

Technological advancement, the growth of the media, the fashion designer and the search forth of the perfect body are all 20th century influences which have affected society and the way in which we present ourselves outwardly. These factors are of significant relevance to the way in which we dress today, causing people to turn their inner garments out, publicly divulging what was once private.

I volunteered myself as guinea pig to see what these new fabrics are capable of in corsetry and controlwear and what they are doing to the body.







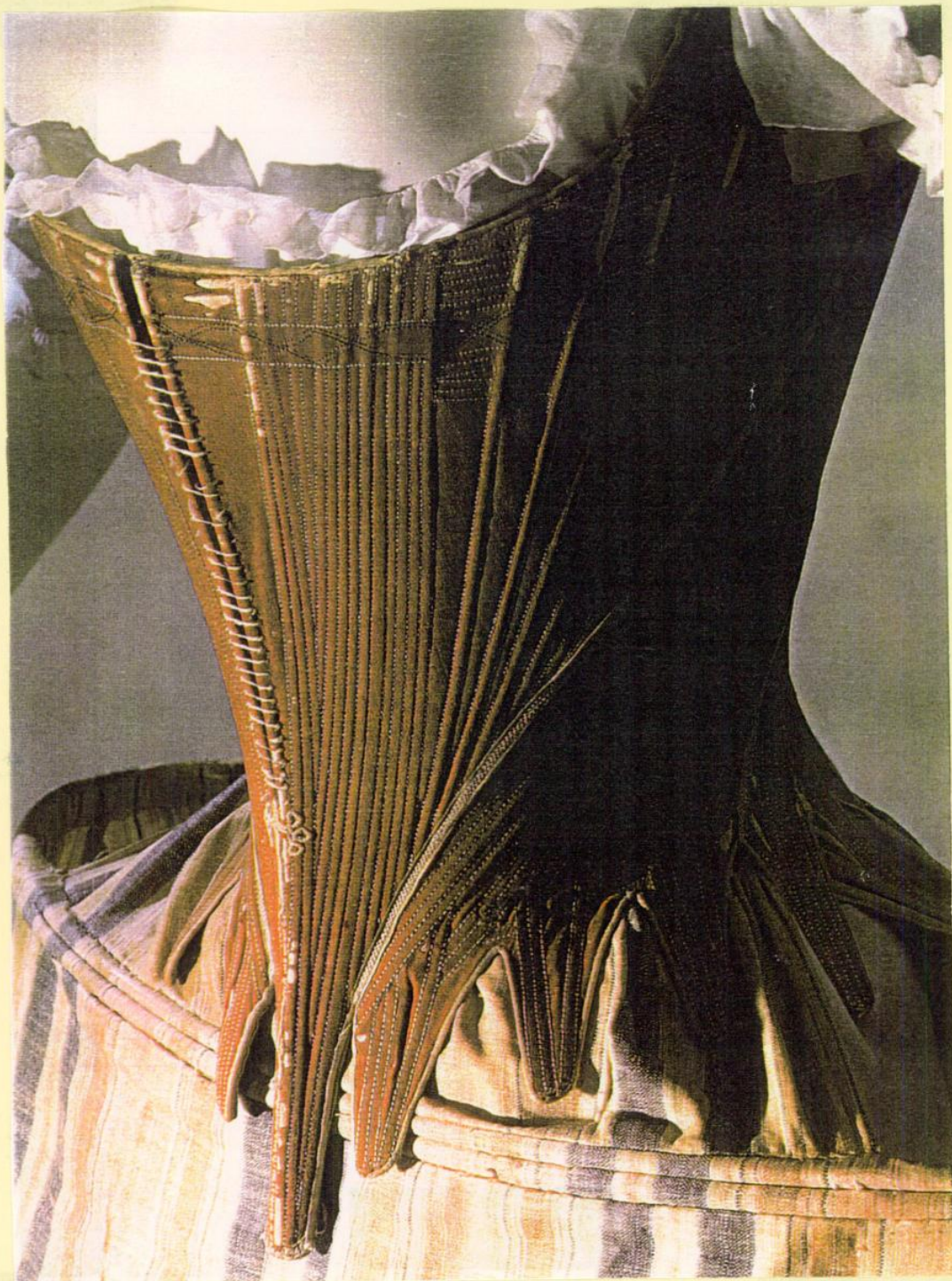


Fig 1.



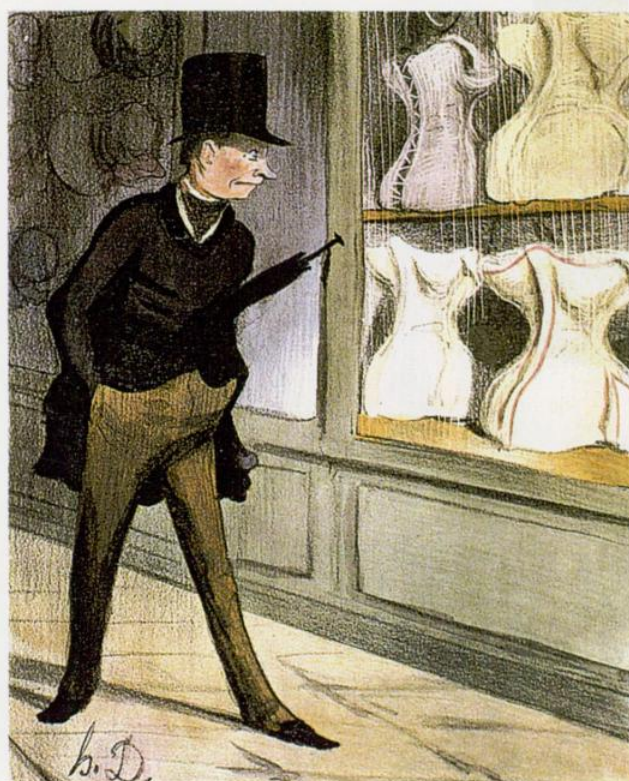
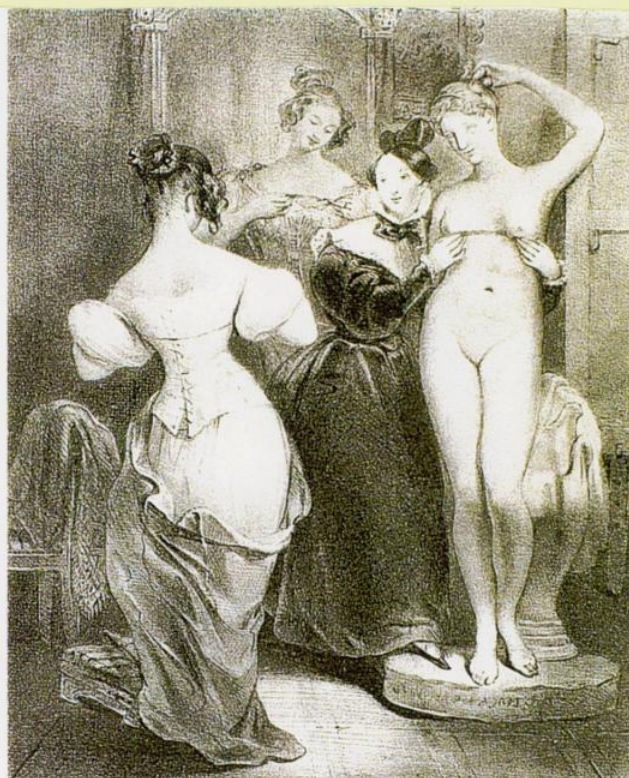


Fig 2.



**Chapter 1: Corsets of the 1800s' and early 1900s' - fabrics, materials, construction and structure.**

Corsets of the early 1800s' were constructed of natural vegetable source fabrics such as cotton or hessian, structured by strips of whalebone (fig 1) or steel sandwiched between layers of tough fabric such as twill cotton or cotton satin. The fabrics were strengthened with lines of cording, stitching or quilting (Carter 1992, P34).

The ideal waist of the early 1800s' was long and narrow (Ewing 1971, P45). This shape was achieved by the wearing of a long, one piece corset, supported by shoulder straps and shaped at the hips and bosom by means of two or more gussets inserted at the top sides and the two sides at the base of the corset. The body was kept rigid by the busk, a long and slightly curved pier of wood or whalebone that was fitted into a pocket of fabric down the front of the corset.(Cunnington 1951, P115). In 1816 a padded triangle of iron or steel was placed in the front of the corset between the bosom in an upward point to separate one breast from the other. this corset was known as the "divorce corset"(Ewing 1971, P46).

The corset was laced by means of passing laces through simple holes and the hauling on these laces to squeeze the wearer into the "perfect shape" (fig 62). Metal eyelet's (fig 2 & fig 3) were invented around 1828 and they were a great improvement on the previous lacing system The metal eyelet's protected the fabric from fraying around the fastening area, where a lot of tension would have been when the corset was fully laced. Often for aesthetic reasons these eyelet's were embroidered by hand (Laurent 1986, P120).

The first steel front busk fastening was produced in 1829 and added to the reinforcement of the corset (Ewing 1971, P46) 1830 saw the invention of an elastic stiffening substance made from a vegetable source. Elastic was primarily used as a thread covered in cotton or silk and used in the making of corsets to help them become less restricting. As a substance it was not fully used to its potential until 1920 (Cunnington 1951, P132).

From about 1820 curves came back into vogue and hence in 1835 the basque was fitted into the corset to add extra shape to the hips and to the curves of the female figure. The basque was a shaped piece of fabric that was fitted into the corset at the top of the hips (Carter 1992, P40) In the late 1840's, early 1850's a new cut of corset was introduced from France into England. This was a corset free of gussets but constructed of several separate pieces of fabric, each one contoured and shaped into the waist. These corsets were lighter and became popular in England (Laurent 1986, P78).



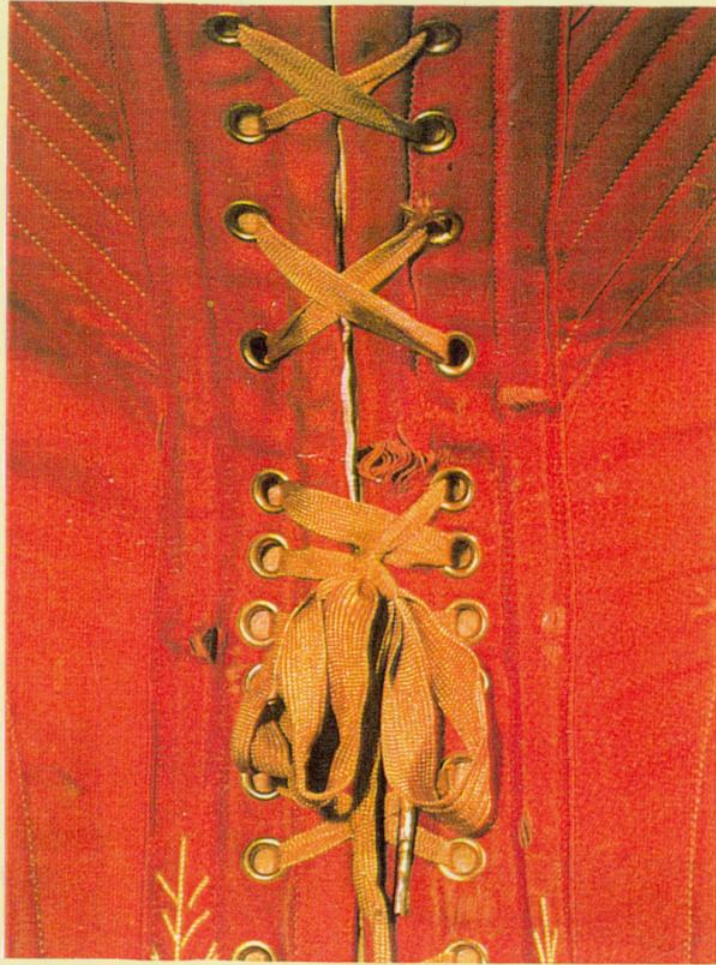


Fig 3



With the invention and production of the sewing machine in 1851, Singer now made it possible to construct corsets with the use of cording and quilting, freeing the corsets slightly of the heavier structuring they had endured in the earlier years. Robert Symmington, a member of the Market Harborough family brought the first singer sewing machines into England. Market Harborough had one of the first mechanized corset factories in England and they developed it into an immense corset company (Cox 1956, P18). These machines were going to cause change in the role of corsets. Up until the 1860's the corsets of the day appeared to be purely functional, made of white or grey fabrics and devoid of decoration (Carter 1992, P52).

In the 1860's corsets became shorter and less restricting due to rising waistlines. They were now made of several pieces of material that could follow the contours of the body more carefully and closely. They fastened at the front yet at the back there was lacing to allow for extra tension to be subjected (Carter 1992, P52). With the introduction of aniline dyes in this decade came a craze for scarlet corsets (fig 3) and detail for the exterior of the corset (Carter 1992, P53).

Ornamentation had always been an important part of the corset, but before now the detail had to be done by hand embroidery. Fine braids, trimmings, staings and silks (fig 4) were brought into corsetry in the 1870's and 1880's as were fine colours such as acid yellows, oranges, rich reds and black or combinations of these colours (Carter 1992, P53).

Whalebone (fig 1) had been used as the main means of structure in corsetry, but by 1870 it was difficult to obtain it in large quantities and so another substitute was sought out. Reed, was a more successful substitute, it was supplied in abundance and was a great form of stiffening or boning. Reeds in corsetry meant that corsets became a lot more machine friendly, as the machine needle could stitch through it safely. Whalebone had always been too hard to stitch through.

The Steam Moulding process was another method that improved the shape of the corset, this method of shaping was achieved by brushing the linings of the corset with cold wet starch and then wrapping them around a hand beaten copper torso that had already been heated with steam. The linings were then allowed to dry on the torso and as it cooled it kept its shape (Carter 1992, P57).





Fig 4.



Corsets extended in length once again in the 1870's due to sheath like dresses being in vogue. The busk lengthened, and in the early 1890's it held the stomach in as it never had before, it was called the "spoon-busk" (Cunnington 1951 P180). Cording became an important feature in the design of the 1880's corsets, it still held the figure solid yet it gave a dimension of suppleness to the corset. Cording also lessened the dependence on boning, especially whalebone which by this time had become expensive as it was so difficult to get. The corset became easier to wash and look after because of the lack of heavy boning. There were three different types of cording methods, namely: string cording, cotton cording and cane cording. String cording proved most successful, temp twine or string made from a machine twisted paper was laced between the pieces of facing cloth and lining and was stitched in continuous lengths. This string cording made an attractive design feature on the corset whilst giving it extra flexibility, support and lift. Cane cording was used from 1880 but was expensive as it had to be imported from Mexico. Sometimes cane cording would be used with string cording to lessen the expense.

By the 1880's the sewing machine was an essential tool in the art of corsetry, it was used in the decoration and detailing of the corset. There are some examples of 1880's corsets made from black satin trimmed with yellow, pink (fig 4), blue or green and boning held in place by embroidery stitches. An example of a more expensive corset would be that of one made of silk with a coloured stitching, lacing and trimmed with lace and a bow. The corset was not worn next to the skin, but over a chemise and was then covered by a camisole bodice that would sit between the corset and the outer clothing (Ewing 1971).

The shape of the corset changed again in 1900 and instead of it curving forward, a straight fronted busk was now used (Ewing 1971, P77). This busk did not dip down into the waist although it covered the abdomen and started lower on the bust line. Women were taking more exercise and this corset was designed to support the abdomen yet leave room for breathing. The "S" shaped corset (fig 6 & 7) came about as a result of the exaggeration of the tiny waist and the bust bursting out over the top of the corset and the abdominal flesh swelled out at the sides, hips and bottom from the pressure of the heavy front bust (Laurent 1986, P131). This corset was stiffened with Whalebone and steel and had as many as ten to fifteen pieces of fabric in its construction as well as gussets. This corset was a cruel one, it crushed women's stomachs and left them with a tiny waist and a huge behind (Ewing 1971, P79).









Fig 6.



Fig 8.









Jane Duvall



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Fig 9.



Pastel shades (fig 7) were preferred to black in the early 1900's and embroidered detailing was an important feature, flowers (fig 10) were fashionable as decoration on a satin background.

From 1905 the corset changed yet again "Corsets are getting longer and longer below the waist and shorter and shorter above it. The corsetieres of Paris bring the corset nearly halfway to the knees" (Cunnington 1951, P212).

This corset left the bust unsupported and as a result a variety of bust improvers were made available. The bust bodice was also popular, like the corset it was laced at the centre but worn above the corset (Cunnington 1951, P21).

Another corset was that of the health corset of 1911 (fig 8). By the standards of corsets at that time it was quite unrestricting and this corset expressed the function of corsetry at that time. Maternity corsets (fig 11) were also designed and made in 1890. Corset Companies and the designers that worked for them started to take into account the anatomical structure of the body and reassess how corsets could lend support where nature had failed, Warner Bros. an American company of two doctors, had been manufacturing health corsets since 1874 (fig 8 & fig 9) and were now as famous in Britain as they had been in the U.S. (Ewing 1971 P.99).

With the war in 1914 came a lot of changes in fashion both in outerwear and in underwear, women needed to be free to move around and to take on some of the physical work of their absent male colleagues. (Ewing 1971 p.87). There was also an inclination to reduce the layers of clothing covering the body and it made sense in a more active world for underwear to become practical. Not only were there changes in the shape and structure of underclothes but also in the fabrics, due to developments in elastic, rubber and other fibres (Ewing 1971 p.91).

The "S" bend corset came and went and a slimmer style of figure came into vogue taking the attention away from a slim waist into an overall slim figure. Hips had to be slim and so a straight line was the main feature of the corset and every curve was suppressed. The corset now served to obliterate any evidence of the female form (Cunnington 1951 P220).

The brassiere as it appeared under that name in 1916 served a different purpose than the bodices before, it served as a flattener made usually of strong cotton or firm broche. It stretched as far as the waist and had shoulder straps. (Cunnington 1951, P229).

Nearly all the top corset manufacturers in both England and abroad came onto the brassiere market, notably Symingtons of Market Harborough - England.



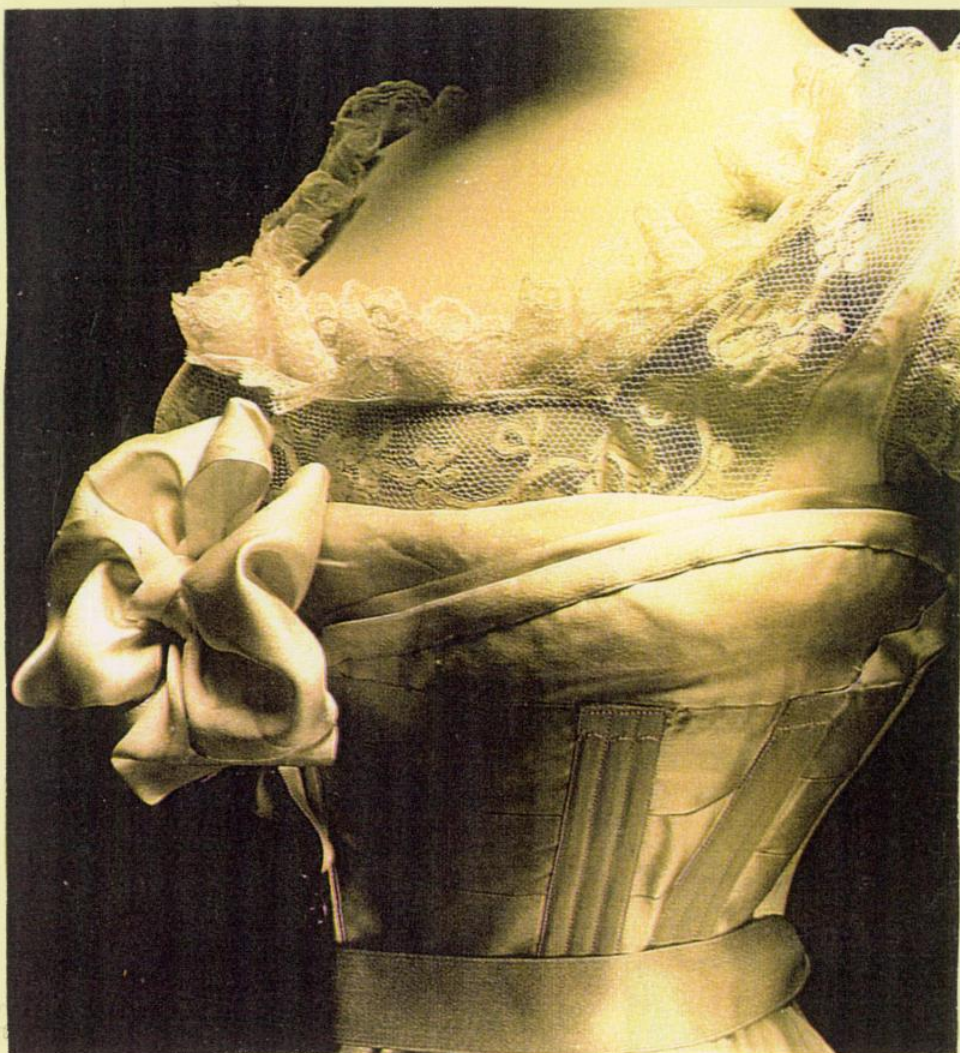


Fig 10.



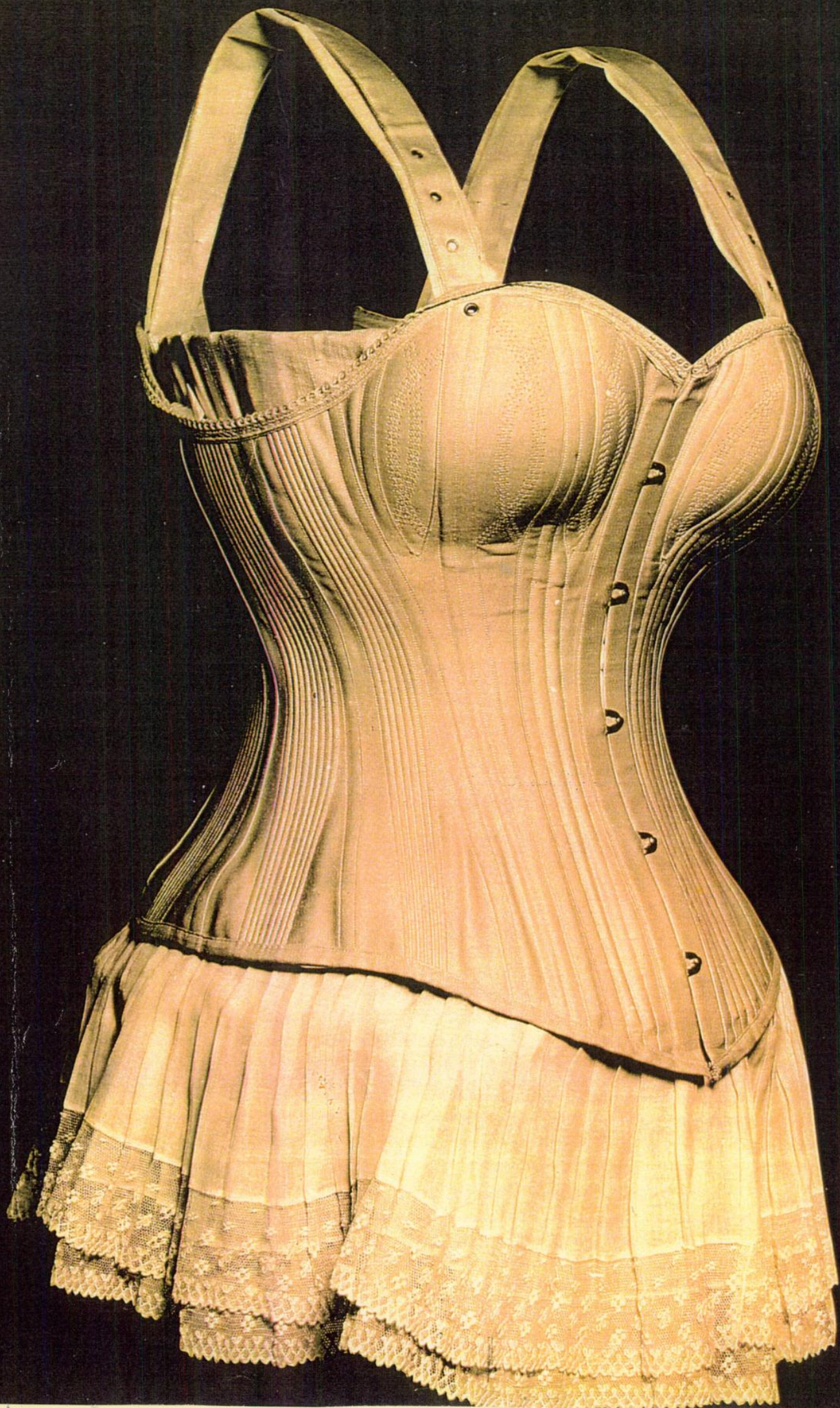


Fig 11.



Fig  
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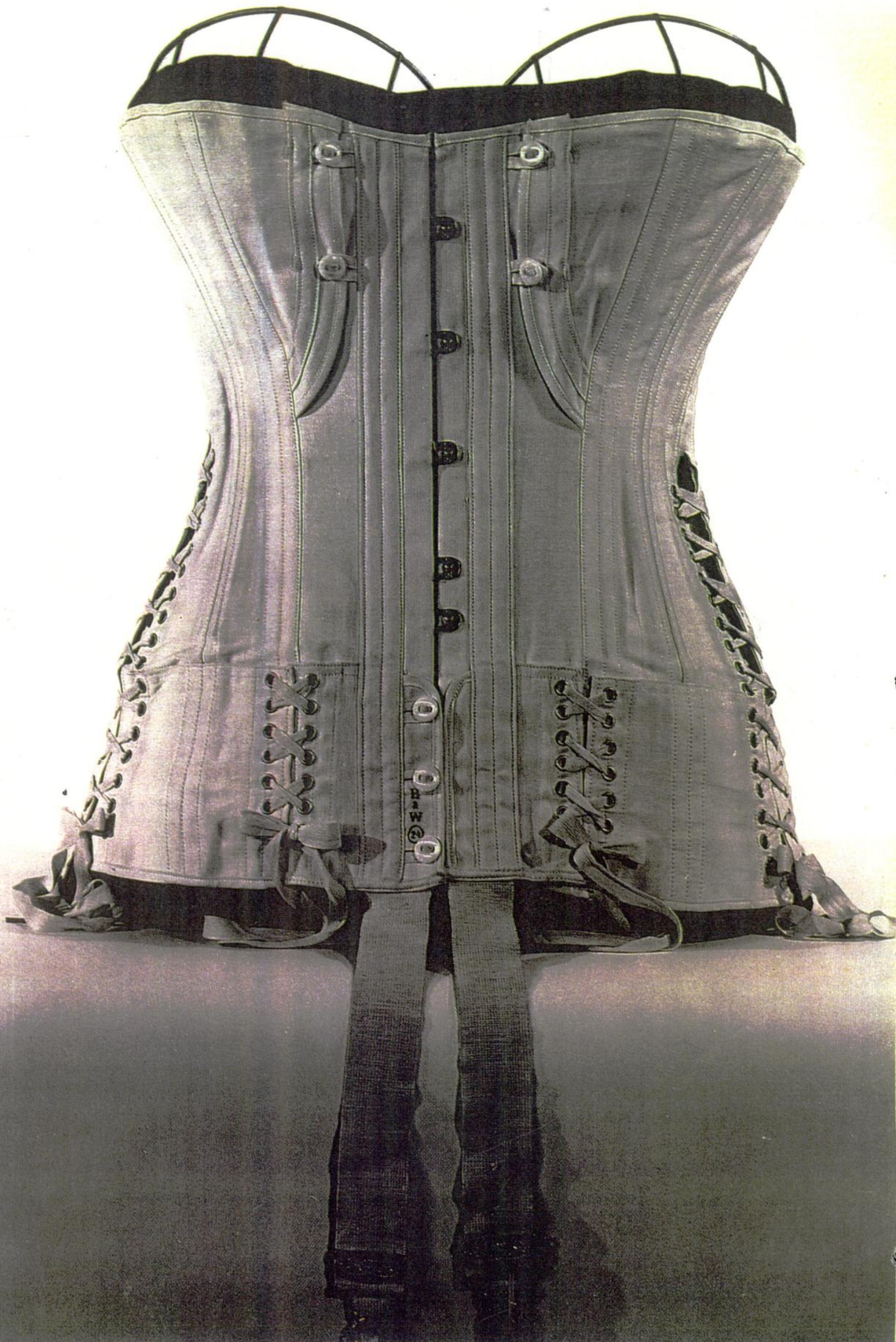


Fig  
12.



For women of the fuller figure, corsets were still very necessary as unwanted curves had to be suppressed and hidden. Many of these corsets were still boned and made of stiff materials. They lasted for nearly half a century, even though the corset industry as we knew it seemed to be declining. (Ewing 1971, P107).

With the fashion of the day the aim of underwear has to create an unbroken flat line down the whole torso and so evolved the corsolette, a one piece garment comprised of the brassiere and the corset. The corsolette came into fashion around about 1920 and it demonstrated the use of newly woven elastic fabric (Cunnington 1951, p250).

The manufacture of elastic caused great changes in corsetry. Shop catalogue of the time advertise:

“corsets of woven porous elastic”(1923)

and to

“wrap round rubber corsets (1925)

(Ewing 1971 P.91)

Other fabrics used at the time were cotton, linen, pure silk (fig 13) and artificial silk. Embroidery was still quite fashionable, as well as lace and printing, with rubber and woven or knitted elastic for support. A 1921 Tatler article speaks of corsets of “suede, stockinette, satin coutil tricot and linen coutil” (Carter 1992 P.90).

Curves began to creep back in around 1926, 1927 and there was a suggestion of hips and bust. For the first time the brassiere separated the breasts as the divorce corset had. The brassiere also suggested bust cups. This invention, was also added to the corsolette as were suspenders. Circular stitching around the bust cups enhanced the shape of the breasts and cotton elastic provided control around the diaphragm and stomach area. (Cunnington 1951 P.245).

Sports and sunbathing had become popular leisure time activities from the 1920's and therefore underwear had to be functional but practical and the layers had to be stripped away in favor of lighter (fig 13) more breathable underclothes.



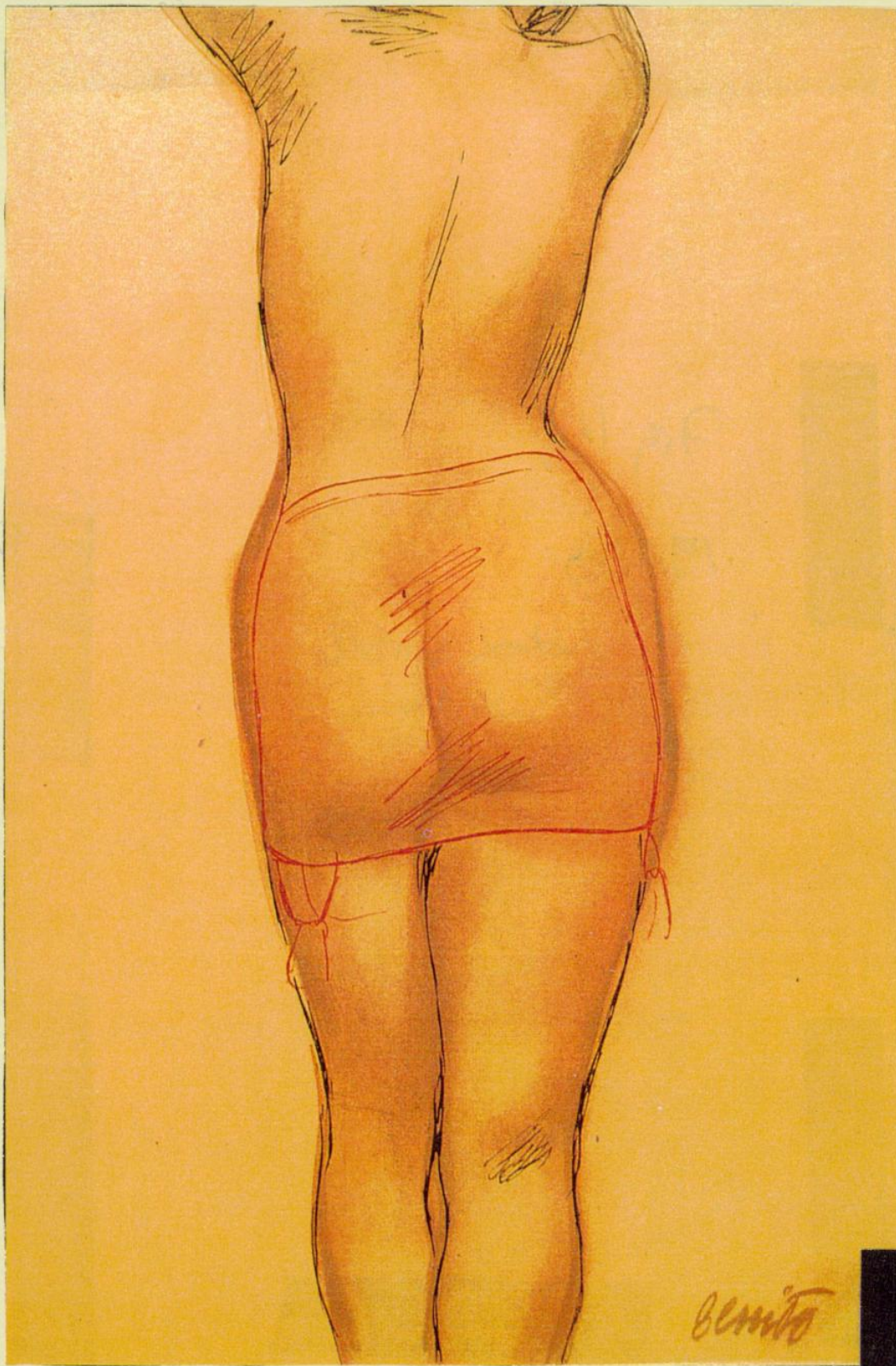


Fig 14.

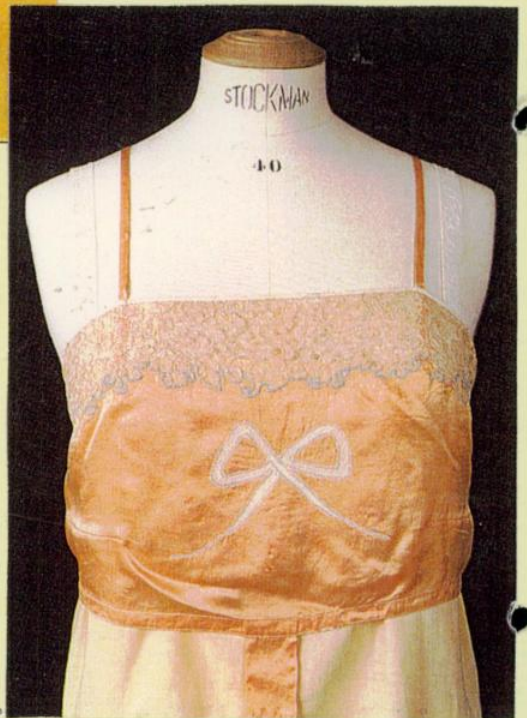


Fig 13.



From the reappearance of the whalebone corset in the early 1800s the corset has become shorter, lighter, it enhanced the slimness of the waist and enhanced the breasts, concealing any flaws in the figure, its lacing and unlacing systems were improved in the first third of the 19th century. Late in the 19th century the fabrics were still cut short on the hips and curved at the abdomen. In 1900 the shape of the corset changed dramatically and it became straight fronted, this shape arched the back and created the S shaped corset. The corset split in two with the invention of the brassiere and the corset as it was, was used less and less in the 1920's. 1930 saw it re-appear in the form of a girdle and paved the way for big developments in corsetry and the fabrics used to make them.





Fig 30



## Chapter 2      Man-Made fibres and their affects on Corsetry in 1900's

A complete revolution in fabrics came about in the 1900's, with the introduction of a myriad of new materials that had very different properties from the fabrics of natural origin.(Ewing 1971 P100).

Man made fibres are created entirely by chemically treated raw materials such as cotton linters, petroleum extracts, wood pulp and by-products of coal. New inventions, raw materials and treatments are conjured up all the time therefore creating new and innovative fabrics, with different functions, properties and names (Ewing 1971, P100).

The conception of man-made fibres goes far back into the past although their general use belongs to our time. Scientists such as the Englishman Robert Hooke and Frenchman Rene A.F. de Reamur initiated some important ideas of drawing out different fibres by chemical processes (Ewing 1971, P.100).

The development of Rayon as a textile came about from 1878 by Comte Hilaire de Chardonnet. He produced his first fibre in 1884 and articles made from it were exhibited at the Paris Exposition in 1889, acetate rayon was in production from 1891, produced in Cantes factory at Besoncin in France. The first potent for Viscose Rayon was taken out in 1892. Developed by three chemists, viscose rayon was of a useable standard by the 1920's, it had an attractive appearance and went into the clothing industry in a big way. (Carter 1992, P84) (Ewing 1971, P100/101).

Many of the man-made fibres have properties particularly suited to underwear.

Rayon was known by the name of artificial silk and made it possible for all classes to buy underwear that had an expensive look to it. (Carter 1992, P84). Fifteen years passed after the development of Rayon before Nylon was developed as a far greater invention in fabrics, for its strength and more expensive appearance. (Ewing 1971, P102).

The thirties brought about big changes in the conception of corsetry due to the development in fabrics. 1930 saw the big breakthrough of elastic that made it the basis material of all corsetry. Elastic decreased the use of boning, steel, lacings and busks in corsets and it also meant changes in outerclathing. Elastic created support and tensions in fabric that could substitute for boning and steel. Elastic was also breathable and more comfortable. Clothes could now be worn close to the body and figure hugging, whaleboning and steel inserts were no longer necessities in underwear. Elastic cut out the structured, architectural look of corsetry and created a natural line but with the support of corsetry.









fig  
15

fig  
15



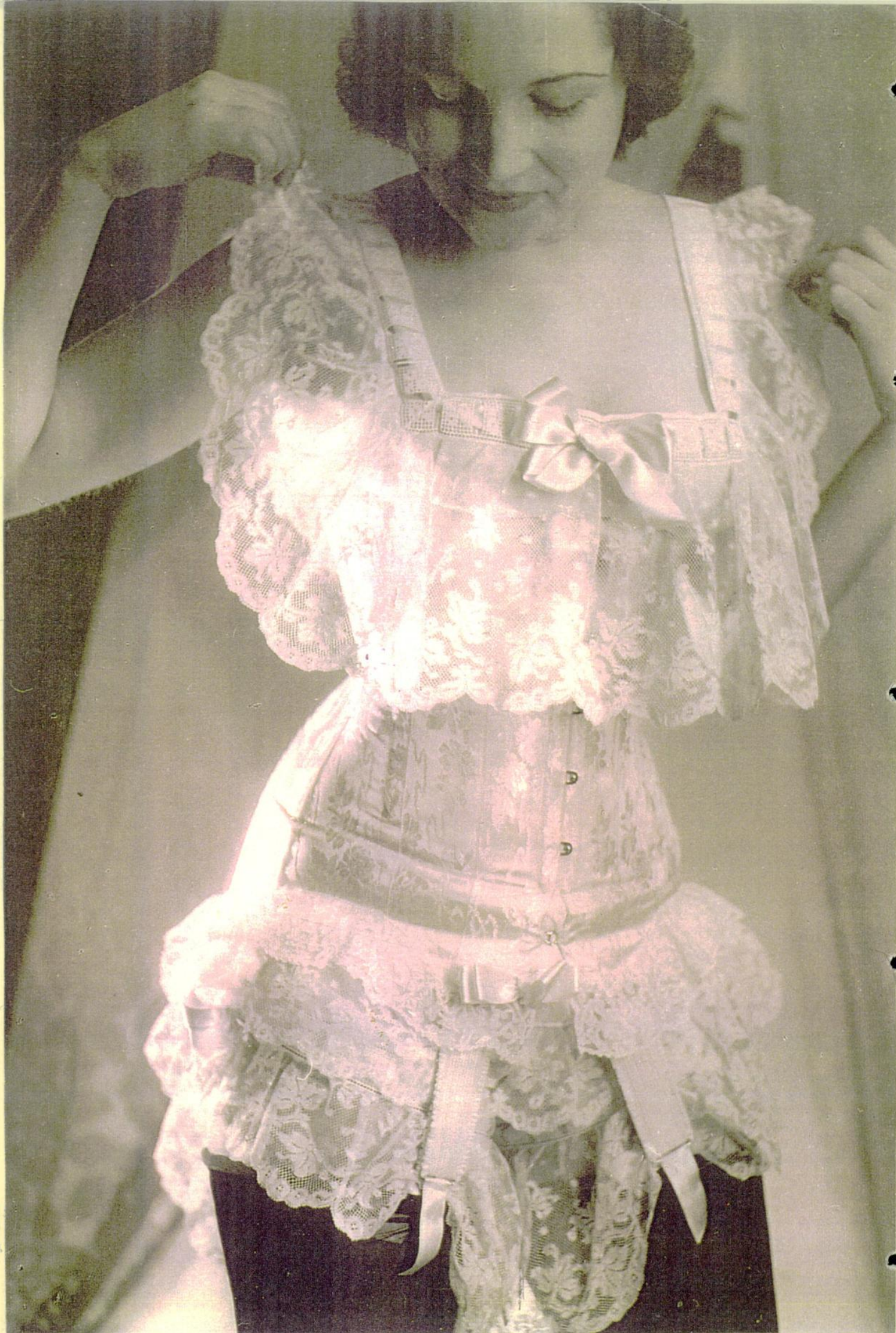


Fig  
16



The corset revolution was based on rubber elastic which is the raw material of natural elastic. Thomas Hancock developed a process that gave rubber its "snap-back" property. Hancock also made it resistant to both heat and cold (Ewing 1971, p104).

The first record of the selling of an elastic corset was in 1911. This was a sports corset which had an elastic band of three inches around the waist. The first advertisement for any elastic corset without lacings was in 1913 in the U.S.A. In 1914 the "dancing corset" appeared in the USA at the height of the tango craze.

A breathable rubber corset was the "Charnanx". It was made with perforations and was, therefore, healthier and could now be worn directly next to the skin, whereas previous corsets had always been worn with chemises or vests underneath them.

(Fig 14) Latex (a milky substance, the sap of the rubber tree) was imported from the Far East and it revolutionised the manufacture of elastic thread. A process was developed whereby the liquid latex was forced through rows of small glass tubes called capillary tubes and then into a bath of acetic acid. In the acid the latex coagulates and forms threads, then called Lastex. These threads could be produced at any thickness, time or course, therefore they could be woven or knitted into lengths of fabric, on machines that had been adapted to suit the yarn (Ewing 1971, P100). In corsetry support and control by new elasticized materials was created by the tensions and pull that the designer would put into the corset.

The most famous corset of the early 1930's was the "roll-on". It suited the lighter figured women as its fabric gave "light control" and it replaced corsets for the thinner or younger women of that time. The "roll-on" was made of knitted fabric, knitted on a circular knitting machine that had already been used for elastic knitting. Its fabric was one of the first with two way stretch. Warner Bros. are said to have introduced this two way stretch into the USA in 1932, due to the use of new long elastic threads (Cunnington 1951, P245).

Developments in materials for corsets and brassieres were continually being produced in the Thirties, both for elasticized and rigid undergarments. A leading manufacturer's records of 1931 tell of several different fabrics used in this industry:

"grosgrin, four-fold voile, faille, satin, lace broche, batiste, pekin net, milanese, crepe de chine Breton net, Swami, satin brocade, pique satin, plain and embroidered linen, voile, broderie anglaise, mercerised batiste, brocatell and delustre satin, Lastex, batiste, hand knitted elastic and chiffon Lastex yarn" (fig 15-18) - (Ewing 1971, P107).



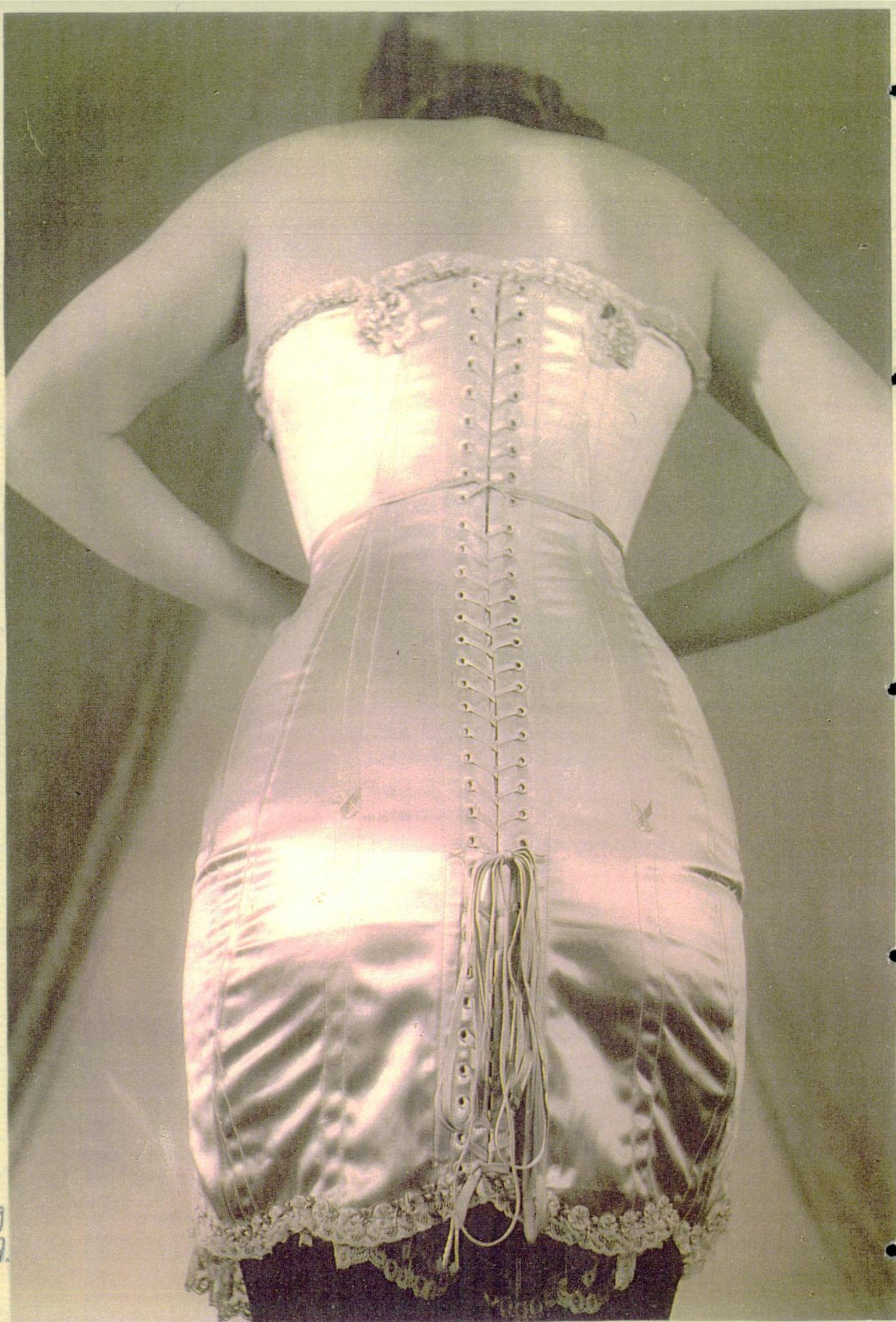


Fig  
17.



Fig  
18.



Fig  
18





Fig 19.



Fig 34.



Many beautiful fabrics such as lace and satin were created from this Lastex yarns and woven elastics were a big technical advance in 1939.

Corsetry moved on from the lace-up, bust front, boned corsets and corsolettes. Doubled fabrics with elastic qualities were replacing boning full time as a means of structuring and support. These fabrics gave the figure the support it needed but with a smoother and more curvaceous line, for under fine evening wear. Backless evening dresses meant backless corsolettes and by 1936 a corsolette was produced fully of elastic with the special two way stretch panels both in the back and front. Controlettes were another undergarment produced of Lastex 1937 produced a bleak satin corsolette that used Lastex in its fabric and had an "uplift bustline". (Carter 1992, p133)

The bustline became an important feature in the late thirties. Cup sizes were now taken into account and the first padded bra came out somewhere about 1935. The high bosom was created by corsolettes and bras of 1939, they also emphasised the shape and size of the bust just like the underwear of today (fig 68). Spiral boning also came into use in 1938 unaware of the effect it was going to have on Madonna's success later on in the century (fig 34). (Ewing 1971, P107).

Wartime hit Britain in 1940 and hence the development of fabrics was hampered and fashion stood still for years. The only reason that corsetry survived the war was because of the need for support that female factory workers needed in their long hours of labour to replace the men that had gone to war. The Corset Guild, set up in Great Britain in 1943 by retail shop buyer, provided a great service to the public. The Guild presented a petition to Downing Street on behalf of the British women, and as a result the corset industry was able to maintain high standards of production throughout the war years. (Ewing 1971, P119).

As the war eased off and restrictions lifted, Nylon carried on its production and development into underwear fabrics. Du Pont had given it its name in 1938 and from then it had developed into a washable, crease resistant fabric available to a mass market in the mid-1940s as nylon voile, nylon taffeta and nylon marquisette (fig 19). It was as strong as the natural fabrics that had come before it but was much lighter and mixed with elastic it was just as supportive (Ewing 1971, P120).





Fig 20



Fig 21.

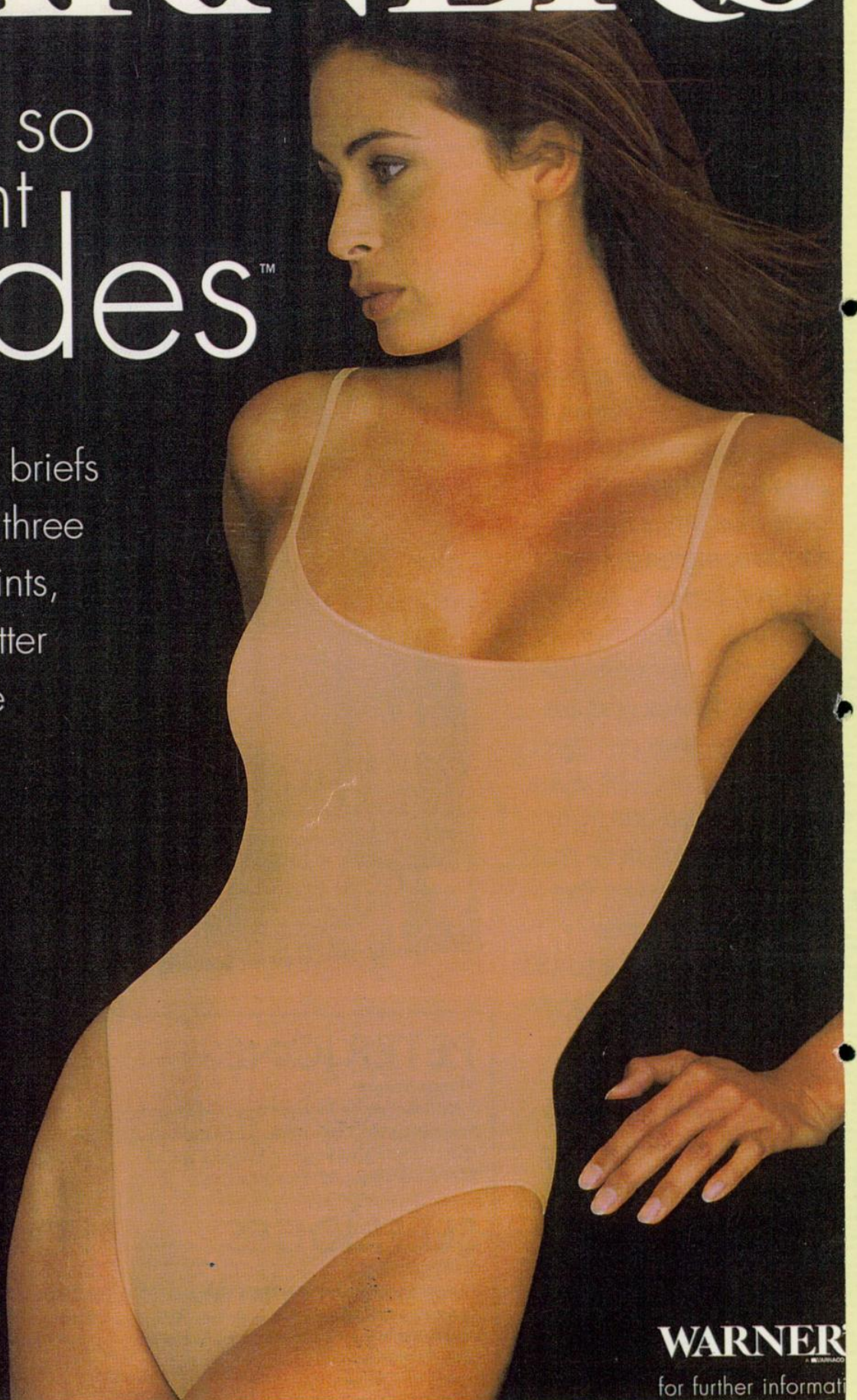




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Fig 22.



Lycra, like nylon, was also developed by Du Pont from spandex fibres that contain no natural rubber at all. It is said that Lycra is three times as powerful as rubber, elastic, and so it opened up new areas in controlling underwear and foundationwear, October 1959 announced the name "Lycra" and in the December 1960 edition of Corsetry and Underwear the new fabric made from Lycra was described. Warner Bros. advertised their first garment made from the new fibre in the same month. In January of 1961 they introduced their first corselette made of this new fibre, it was called the "Merry Widow" (fig 20) and was introduced into Britain.

Warners also introduced their "Birthday Suit" which was an almost seamless, boneless, close fitting pantie-corselette made from Lycra. (Ewing 1971, P121).

Lycra was mostly mixed with rubber elastic fibres or nylon and the proportion of Lycra used was based on the amount of stretch required, Lycra could be dyed, it is perspiration and oil resistant and is unharmed by detergents.

Lycra is being used in figure controlling garments (fig 21 & 22), that are attempting to do the job of corsetry without the cruel boning.

"Always incorporated into other fabrics as a blend, Lycra lends drape, strength, fit and comfort to a garment and is particularly useful in tailored items, reducing bagging and seating at pressure points. Used by absolutely everyone from London's current favorite designer Alexander McQueen to Queen Elizabeth's corsetiere Rigby and Peller" (Foxe, Irish Times, Aug 19th, 1996).

There's a new generation of non-natural fibres/fabrics being used in fashion right now. Many of them were developed for sportswear but embraced by the designers, have played a major role in fashion over the past couple of years (fig 21 & fig 48). Technology has meant that these man-made fabrics have been manufactured so as they are breathable and durable.

Microfibre, for example, is the umbrella term for yarns which are made from very fine extrusions of polymer filaments such as polyester, acrylic and polyamide. It is washable, breathable, drip dry and has tiny perforations to let perspiration escape.

Nylon/Tactel is developed Nylon which is being used by top designers such as Prada, Dolce and Gabbana and Helmut Lang, as well as the mainstream chain stores. Tactel is made from very fine filaments of Nylon, again it is durable and wearable. It is often used on its own (100% Tactel), (fig 26) but works well when blended with natural fibres. It is often used in evening wear and can look high lustre or dull matte.





Fig 48.



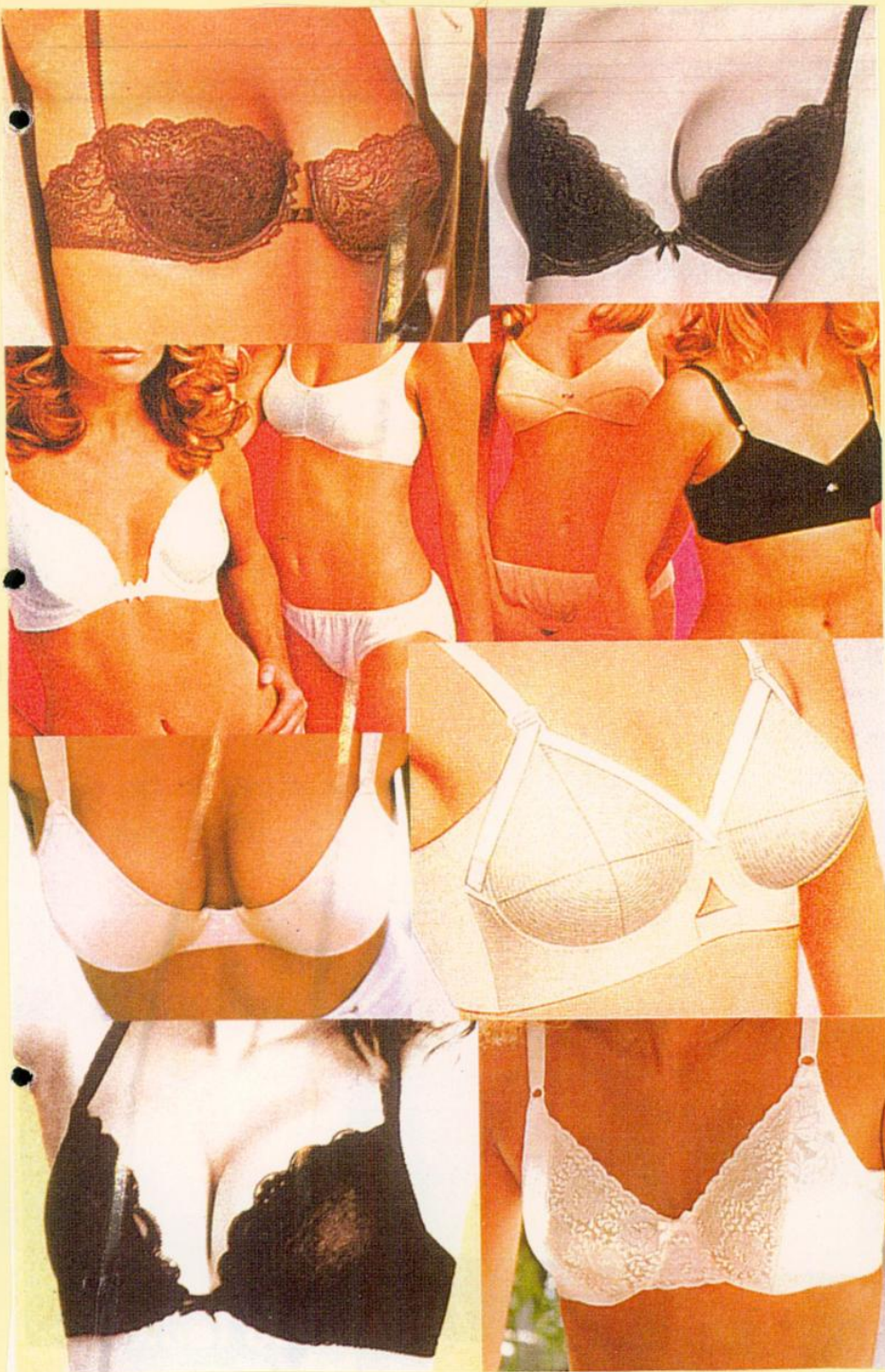


Fig 68



Fig 23.



Fig 24

*Why choose  
between beauty  
and comfort?*

*I don't.*



The attractive new range of Cross Your Heart bras combine natural shaping with gentle support to help you look and feel your best all day long. And to achieve your perfect look make sure you're correctly fitted. You can

New  
*Playtex*  
**Cross Your Heart®**

rely on us to make sure you really do see the difference with Cross Your Heart or we'll give you your money back. For more information on your nearest stockist call freephone 0800 374 282.



Viscose, Viloft-viscose, derived from wood pulp and first developed in 1889, was the earliest man made fibre. Viloft is a form of viscose fibre created by Courtaulds and is widely used today, especially in underwear and thermal undergarments. It is breathable and antistatic and its structure as a fabric traps air to protect and insulate against cold. It works better when blended with other fibres. (Foxe, Irish Times, Aug 19, 1996).

Then there is also Polyester/Coolmax, Tyvek, Sympatex, Supplex and Goretex, amongst many other further fibre developments into fabrics (i.e. by Du Pont, Tactel Aquator, Tactel Micro and Tactel Diabolo).

Contouring and control are important elements in underwear and have been for a number of years. A toned stomach, firmer bottom and slimmer thighs would be most women's greatest wish (fig 63). Fashion at the moment is quite figured and draws attention to the shape of the body - with tailored jackets and hipster trousers, for example. The female figure has changed over the past number of years due to changes in diet and the pill, therefore the areas in need of support and control have needed to be reconsidered. A 1996 Vogue article reports that corsetry and bustiers are coming back into fashion in both underwear and outerwear. You can now change your shape much easier and faster with underwear than with exercise, especially with the development of the new microfibres. Underwear is now being created like a "second skin" (fig 22), without seeming but with silk soft support. An example of this is "Warners Nudes", designed to flatter every body like a second skin" (Ad in Vogue Dec'96).

The Warner's products are available in bras, briefs and bodies. Then there is also Prima Donna's All-In-One body from Ribgy and Peller. As well as developments in containing underwear like control briefs by Playtex and of course the Wonderbra and Ultrabra (figs 23 and 24).

I decided to have a look in the shops and see what was available and what it did. Marks and Spencer's was just one of the fashion stores I found to be using these new fabrics in corsetry (fig 25) having read an article in the Evening Herald (Dec 2 1996). I decided to try some of these garments on to see how the structure, support and control compared with that of boned corsets. All the Marks & Spencer corset/bodies stated that they were underwear to be worn as outerwear.



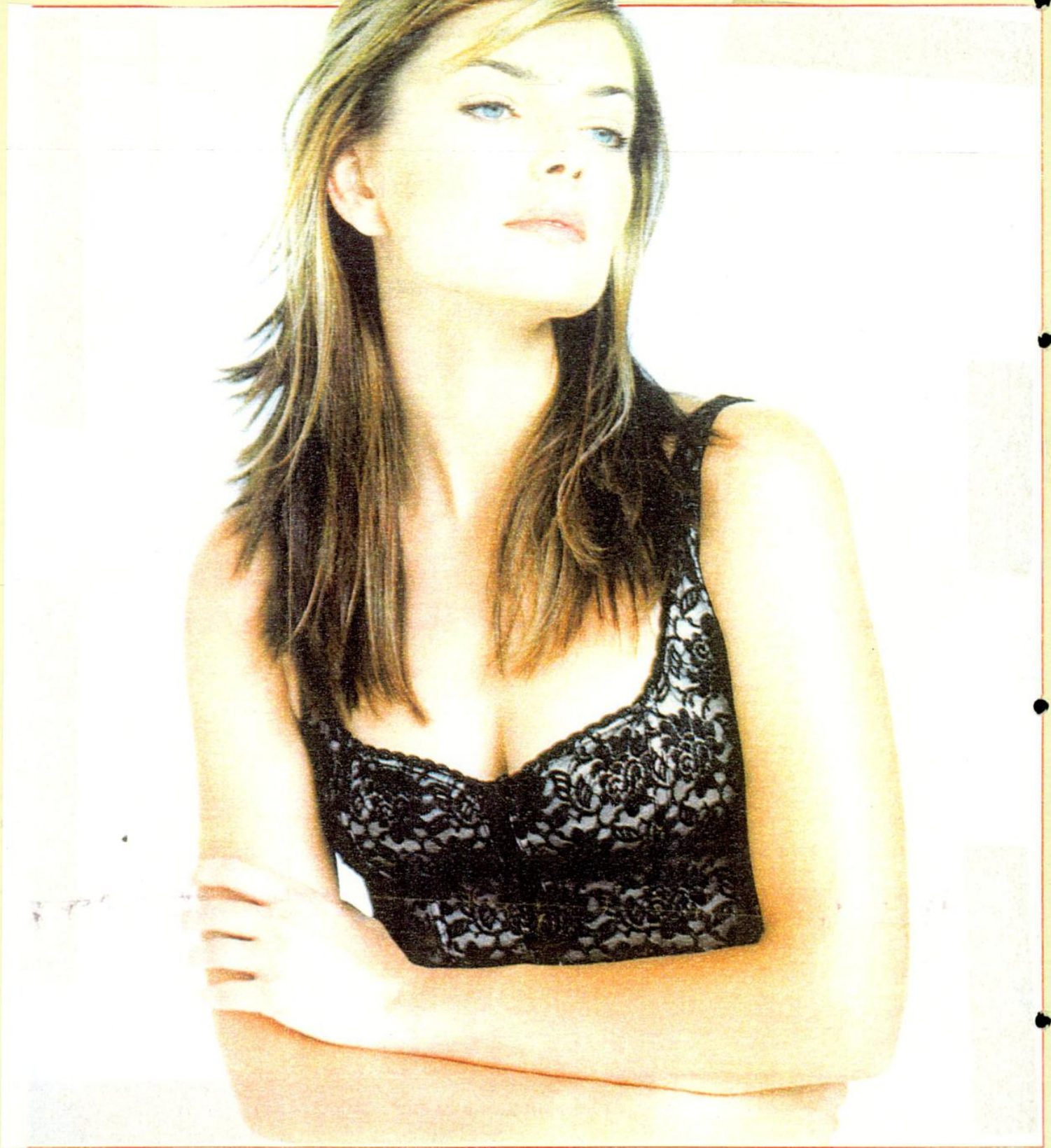


Fig 25.



The first I tried on was a "Black Velour Bodice" in Size 8,

Fabric Content: 92% Polyamide  
4% Elastane (Lycra)  
4% Metallised fibres  
1% Polyester

This bodice looked great as a top, was very elegant with its velvet finish and it was supportive because of the lycra in it. As far as control is concerned it would not conceal any unwanted bulges. The Lycra was quite stretched in the fabric and because of the low lycra content, 4%, was not very controlling. The lycra was knitted into the garment horizontally. Maybe if it had have been woven with Lycra in both the warp and weft, a more controlling fabric would have been made. This bodice only came to above the waist so the areas that is supported would have been the bust and the ribs, for the stomach it held no support and I felt like I had been cut in half, my lower half felt uncovered and my waist was left vulnerable.

The next garment I tried was "The Gardenia Lace Bodice" Size 8,

Fabric Content: 90% Polyamide  
4% Elastane (Lycra)

This was another wonderful looking bodice of a crochet appearance, with a dipped front at the waistline. The handle of the fabric was wonderful with a good recovery. This bodice also held good support, better than the Velour bodice because of the extra 6% lycra but again the lycra was spread too fine in a crochet type fabric, I was satisfied with the length of this bodice as it sat below the waistline and supported the bust and waist. If I hadn't have worn a bra this bodice would not have pushed the bust up, in fact it flattened it due to the lycra being a main ingredient in the whole fabric and not in areas of the bodice. This garment was put on over the head, as was the last one so by continuous wear the elastic quality would probably break down, if a zip fastening was used it would work much better.



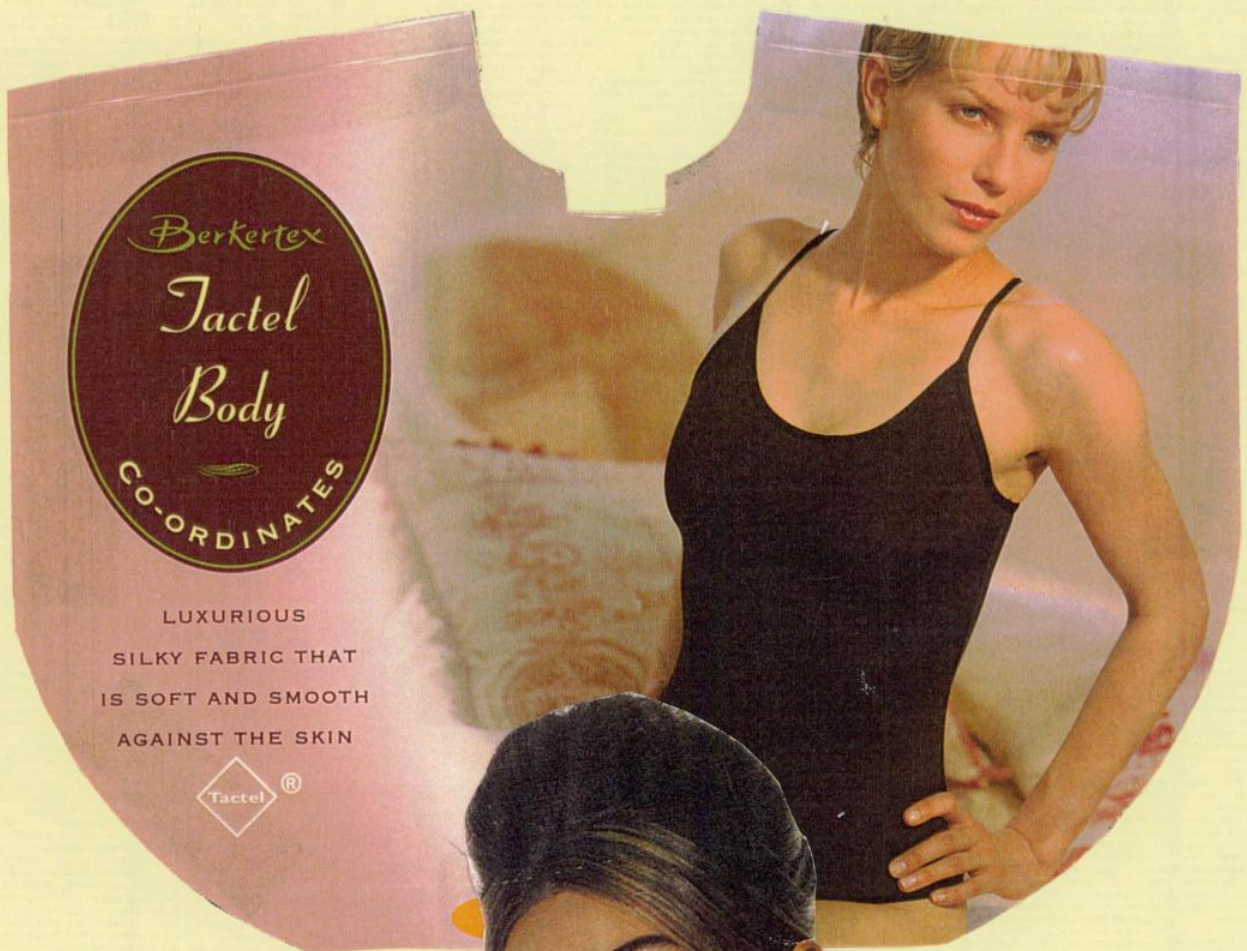


Fig 26.



Fig 28



The Satin Trimmed Velour Bodice, size 8,

Fabric Content: 96% Polyamide  
4% Elastane (Lycra)

This bodice was constructed of Lycra in the same way as the "Black Velour Bodice" the lycra was knitted in all over, so it didn't give specific support to a particular area, but gave medium support all over. The fabric was sewn in panels that were trimmed at the edges with satin, this paneling gives the bodice the shape desired as it follows all the contours of the body. This garment was not a control garment but was very supportive and comfortable to wear as a top.

"Satin Trimmed Velour and Boned", Size 8,

Fabric Content: 84% Polyamide  
12% Elastane (Lycra)  
2% Viscose  
1% Polyester  
1% Cotton

This bodice was boned so it contoured the body perfectly and controlled the figure well. The bones sat in between each panel of fabric securely and backed by another fabric which gives an extra strength to the garment. This seaming around the boning makes the fabric taut and created a push up effect under the bust as well as keeping the stomach flat. This bodice felt wonderful to wear and the fabric held good recovery because of the 12% Elastane, the extra elastane in this garment was evident in the control it provided.

I then picked up a piece of underwear designed purposely to "Flatten the tummy and slim the hips" it is called "Smoothlines Camisole Sensitive with Lycra".

Light Control

Fabric Content: 72% Polyamide  
28% Elastane (Lycra)

Although the fabric content in this garment stated 28% Elastane I didn't find that it supported the tummy or slimmed the thighs successfully. The fabric was woven quite fine and was of one layer only to create a second skin appearance, so the extra support of the second fabric was missing badly for control purposes. This garment only had seams at the sides so the same tension was not put on the fabric as had been in the other bodices I tried on. So from my first experience trying on bodices in Marks and Spencer's I have decided that control does not only depend on the fabric content that is used in control underwear - the way the garment is cut and put together is a very important aspect in creating control for specific areas.

All these garments I tried on in Marks & Spencers were priced at under £20.







Brown Thomas was the next store I went in search of the perfect corset. I headed straight for Vivienne Westwoods section and there I found a boned black taffeta corset, Size 10 (fig 64)

Fabric Content: 87% Polyamide  
13% Elastane (Lycra)

This corset had a scooped out neck with a zip at the back, which meant that you encased yourself in this wonderful structure. As I zipped up my whole body straightened, I felt completely supported and body hugged, I even thought I felt taller than I usually am ! This corset held both the back and the front of the body in parallels, supporting the abdomen, waist and bust like nothing I have ever felt before. The illusive quality of the fabric made the outside of the corset look soft and unstructured whereas on the inside there was a scaffolding of boning stitched onto fabric in diagonals towards a central point at the waist. The boning was set between two layers of fabric, tightly sewn at either side creating tension. The placement of the boning caused the bust to push up at the top of the corset and gave the appearance of a straight line down over the stomach. The corset was extremely comfortable. I moved around in this corset to see how much flexibility I had, I felt like keeping erect most of the time and when I bent over I bent from my waist down, my back did not curve. My tummy felt supported even as I bent forward. Movement would be restricted in this corset but at £595 I don't think I would be wearing it as an everyday item of clothing. This corset would be perfect on top of an elegant skirt to be worn as evening wear.

The underwear department in Brown Thomas also had some wonderful looking corsets. I tried a Warner's corset, it was boned and had a zip fastening at the back, this corset could easily be worn as outerwear and held the body in great shape, the boning I have found is a very important part of control and support in corsetry, as it stabilises and controls the movement of the flesh beneath it. The price of this corset is £38.00 and was also double layered in fabric around the boning. The boning was again diagonal but there wasn't as much of it as in the Westwood corset and the bones were not as wide either, the Westwood corset worked better because of this as well as having 13% elastane in its fabric content. The Westwood corset had the Elastane woven into the inner fabric causing control and support around the body as Christian Dior had done in his "New Look" gowns of the 40's, (Fig 27) the boning was structured the same way.





An inside view of a 1955 cherry-coloured faille dress complete with bustier. Fig 27



Other garments I tried were the Malizia Body (of La Perla group).

Fabric Content: 60% Polyamide  
10% Cotton  
10% Rubber  
10% Spandex  
5% Polyethylene  
5% Acetate

The controlling fibres in this would be the cotton, rubber and spandex primarily, this body was stitched like a corset so it contoured the body well and had a lovely fit. A row of stitching ran horizontal under the bust creating support and lift and the fabric was fibre blended well that it held the stomach flat. The acetate was used as an aesthetic feature to create a shiney effect under the light.

I also tried on Gossard and other undergarments also in Brown Thomas but the items I have mentioned are the ones that impressed me the most.



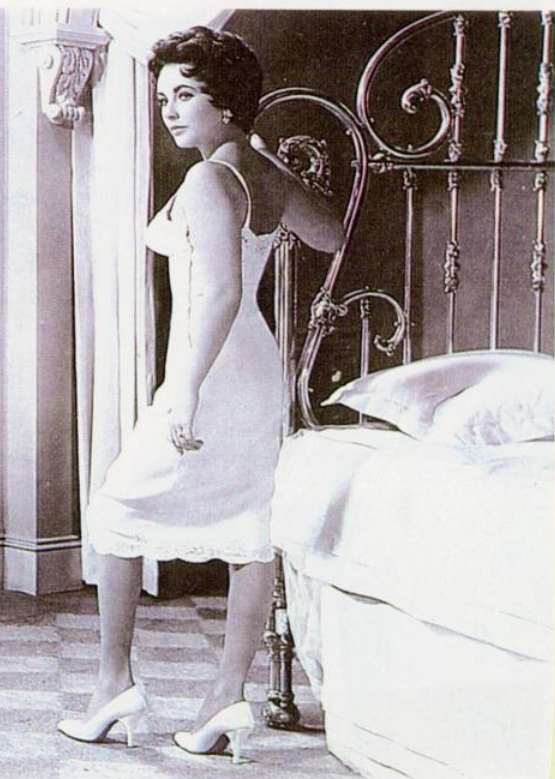


Fig 29.



Fig  
31

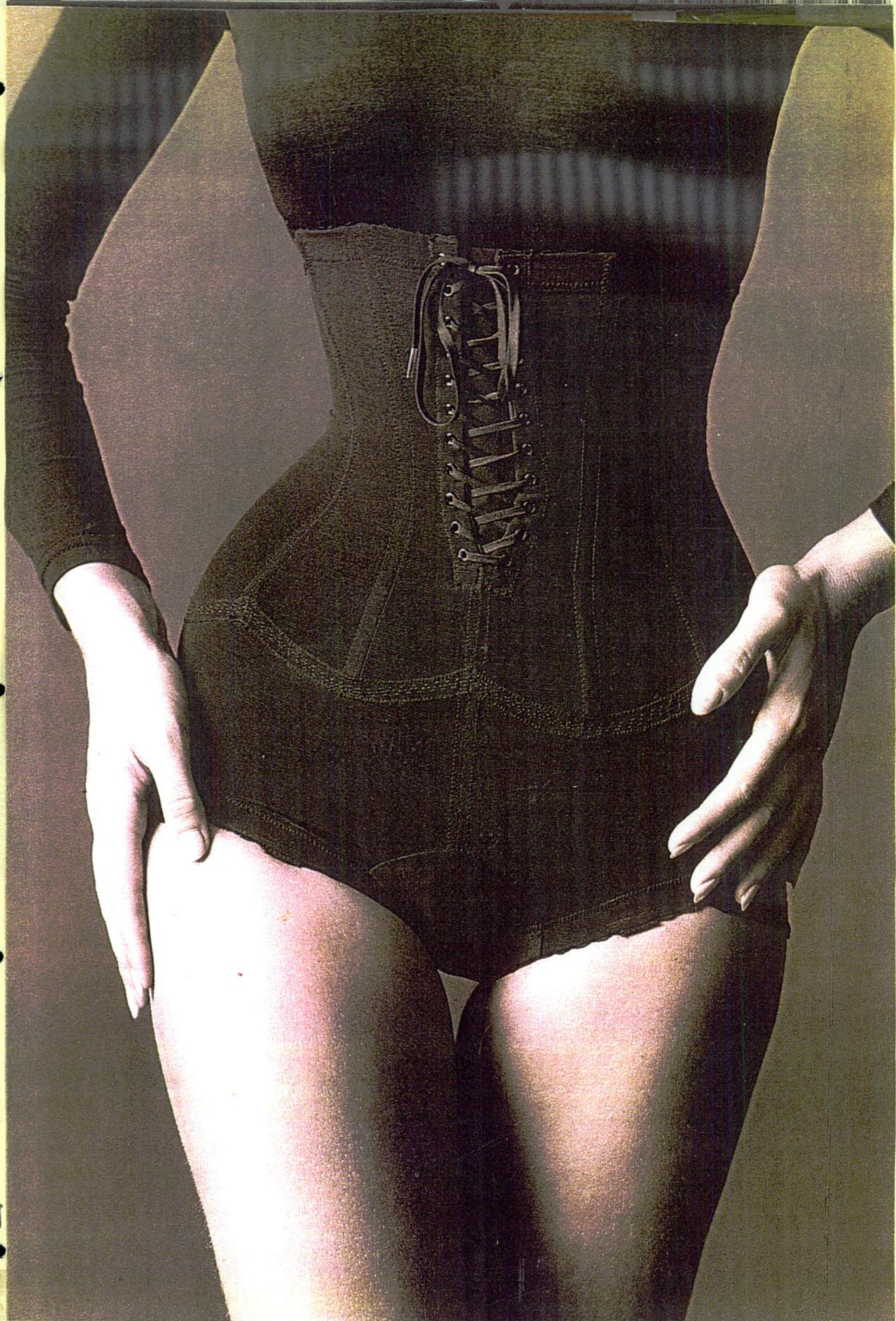


Fig 31





Fig  
32



### Chapter 3: Underwear as Outerwear: Corsets on the Catwalk

Elastic fabrics and lycra (fig 29) allowed for simpler designing in underwear. Although they were initially designed for use in undergarments, both Lycra and elastic have had great impact on the design of outerwear (fig 31).

Dior (fig 27) had great impact on putting forth the corset as something worn on the outside. his dresses during the "New Look" period in 1947 display a collection of corseted gowns that portrayed a tiny waist (fig 30) and protruded breasts. Warner's "Merry Widow" (fig 20) of 1952 was also worn on the outside, a beautifully figured corset and made with such detail that it shouldn't be hidden. The "Merry Widow" has been revived in the early '90's (fig 28) by Josie Natori in lace with velvet appliqué and jet beading. Dancewear also uses corsetry in its costumes and made them highly visible on the outside for stagewear.

Advertising had a lot to do with making it acceptable to view women, in little or not clothing and in the 1960's lightly clad women put themselves further into the limelight by exposing themselves in their underwear to the advertisements and fashion pages of magazines, women were breaking free of men's shackles and started making statements about their sexuality and equality. (Carter 1992, p108).

By the mid-sixties stretch panties (fig 31) and corsets were considered to be of orthopedic use only. At the end of the sixties underwear evoked the "nude look" and went more for the natural approach. Underwear had been reduced to a purely functional role, so it is hardly surprising that decoration moved into outerwear. (Laurent 1986, p231).

By 1972 it was evident that the fashion world had been shaken more in the recent years than it had been in the whole of the latter half of the century. One trend remained constant throughout and remained constant in the '70's, the rejection of any move to abolish the sexual symbolism of clothes. Women wanted their bodies to be recognised as very different from men's.

By 1985 underwear was being designed as a complementary part of clothes as the 1980's had seen women freed of strict dress rules. Underwear was sometimes designed to match clothes for outerwear. Where a gingham suit was shown in a magazine the model might also have a matching gingham bra and panties. (Laurent 1986, p261) (fig 32).





Fig 33

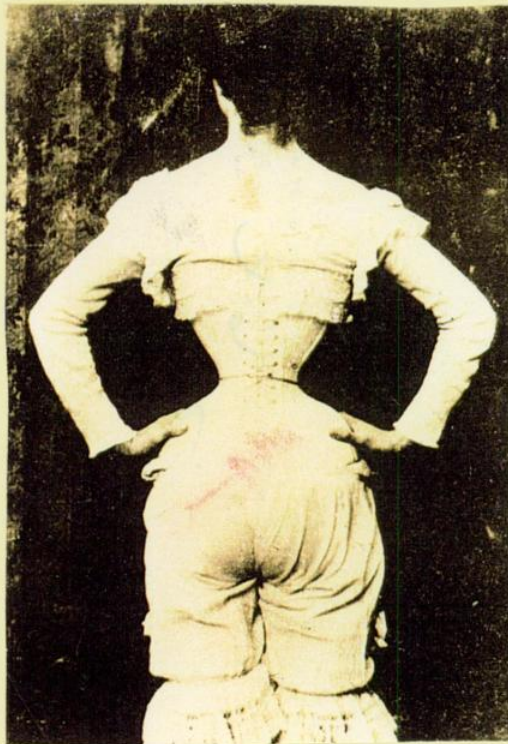


Fig 62



Jean Paul Gaultier has mastered the recasting of lingerie as something close to sportswear. There's no better place to bring it out in the open than onstage. Here, Madonna struts Gaultier's stuff during her summer 1990 Blond Ambition tour.

A full-page photograph of Madonna performing on stage. She is wearing a black corset-style top with multiple straps, a black top hat, and black fishnet stockings with black knee-high boots. She is holding a microphone and has a confident, strutting pose. The background is dark with a blue spotlight effect.

# out





fig 38

Fig. 38. Corset, 1910. The corset is made of black silk and is fastened with a row of metal buckles down the center. The corset is shown on a mannequin.

Fig. 38. Corset, 1910. The corset is made of black silk and is fastened with a row of metal buckles down the center. The corset is shown on a mannequin.



In the 80's Vivienne Westwood took the idea further and put the corset on catwalks as outerwear (fig 33). Exploring the forbidden, she was influenced by eighteenth century stays. Westwoods corsets are visually very powerful, (fig 37). Without all the pain and structuring of the eighteenth century type, her corsets use zips to fasten them instead of lacing (fig 53). Pearl, a New York based corset designer, describes Vivienne Westwood's corsets

"They are plastic and quite lightweight so they appeal to a younger way of thinking about comfort. They don't lace up, they just zip up" (Steele 1996, P86).

For a lot of other designers it is the method of fastening, namely lacing that has attracted them to the use of corsets in their collections (fig 34). Jean Paul Gaultiers fascination with corsets was probably one of the main breakthroughs for corsets in the '80's. Gaultier is notorious for having designed the shocking, soft, boudoir pink satin laced up corset (fig 36) for Madonna's world tour in the late '80's, Madonna gave the corset attitude and she gave her clones inspiration to wear them. In her "Blond Ambition" tour she wore a corset also, (fig 35) laced from breast to crotch with breast cones. This corset had been inspired by a dress Gaultier had designed with six inch velvet breast cones. Gaultiers perfume is also bottled in a corset shaped bottle, like one of this corsets. He has also designed a variety of jackets that are unisex and lace up like corsets (Steele 1996, p88).

Designers are pursuing a look that conveys elements of bedroom privacy and they are putting them into the public's face via the catwalk.

The corset, (fig 38) was one of the first items of clothing to be considered a fetish, with its tight lacing causing bulging breasts and a curvaceous figure. Tight lacing also subjected a great vulnerability on the state of the person wearing it, as it inhibits naturally breathing and movement. (Steel 1996, p76).

Used in fashion for several purposes, the corset has been considered a method of producing an aesthetic ideal and making the body conform to the perfect shape (fig 39). The corset is also considered to be the epitome of femininity. Fetism and the creation of erotic discomfort (fig 40) is another fascination that comes with the corset.





Fig 36





Fig 39





Fig 40

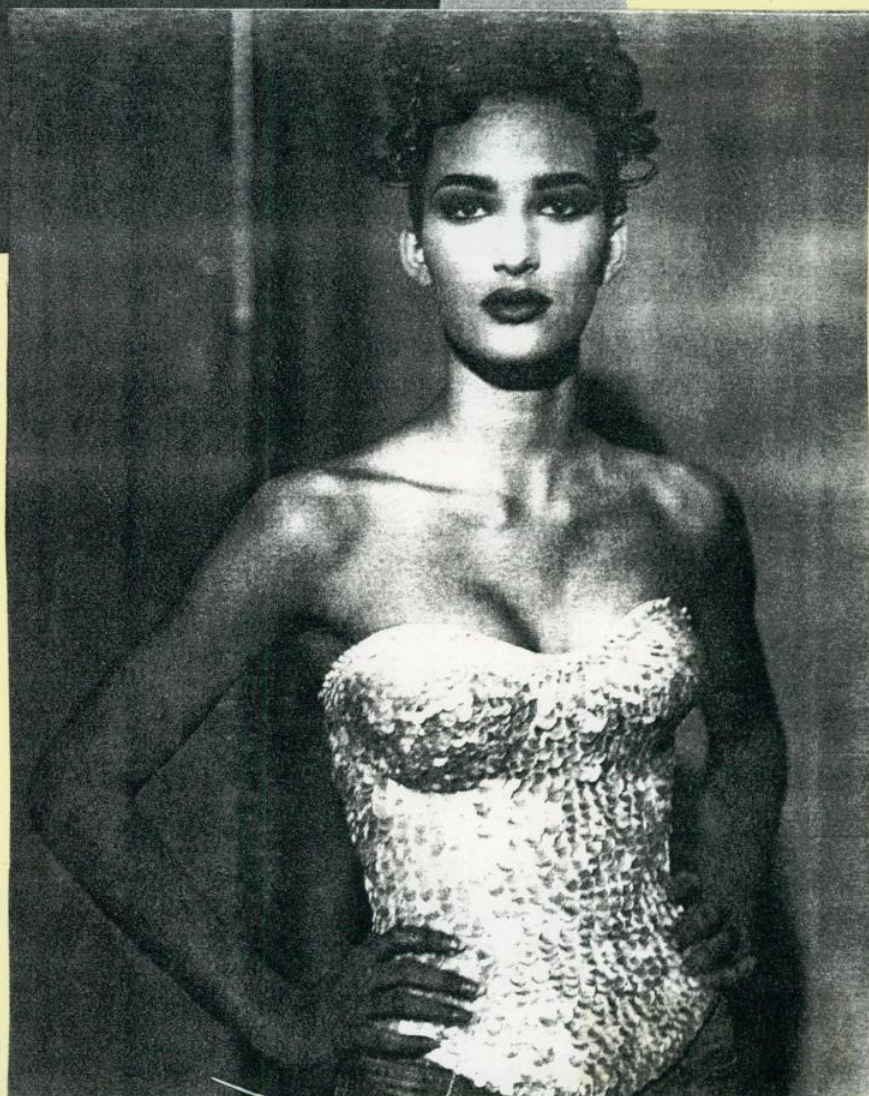
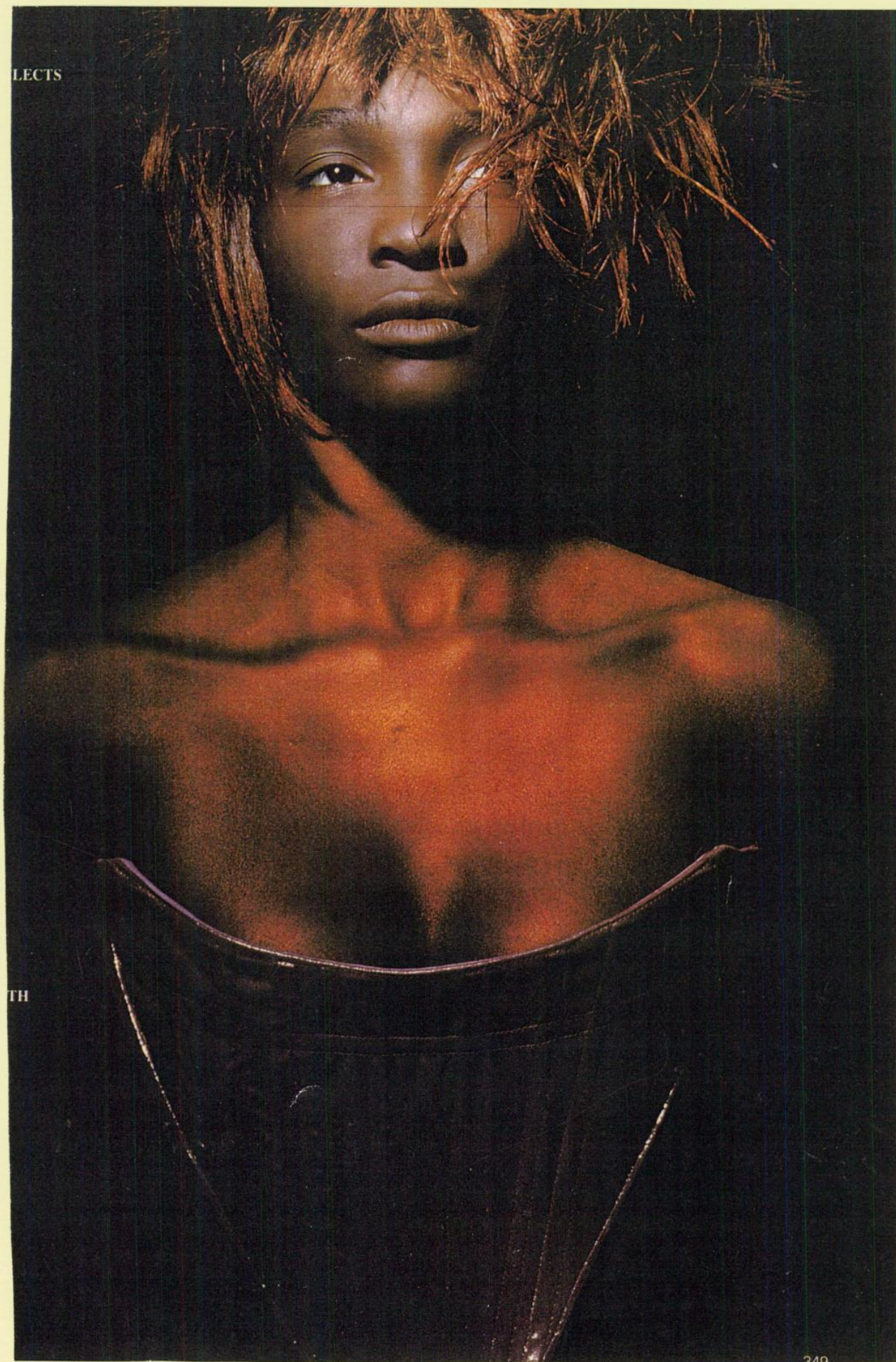


Fig 51



LECTS



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Fig 53.





Fig 54



Now in the 1990s' it appears that the right balance has been struck. The corset has come out of the closet of pornography and it has kept its sensual appeal, yet has become wholesome and healthy, in its open sexuality. The new style of corsets are made to fit you, and not for you to fit into them, they are not designed to constrict the rib cage or create impossibly small waists, but to create an element of allure, and wonder. These corsets have the most erotic impact when worn as outerwear.

A corset revolution came about again in 1991 with designers such as Thierry Mugler (fig 41) Helen Storey, Vivienne Westwood (fig 37) and Jean Paul Gaultier all showing collections on women in the trappings of corsetry.

Azzadine Alaia, (fig 42) a Tunisian born designer who works in Paris, showed leopard skin patterned corsets and stockings in his 1991 collection. In 1992, he created very beautiful leather corsets in dusty reds and rose shades, the accessories he designed, such as little bags were also shaped like corsets.

1994 showed exquisite fabrics constructed into wonderful corsets (fig 43). Soft pinks, rose reds and black brocades (fig 54) were the choice of fabrics by Christian Lacroix, Martine Sitbon, Ines de la Fressange, Valentino and Cadolle, Vivienne Westwood produced a long sleeved corset in white, printed on the front with a rose. This corset would look well with jeans and is casual enough to be worn as daywear, yet the corset holds an elegance worthy of a ballgown.

Style magazine of the Sunday Times (5th February 1995) devotes the centre page to an article on corsetry called "Breathtaking" (fig 44). The article mentions Lagerfeld (fig 55), Versace and Lacroix as having featured corsets in their couture shows. The main photograph is of an embroidered cotton bodice from Versace (fig 44) that is elegantly detailed with yellow, pink and blue flowers and is shown with lycra hot pants with printed flowers also in the same colours. the model is fully made up with her nails painted and her hair perfect which would also suggest that she is dressed to go out.

The 12th of November issue of the same magazine incorporates surgical fetishism into an article (p13). Shown is a corset designed by Hussein Chalayan, worn with a mini skirt (fig 45).





Fig 37





Fig 41.



Fig 42





Christian Lacroix



Vivienne Westwood



Severin



Inès de La Fressange



Cadolle



Cadolle



Valentino

With fashion's return to shapelier silhouettes, designers are throwing some extra curves with corsets



Martine Sitbon

VOGUE MAY 1994

Fig 43



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Fig  
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Dan  
e 3.

Fig  
44



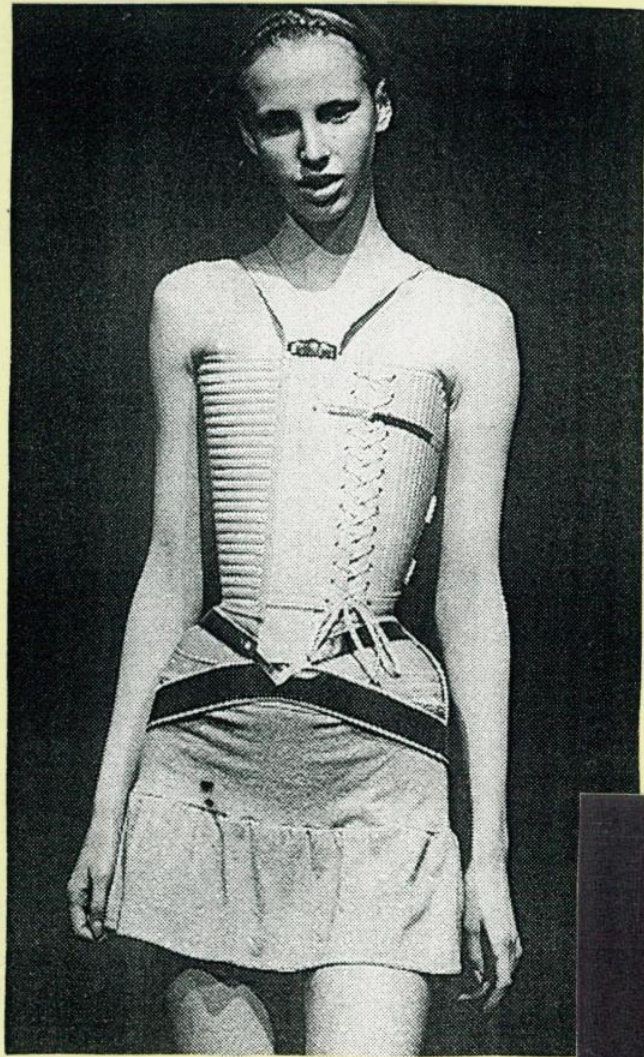


Fig 45



Fig 55



An article in Vogue (September 1996) says that

“Lingerie is turning up on everything from Courtney Love to couture runways”(Hume Sept ‘96, Vogue, P236).

This article also discusses whether the “near-naked” trend may have gone too far in the lifestyle of the working women of today. Gianni Versace proclaims that as evening wear

“The corset reigns supreme, it waves the banner of femininity” (fig 46) (Stylissimo MTV earlier in 1996).

Evening wear took off in the bare minimum of fabrics, styled into figure hugging corsetry. Cosmopolitan (December 1996) uncovers the secrets of great cleavage in an article entitled “Raise your Profile”. Cleavage is the big hit of the ‘90’s and with role models like Eva Herzigova and Liz Hurley the everyday fashion conscious want a piece of the action. Underwear has provided for the craze with the Ultrabra, Wonderbra and the Balcony Bra, but designers (fig 58) have also jumped on the bandwagon by introducing inner boning (fig 56 & 57) and padding into their garments for automatic cleavage. Dolce and Gabbana and Versace have included an underwired bra top to their dresses and Vivienne Westwood’s evening corsets are boned to give the bust a boost (Deed1996, p203).

Club Culture is seeing underwear on the dancefloor as “Clubwear” with the dance craze and ecstasy boom, the heat factor in night clubs is calling for less and less clothing to be worn. On an occasion in Dublin’s POD Dance Club I counted as many as eight corset type tops, one of which was a Gaultier Jeans corset in a clubby orange colour with blue denim also.

Body confidence is high in the ‘90’s with the influx of gyms and work out machines as well as cosmetic surgery and body sculpture, giving the public all the more reason to display the wonderful bodices that have all worked so hard for. (fig 65).





Jean Paul Gaultier



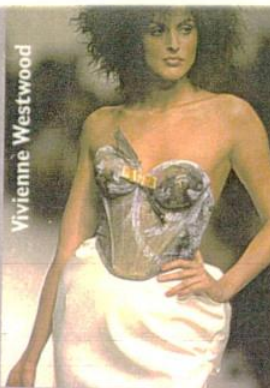
Donna Karan



John Galliano

Dolce & Gabbana

Vivienne Westwood



Giorgio Armani

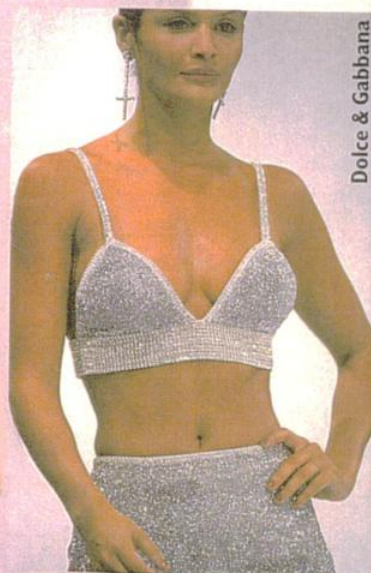
Salvatore Ferragamo



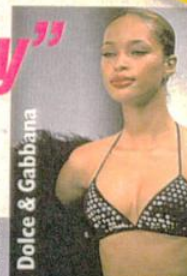
**"The corset reigns supreme: it waves the banner of femininity"**

GIANNI VERSACE

*Evening's sexiest accessory - the band minimum*



Dolce & Gabbana



Christian Lacroix



Christian Dior

Versus







Fig  
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Fig  
56





DOLCE & GABBANA  
*Parfum*

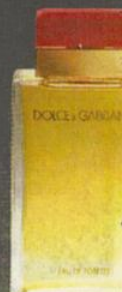


Fig 57.



## McQUEEN

This page: devoré s  
order by Alexander  
McQueen. Corset to  
Angels & Bermans. S  
feather necklace (£2  
Eric Halley

## DOLCE & GABBAN

Opposite: chiffon sk  
camisole (£930 for  
both by Dolce & Gab  
Tights (£14) by Wolf  
For stockists,  
see Shopping Guide

All pictures were sh  
Studio Rouchon, 36  
fer à Moulin, 75005  
tel (00 33 1) 43 37  
Contact Mike or Pat  
further assistance

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situated in a beaut  
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SWIMSUIT, BELOW, £340,  
GIANFRANCO FERRE.  
NYLON/ELASTIC BIKINI,  
OPPOSITE, £100, AND SHEER  
NYLON DRESS, FROM A  
SELECTION, BOTH GENNY;  
SUNGLASSES, FROM A  
SELECTION, GIANFRANCO  
FERRE; STRAPPY LEATHER  
STILETTOS, STUART WEITZMAN  
(A SELECTION OF STUART  
WEITZMAN SHOES ARE  
AVAILABLE AT RUSSELL  
& BROMLEY). SEE DIRECTORY  
FOR STOCKIST DETAILS





### **Tight-lacing today:**

Pearl, a New York based designer, devotee of the discipline of tight lacing (fig 47) has a 19 inch waist. He sleeps in his corset and proudly boasts that "a good corset can reduce you waist by six to eight inches (Mulvagh, 1992) (fig 59).

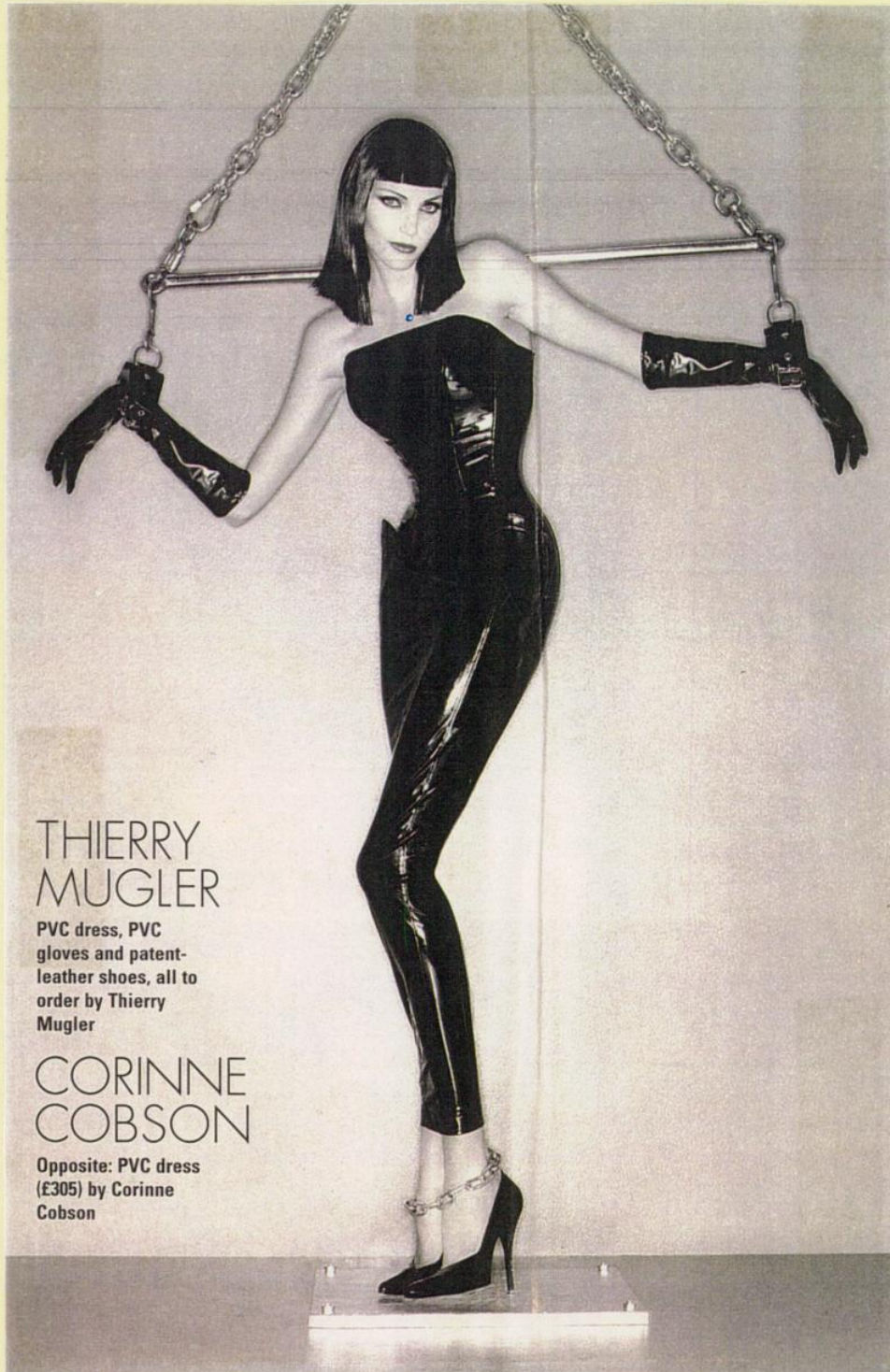
Pearl grew up in South Africa although his parents were British. He became obsessed by the ballet and began to train as a dancer, which then led into designing ballet costumes and sets. In 1981 he emigrated to Britain where he worked as a wardrobe supervisor for one of London's best theatrical costumes and later he moved on to Covent Garden to dress divas such as Jessye Norman. He now cinches and laces stars of clubland, catwalk and celluloid into dramatically artificial shapes (fig 59). Most of Pearl's clients are interested in the more dramatic style of dress whether they are involved in theatre or not. Rifat Ozbek and Thierry Mugler (fig 49) have both had Pearl work for them and he also regularly dresses members of urban subculture including Suzanne Bartsch (New York's reigning nightclub queen) Cher and Grace Jones. His customers are extremists as are his corsets Pearl explains:

"Its best if you tighten the laces at least three times before going out so the organs have chance to be displaced, to move around" (Mulvagh 1992) (fig 52).

For Pearl tight-lacing is all about control and discipline, he likes the feeling of restriction. Pearl speaks of both clients and friends he is acquainted with for their tight-lacing interests. One woman has "trained her 17inch waist by sleeping in a tight steel belt, she also exercises in her corset. Another middle aged housewife can lace as small as 15 inches. This woman is 5 feet 6 inches tall and she wears her corset twenty four hours a day, only taking it off to bathe. X-rays have shown a modification of her lower ribs and a possible lengthening of her spine especially the space between her spinal rings. Her husband, a surgeon, has encouraged her to wear corsets because he enjoys the visual appearance of them and the way they enhance the figure. He also finds it sexually stimulating although his wife who wears them says that she doesn't "get any great sensual feeling from wearing a corset" (Steele 1996 p85).

A twenty seven year old called Lauren (fig 52) wears a 19 inch corset. She says that she likes the way it feels and says that its like "Someone is holding me" she insists that she wears it for herself and not for her partner. Lauren compares tight-lacing to Ballet and says "Ballet is culturally accepted and corsets aren't, but in both cases you train the body. Ballet is hard on the feet but the result is accepted as being beautiful, she also says that tight-lacing, like ballet is "about strength and grace, its feminine and very strong". (Steele 1996 P86)





THIERRY  
MUGLER

PVC dress, PVC  
gloves and patent-  
leather shoes, all to  
order by Thierry  
Mugler

CORINNE  
COBSON

Opposite: PVC dress  
(£305) by Corinne  
Cobson

Fig 49



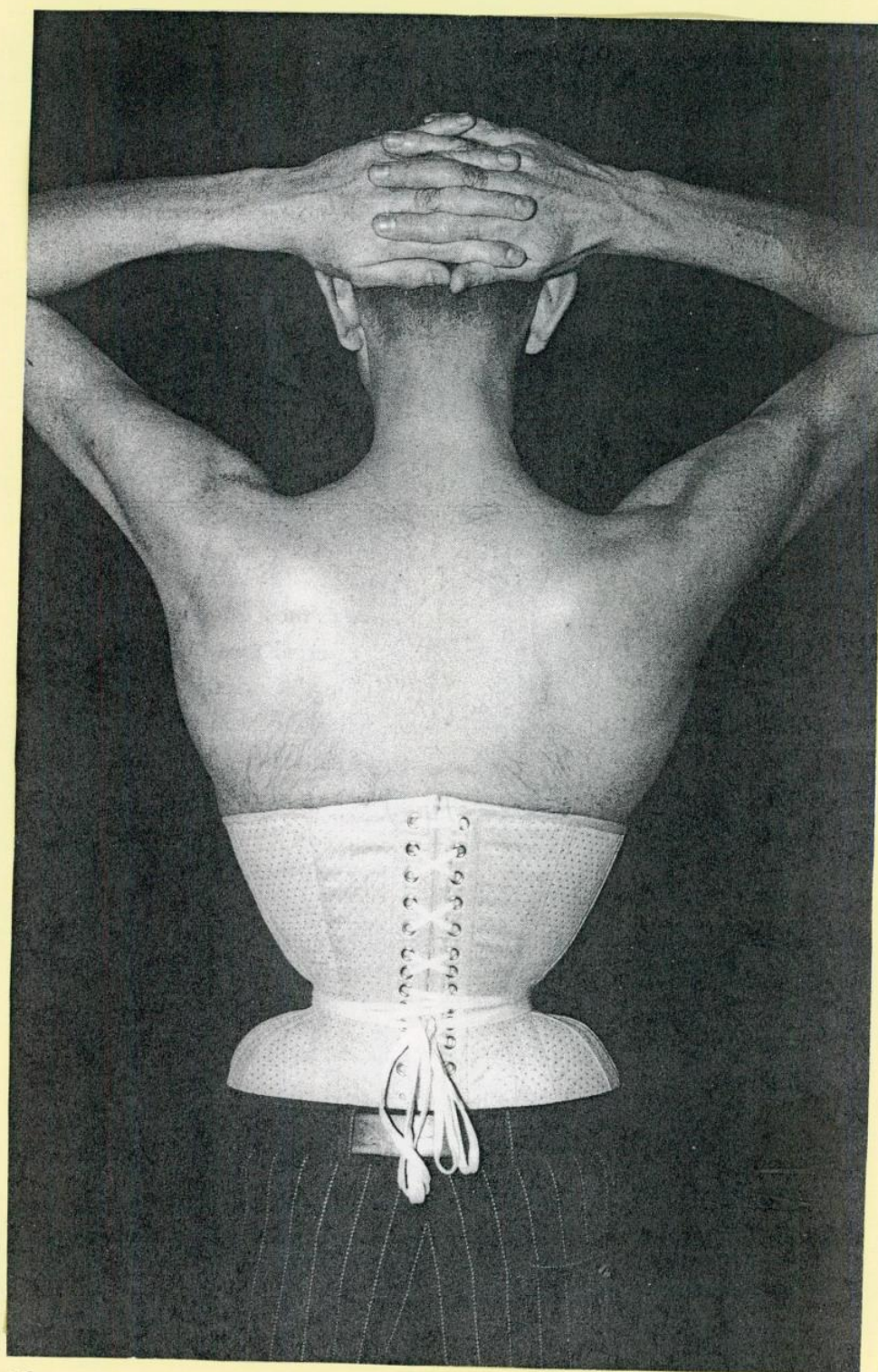


Fig 47.



Black silk and satin jet-embroidered corsetted bodice by Pearl; black glitter knickers by Agent Provocateur



Fig 59





Fig 60





Fig 61  
61.



Lauren says tight-lacing should be done in a healthy way and the body should be allowed adjust. When she is asked what she feels about the new fashion corsets she says she wants to say "please, this is a lifestyle, not a fashion, but its worth it if someone comes to a better understanding about corsets" (Steele 1996, p86).

As fashion's emphasis has shifted towards the well defined body shape, the world of corsetry has been raised from the dead. Well know corsetieres are providing lavish corsets for the showbiz world and even the mass-market manufacturers are contour shaping their popular lines.

Such mass-market manufacturers as Gossard and Triumph and La Perla (fig 60) have been swayed with demands for padded and underwired (fig 61) underwear. In underwear retail outlets like Knickerbox and Marks & Spencer's (fig 25), there has been a notable increase in padded bras and corset style underwear. Of course corsetry is big business in eveningwear, for ballgowns and social events. It is very big in couture and in all the major events. Magazines capture some of the biggest names in waist slimming, bust contouring corset style dresses designed by some of the top couture designers (fig 66).





Fig 52





Fig  
66.

Fig  
66.



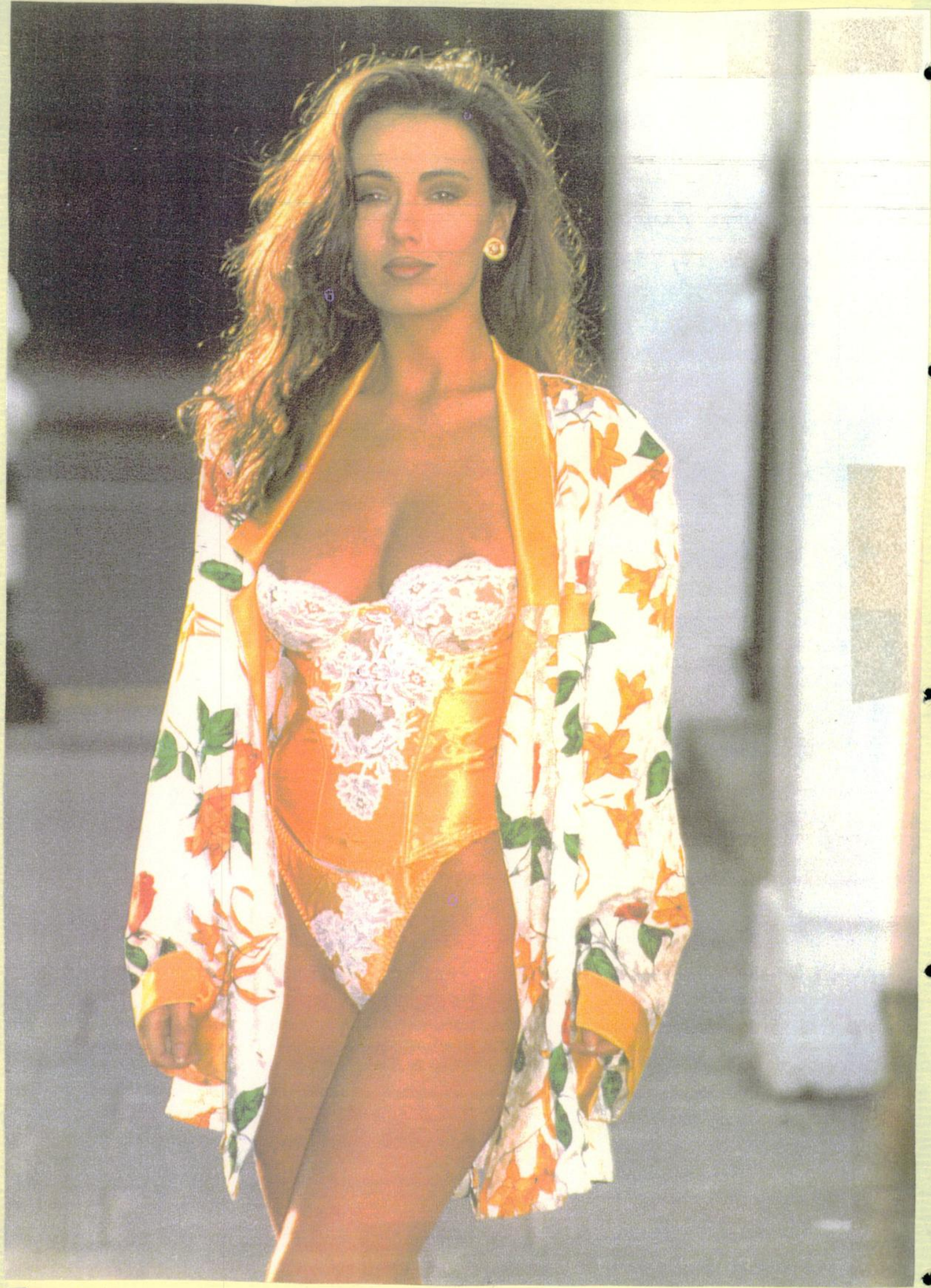


Fig 63



## **Conclusion:**

This thesis has dealt with corsets of varying forms, fabrics and structures and their development throughout the 1800's and 1900's as controlwear in undergarments and outerwear.

Technological advances in fibre construction have led to the production of lighter, more comfortable corsets, even if they are boned. The fabrics now work with the boning to create the desired effect of a toned body with a great cleavage, quicker and better than months of working out.

I have examined the corset and why it existed and how fabrics and fastenings were developed to prolong its lifespan, durability and to keep it in vogue centuries later. I admire the designers who are inspired by corsetry and who have developed it as outerwear and the individuals who choose to wear them and have succumbed to its restrictions for personal gratification and external appearance.

Now that corsetry has been designed and developed as outerwear it is almost impossible to define what is underwear and what is outerwear. In some shops they even advertise corsetry as "underwear to be worn on the outside".

The nineties have seen the sales of underwear soar no end, due to the emphasis on the beautiful perfect body, the ideal and the need to feel confident yet seductive at the same time.

For me, corsetry is about how it makes me and my body feel, the closeness and intimacy of a corset has the power to make you feel confident secure and sexy. It makes sense to design outerwear that also contains that intimacy and ability to control the parts of the body that people want to keep hidden or disguised, whilst emphasising the parts that are pleasing to the eye.

Since writing this thesis , I found the perfect corset for me, it is not only boned, but it also tight-laces at the back for extra tension . When I wear it I feel extremely secure and strong yet feminine. Now, I admit to being a devotee of the discipline of corsetry and controlwear.





Fig 50



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