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NATIONAL COLLEGE OF ART AND DESIGN

4TH YEAR FASHION

BIBA - THE FASHION EMPORIUM

by

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Special thanks are extended to my Tutors and to the Library at the National College of Art and Design and also to the archives of the Victoria and Albert Museum, in London.

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INTRODUCTION

The Sixties and Seventies is a fascinating period that draws people's interest because of its exciting atmosphere of change and rebellion and call for freedom and liberation in all walks of life, but especially in the World of Fashion.

'**BIBA**' - The Fashion Emporium - a name synonymous with the Sixties - had a major impact on the life of the 'teenagers' of this era. Out went frumpy, expensive matronly clothes of cardigans and pearls and boring skirts and in came short skirts, jeans and T-shirts.

Part and parcel of this revolution was '**The BIBA Look.**' But why was '**BIBA**' such a success? How did '**BIBA**' compare with other Fashion Designers of this era, such as Mary Quant, Ozzie Clarke, Foale and Tuffin, and John Bates, all of whom helped to reshape the History of Fashion. And what influence did '**BIBA**' have on the World of Fashion today?

In a brief history of the rise and fall of '**BIBA**' I hope to convey the enthusiasm and excitement that greeted Barbara Hulanicki's designs for this 'dream generation' and her meteoric rise to fame as she and her husband, Stephen Fitz-Simon, started a small postal business which grew into a giant empire in Kensington High Street.

My research began in the Library of the National College of Art and Design with several books as sources of information, such as, 'Fashion in the Sixties' (1978) by Barbara Bernard, 'In Vogue, Sixty years of Celebrities and Fashion' (1975) by Georgina Howell, 'Couture to Chaos' (1976) by Robyn Healey and 'Women in

Fashion' (1991) by Valerie Steele. However, it was Barbara Hulanicki's own book 'From A to Biba' (1983) that conveyed a clear insight into her enormous talent for design along with her lack of business sense. Twiggy's autobiography, 'Twiggy in Black and White' (1997) has also given me a look into '**BIBA**' through the eyes of the 'Perfect **BIBA** Girl.'

I talked with friends and relations who were teenagers during this era. I wrote to 'Image Magazine,' Ireland's leading fashion magazine, and to Gerry Ryan on Radio 2 in order to research '**BIBA**'s' influence on Irish women but without success. I have also come across many difficulties in trying to find good picture of '**BIBA**' fashions as they are very scarce.

In order to 'tune in' with the thoughts and feelings of this remarkable designer |I spent some time in the archives of the Victoria and Albert Museum in London and here it was that I felt transported back in time to 'The Sixties.'

Barbara Hulanicki had an amazing gift for fashion and her endless energetic ability to make her fantasy become a reality emanated from her work, so much so that when I visited her work, now 30 years old, I felt a presence that enveloped me. While surrounded by all this '**BIBA**' nostalgia I felt carried along with Barbara Hulanicki's excitement and enthusiasm for her dream.

Absolutely everything, from the designs for the murals on the walls to the original photographs of The Rainbow Room were beautiful and exciting to see. I marvelled at

her energy and single-mindedness as she made her fantasy become a reality.

However, when I visited the present-day **'BIBA'** store in London it proved to be a huge let-down but the stark reality of this store today neither remotely reflected Barbara Hulanicki's vision of **'BIBA,'** nor did it diminish my admiration for this designer and her work.

'BIBA' Barbara Hulanicki's business may be dead but its spirit lives on in the fashions of today.

BIBA - FASHION EMPORIUM

CHAPTER 1

THE RISE AND FALL OF 'BIBA'

A '2 guinea' shirt and a friend on 'The Daily Express' was the beginning of, what was to become, a very large and successful Fashion Empire of the 60's and 70's. The name of this Fashion Empire was '**BIBA.**'

'**BIBA**' started life in the early 1960's as a postal boutique which Barbara Hulanicki and her husband, Stephen Fitz-Simon conceived. It was an 'attempt to cater for the mass teenage market' as Barbara Bernard puts it in her book 'Fashion in the 60's.' Although clothes were still relatively cheap, fashions were changing so quickly that many young people were unable to afford to keep up.

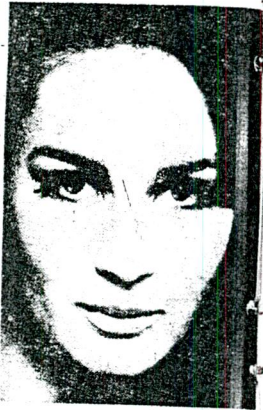
Barbara and Stephen's first venture was to advertise a shirt, priced at 2 guineas, in the 'Daily Express.' They expected an avalanche of orders but were rather disappointed when they only received 200. After a few unsuccessful attempts they began to feel that their new business venture was over before it had even begun.

Out of the blue, the Fashion Editor of the 'Daily Mirror' - Miss Felicity Green - contacted Barbara as she was writing an article, entitled, 'Four Girls prove that Beauty and Business Ideas can go together.' For this feature Miss Green asked Barbara to design a dress which was to be different and, most importantly, inexpensive.

This was to be the pink gingham dress - sleeveless and short with 2 darts - that started it all.

The dress that started it all

Love that beauty can go together



THIS IS MARIE LISE

OPENING A BOUTIQUE FOR VIGS AND PRETTY THINGS." iday of next week the ground floor of London's newest and most glamorous g establishments—it's five floors, so call it a salon—will be taken over by ... will be on sale? Shoes, scarves, belts, and handbags, all designed by the n boss herself. Also hair pieces de collaboration with her husband, wig- on Boyle. c people want pretty, individual things— too expensive, either," says Marie Lise. pieces, for instance, will start at 4 gns."



THIS IS BARBARA

NOW SHE'S A DRESS MANUFACTURER AS WELL AS A FASHION ARTIST. One of the most successful fashion artists in the business, Barbara went to a party in a long skirt she had made herself. A fashion editor saw it, adored it, and wanted a similar one for her readers. So Barbara got a friend in the cheaper end of the rag-trade to make it up in quantities at a next-to-nothing price. Hundreds of people sent for it. Now she designs specially for newspapers and magazines on a mail- order only basis. On the right a "Barbara" summer shift designed exclusively for Daily Mirror readers. For more about this, read on. . . .

.. and this is one of her designs. Interested? It can be yours for 25s including the kerchief

✿ If you're in the market for something cool and shifty . . . If you think gingham is an "in" fabric . . . If you like the idea of the headscarf to match . . . If you feel twenty-five bob isn't a fashion fortune—and it isn't . . . This is your dress, with its figure-skimming lines, softly rolling neckline and keyhole back. It has been designed and made specially for the Daily Mirror by Barbara Hulanicki. If you would like one, send 25s., plus 1s. 6d. for postage and packing, to Biba's Postal Boutique, 35, Oxford-street, London, W.1. In pink gingham. Sizes: 10, 12, 14.

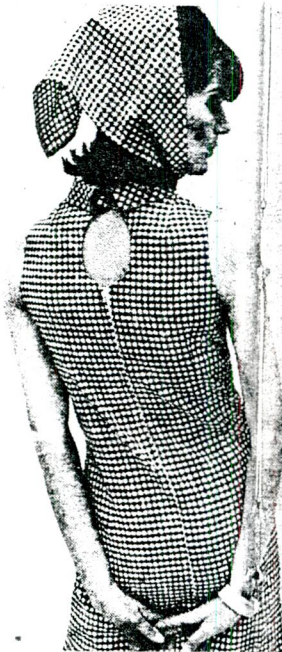


FIG.1

PINK GINGHAM DRESS

On the 5th May, 1964, the day after the feature appeared in the newspaper, four thousand postal orders arrived and the day after that another seven thousand. In total, 17,000 orders arrived and out of that, only 90 were returned.

A profit of 5 shillings was made on each dress. Success had finally arrived.

'BIBA' did not look back. Cathy McGowan - Queen of the Mods in the 60's, asked Barbara to design some clothes for her and as Cathy was the presenter of the increasingly popular T.V. Show 'Ready, Steady, Go' this was a great advertisement for **'BIBA.'**

Later, in 1964, the first **'BIBA'** Store opened in Abingdon Road in Kensington. The shop was an instant success.

'BIBA' sold an holistic idea of style.' (Blue Print April 1993 page 9)

'BIBA' was the first shop to stay open for late night shopping and not even they anticipated just how busy the shop would be after 6pm. It soon became a big part of many young people's lives. What made it different from the start was:

“it's dark, exotic, glittering interior, jumbled clothes, feathers, beads and lurex spilling over the counters like treasure in a cave. Its gimmick was the incredible cheapness of the clothes. There were no price tags but the poorest student could afford to say 'I'll have it,' before asking 'How much?'"(Howell, 1975 page 258)

It also had the best music of the time playing in the background - often 'The Beatles.'

For £15, the price of a Mary Quant party dress, you could walk out of '**BIBA**' in a new coat, dress, shoes, petticoat and hat.

'**BIBA**' was often so crowded that people had to queue to be let in one by one, as other customers left. Barbara had to go outside everyday with a "damp cloth to wipe the nose marks off the window." (Howell 1975 page 258)

According to Barbara Hulanicki, London had become filled with a 'designer's dream' generation of young people. They were the post-war babies who 'had been deprived of nourishing proteins' (Hulanicki 1983 page 79) and they grew up into skinny young people. They could look stunning in anything simple and short for their 'never-ending legs.' Contrast this romantic vision of the Sixties with that of the cynical Andy Warhol who saw the reality of this hedonistic generation "with all the slimming pills and amphetamines people took to stay awake, most people ended the 60's younger than when they started the decade." (Cawthorne 1989 Page 60)

These young people were envied all over the world. There was no social distinction in '**BIBA**' - all classes mixed together. "Their common denominator was youth and rebellion against The Establishment." (Hulanicki 1983 page 79)

According to Barbara Hulanicki herself, the classic '**BIBA**' girl had a certain look.

"She was pretty and young. She had an upturned nose, rosy cheeks and a skinny body with long 'asparagus' legs and tiny feet. She was square-shouldered and quite flat-chested and her head was perched on a swan-like neck. Her face was a perfect oval and her eyelids were heavy with long spiky lashes. She looked sweet but was as hard as nails. She did what she felt like at that moment and had no Mum to influence her judgement." (Hulanicki 1983 page 98.)



Fig 2. TOTAL LOOK FROM BIBA 1966

Soon many famous people were seen in the shop, including Sonny and Cher, Julie Christie, Richard Avedon, Cilla Black, Sandie Shaw, The Beatles, Jane Ormsby Gore, Mick Jagger and Twiggy. The list goes on..... In the 60's you had to be prepared to look good. The saying 'no pain - no gain' springs to mind, as blood circulation was actually hindered because the long skinny sleeves were so tight.

The Popular Press loved the '**BIBA**' look and it soon grew from a style of fashion to the personification of the young and fresh, despite the fact that it was never taken seriously by the big fashion magazines of the day. This did not deter Barbara. Success to her was "not a photograph of an unwearable over-priced garment in a glossy magazine, but rather 'when I had a winner on my hands people bought it and they if they liked it that was my reward.'" (Hulanicki 1983 page 99)

Crowds, attracted by the clothes, the prices, the music and the atmosphere thronged to '**BIBA.**'

By the summer of 1965 '**BIBA**' had outgrown Abington Road. The shop was so packed on a Saturday that customers were unable to move. Over six months later '**BIBA**' moved 500 yards down the road to Church Street and to premises four times the size of Abington Road.



FIG. 3 MOVING DAY FOR BIBA FEBRUARY 1966

Leading the charge are pop singer Cilla Black and television hostess Cathy McGowan

In a clever publicity stunt by Barbara Hulanicki and her husband '**BIBA**' acquired the help of well-known personalities such as Cilla Black and Cathy McGowan to ensure press coverage and therefore free advertising. This move was an instant hit. "The pavement outside was milling with people, every window seat was occupied.

There were moments when the shop looked like a swarm of locusts had attacked it.

(Hulanicki 1983 page 87)

Soon America and Europe discovered 'Swinging London.'

SWINGING LONDON



I Carnaby Street was where it was happening, especially for men's clothes. Lord John was the first boutique in the narrow Soho street, just a stone's throw from the traditional heart of men's tailoring, Savile Row.

FIG.4 SWINGING LONDON

People had come to accept the exposed thighs as a part of life but all of a sudden attention came with exclamations such as 'oh look at that one!' and the more attention they got the shorter the skirts became. The newly created tights, as well as knickers, soon became a lot more colourful.

Mary Quant may have been the inventor of the 'mini skirt' but Barbara Hulanicki would say that it was their stockist - Theo Savva - who was the man 'responsible for putting it on the High Street.' (Hulanicki 1983 page 87)

As the shop became more famous so did the people shopping there - John Lennon, with his new girlfriend - Yoko Ono, Mia Farrow, Mick Jagger and Marianne Faithful, even Brigitte Bardot came to shop there.

"The first '**BIBA**' mail-order catalogue came out in 1968 - the year that saw the assassination of Martin Luther King, students on the barricades in Paris and a general feeling that the young could, would and should change the world." (Godley 1993)

After the birth of their first son - Wiltod Vincent Hulanicki Fitz-Simon, Barbara began designing children's clothes, since there was nothing but pink and blue stretch towelling suits or woolly jumpers and bonnets available for children in the regular outlets. Thus the Children's Department opened and soon '**BIBA**' babies began to appear in the streets with their '**BIBA**' mothers.



FIG 5 MOTHER AND DAUGHTER



FIG 6 BARBARA HULANICKI - VELVET JACKET

**TROUSERS AND HELMET CIRCA 1968
'BATTLE DRESS FOR THE FEMALE SEX.'**

'BIBA' babies mirrored **'BIBA'** adults - when hems of coats were dropped for the adult collection the children's range followed suit.

As Lou Taylor and Elizabeth Wilson say in their book 'Through the Looking Glass' **'BIBA'** had caught the mood of the late Sixties which was moving towards an aesthetic, different from the space age brightness of Courreges, or the Primary colours - black, white, acid yellow, red and blue of Yves St. Laurent in 1966. **'BIBA'** showed that there was more to colours than these ones.

The Trend was moving towards Art Nouveau and later to Art Deco. Hulanicki decorated her shops in sombre colours and furnished them in period bentwood and ostrich feathers in Victorian Vases. " Soon, instead of little shift dresses she was creating Jean Harlow satin evening wear (or perhaps it was for the boudoir - you could never be quite sure)" (Wilson 1989)

Barbara not only decorated her shops in sombre colours she also designed her clothes in dusty blues, bilberries and mulberries, which looked perfect for the **'BIBA'** girl in daylight but when she was inside the **'BIBA'** shop "the music thundered, the lighting was soft and she became more mysterious (Hulanicki 1983 page 98)

'BIBA' owed its success to the fact that Barbara Hulanicki had gone against the grain of the 60's. Instead of designing bland, badly conceived clothes, she designed beautiful clothes that didn't patronise the public. This idea worked. Barbara had the foresight not to dictate to the Women of the 60's - she gently led them.

As the 'BIBA' lifestyle grew it outgrew its premises in Church Street and made its third move in 1971 to the old Cyril Lord's Carpet Co. building in Kensington High Street which was 9 times the size of Church Street. They had a huge sale in order to help finance this move but eventually had to look for outside investors such as the Bank and Dorothy Perkins, who bought 75% of 'BIBA.' It opened in September 1969 after months of hectic preparation. 'The Sunday Times' called it 'The most beautiful store in the world.'

Over one thousand people were to visit the New 'BIBA' every week. It actually had a bigger crowd than Queen's Park Rangers on one Saturday - thirty thousand - as counted by 'The Daily Mirror.'



Interior of Biba, High Street Kensington, where not only clothes, but cane chairs, luxurious cushions, lampshades and artificial flowers were sold – the total look for the late Sixties. Courtesy British Tourist Authority.

FIG 7 INTERIOR OF BIBA, HIGH STREET KENSINGTON

where not only clothes, but cane chairs, luxurious cushions, lampshades and artificial flowers were sold - the total look for the late sixties.

However Barbara was still not yet satisfied. She continued to dream of owning the Derry and Toms Building with a beautiful roof garden which was also in Kensington High Street. They had scarcely settled into their third shop when her dream premises came on the market in 1971 and for the next two years she collected furniture, designed wallpapers and shop fittings for this beautiful new store. A staggering £5 million was spent on redecoration of the store in Barbara's style - the result being 'an eclectic combination of Victorian Art Nouveau and Art Deco, mixed with Hollywood glamour' (De La Hague 1988 page 146)



**FIG 8 TWIGGY IN THE RAINBOW ROOM
(Hulanicki, 1983)**

It was here that Barbara Hulanicki gave free range to her 'dream.' - a step into her new store was to be a step into a beautiful perfect world - a 'BIBA' world where beautiful people wore her beautiful 'BIBA' clothes.

The 'BIBA' world was communicated to the wider public through fashion images of the most famous models wearing 'BIBA' clothes. For example in Fig 9 where Jean Shrimpton models a long mauve dress with diamante straps and in Fig 10 a beige and copper suit.



FIG 9



FIG 10

The 'BIBA' image was also communicated through advertising graphics where young, leggy, innocent and sweet girls wore big floppy hats and extra or extra long dresses as shown in the following drawings:-

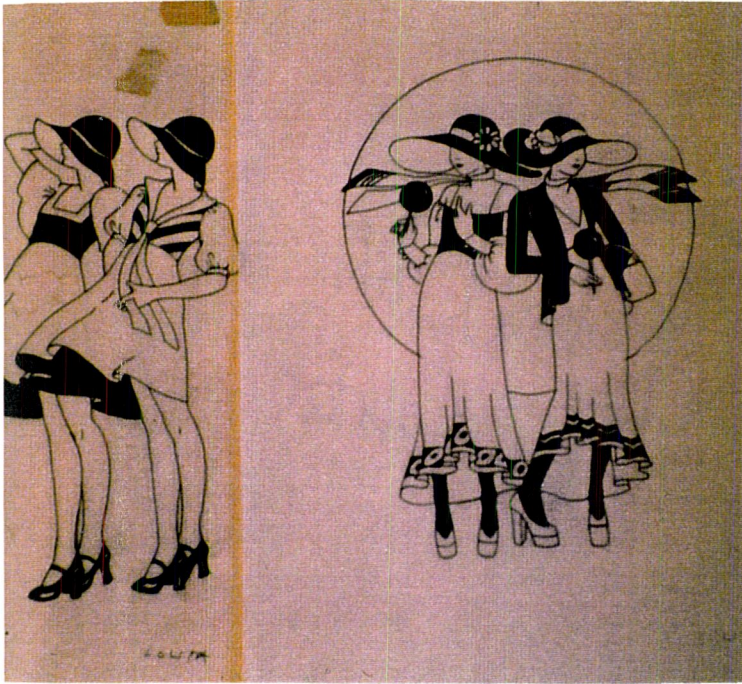


FIG.11
Picture of Lolita
Fashion for the young self-
confident girl.



FIG 12
Naughty Pussy - cheeky but cute!



FIG.13

What an asp!



FIG.14

BIBA BABIES

In other graphic images there were sophisticated cheeky looking girls as shown in the following photographs:-

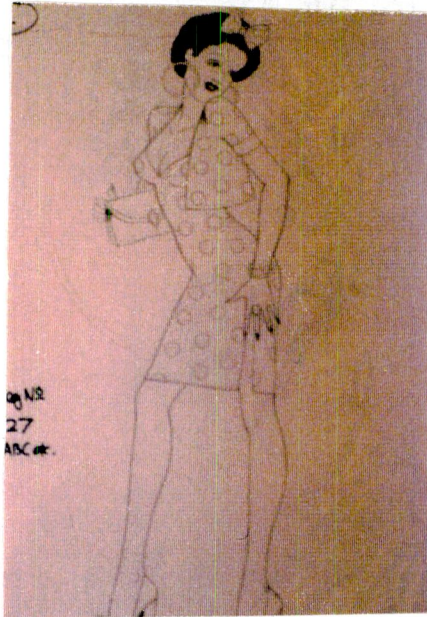


FIG 16
Spotty Dress Girl



FIG 15
French Resistance
Oh la la! Tres Chic



FIG 17
Girl with skirt blown up

The 'BIBA' image appeared to take on a life of its own from clothes to cosmetics to furnishings - it was a way of life - an escape from reality for many young people of the 60's and 70's. 'BIBA' domain even extended to advertising, postcards, diaries, address books, posters, wall-paper designs, new-baby stationery, flyers for shops, clothes labels, paints and even food. Its identity was clearly recognisable with its logo of Celtic-like design which was created by John McConnell.

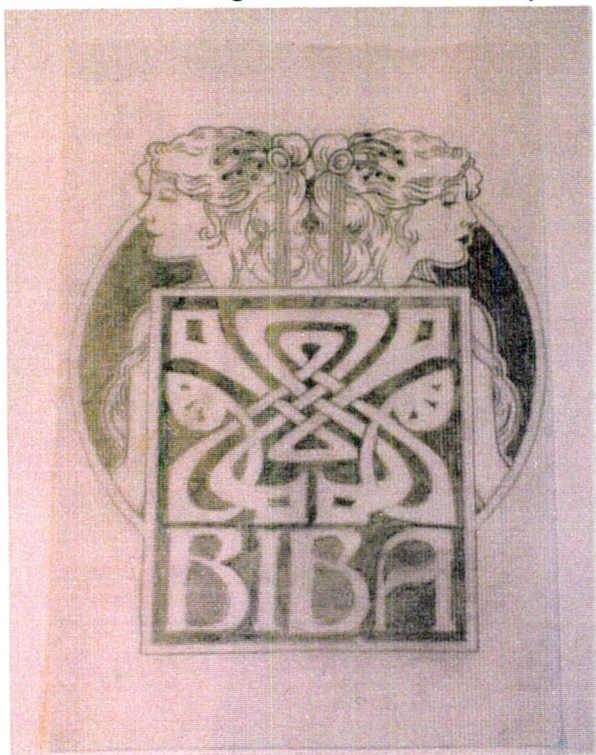


FIG 18

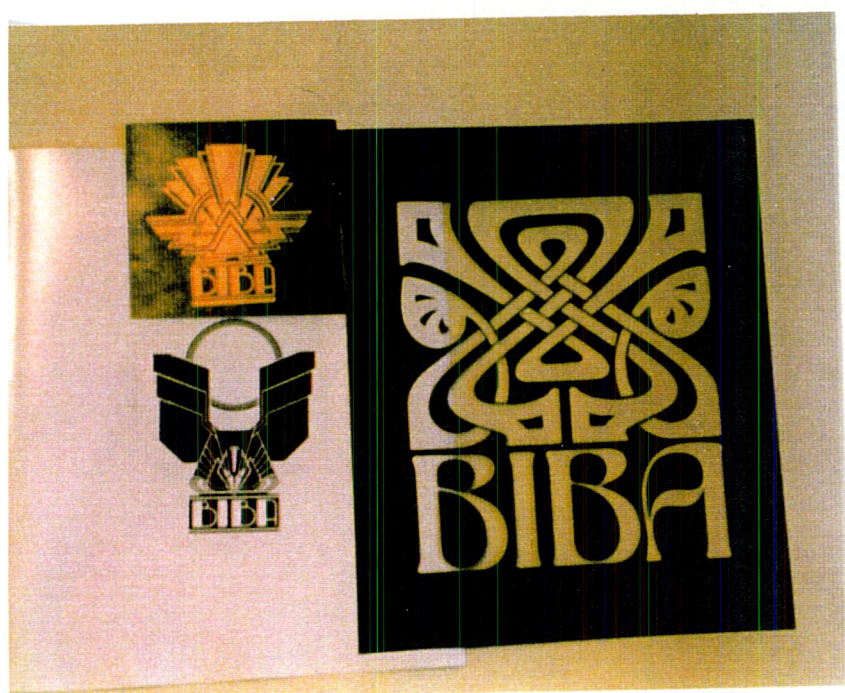


FIG 19

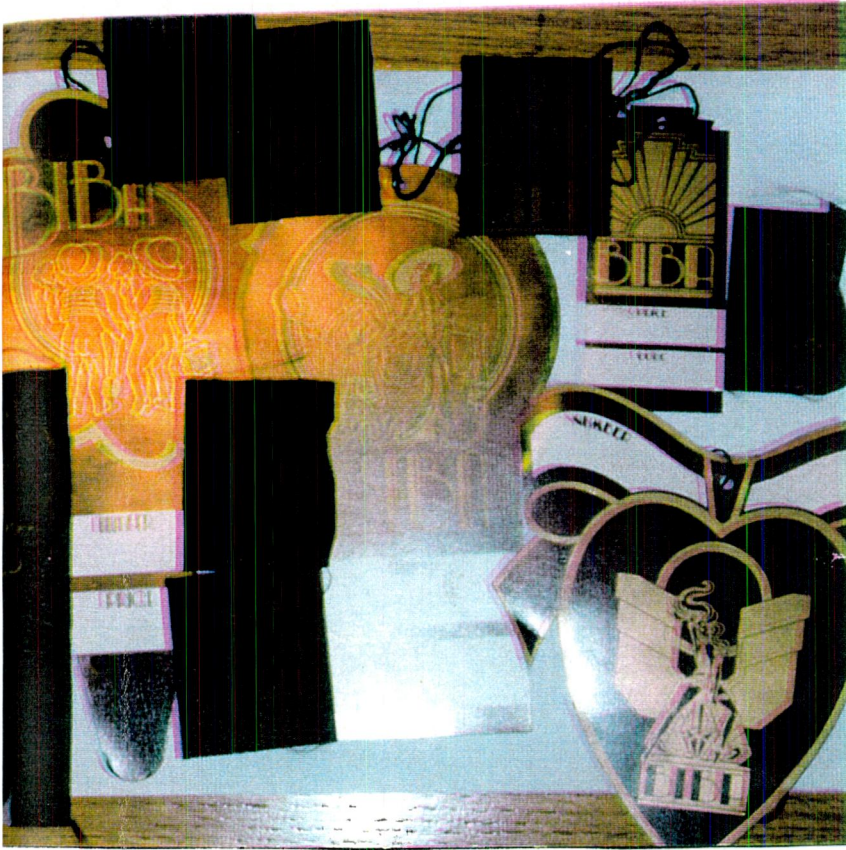


FIG.20

'BIBA' LABELS

'BIBA' continued to grow and expand. Their next venture was the launch of 'BIBA' cosmetics which included, e.g. maroon lipsticks and sepia eyeshadows designed to enhance the 'BIBA' look. This was a huge success - customers even came into the store in the morning to be made up and read for work.



FIG 21

BIBA GIRL IN MAKE-UP

The new store, in the Derry and Tom's Building, Kensington High Street, which cost £5 million to refurbish as the new 'BIG BIBA,' consisted of five floors.

The Basement was the Food Hall which had life-size fun displays to market the food.

For example Fig 22 shows soup being sold from a giant Campbell's soup tin with Warhol written on it



FIG 22

Photograph of Food Hall

The Food Hall also sold 'BIBA' foodstuffs, the label being a work of art in itself as seen in Fig 23.



FIG 23

FOOD LABELS

The First Floor was for Babies and Children's wear with purple prams and aubergine playpens for the baby. They had pretty crochet clothes, which were a change from the normal children's clothes available at that time. The Children's Shoe Department was a scaled down Fairy House for the children to play in and the Boy's Clothes Department was fashioned into a Cowboy style Saloon.

The Second Floor was for 8 to 14 year old girls, otherwise known as 'The Lolitas.'

The Maternity Department was also situated on this floor with everything in this department built larger than life so that a girl could feel small and delicate when, in fact, she felt large and pregnant.

The Third Floor was the Men's Department, but cleverly tucked into this Department was The Mistress Room where men could buy the woman in their lives extra-sexy underwear.

Household was on the Fourth Floor and this boasted a Casbah full of pewter and spices and it was all guarded by realistic stuffed lions and tigers.

The Famous Rainbow Restaurant and Ballroom were on the Fifth and final floor

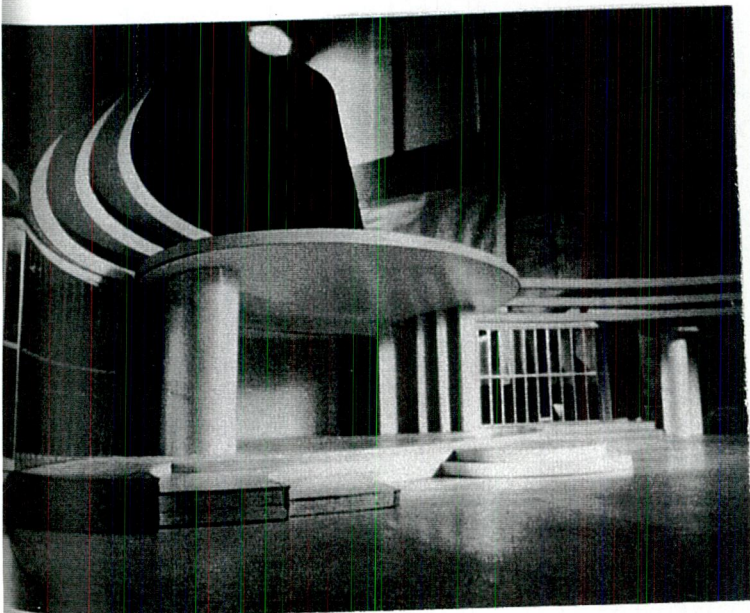


FIG.24
RAINBOW ROOM

However, 'BIBA' had become a 'packaged lifestyle where wit and style took precedence over sales drives. It was the beginning of the end. Ironically, 'BIBA'S' huge success became its own downfall'

Shortly after the opening Alister Best was moved to remark in 'Design Magazine' that, at 'BIBA' "Shopping is almost a fringe activity."

"In the Food Hall dog food was stored in the belly of a giant Great Dane - shaped stand and yet there were only a couple of check-outs." (De La Haye 1988 page 147)



FIG 25

PHOTOGRAPH OF GREAT DANE FOOD STAND

Customers, therefore, did not feel under any obligation to buy anything and merchandise covered only 90.000 square feet out of a possible 200,000 square feet. Clearly Barbara Hulanicki's talent lay with the aesthetic atmosphere of her store rather than with the practicalities of the business world. This is clearly to be seen in the above photograph of the Great Dane Stand for displaying dog food. A novel way of displaying the dog food but, nevertheless it was in reality a poor use of floor space.

The '**BIBA**' Fashion Emporium, conceived by Barbara Hulanicki and her husband, finally died - starved of its life blood - sales.

'**BIBA**' finally had to close its doors in 1975 due to losses of £6 million and business ceased trading.

BIBA - THE FASHION EMPORIUM

CHAPTER 2

**THE SIXTIES YOUTH REBELLION EXPRESSED IN
THE WORK OF DESIGNERS OTHER THAN BIBA**

**Wow, Explode! The Sixties
It came to life in a pure
Exaggerated, crazed out,
Wham, wham, wow way.
The Beatles, Hendrix,
Joplin, The velvet Underground
exploding so wonderfully.**

(Betsey Johnson, New York page 238)

Post-war babies soon grew into post-war teenagers and by the early 1960's "The common denominator was youth and rebellion against the establishment." (Hulanicki 1983 page 79)

Society was changing rapidly - no longer were teenagers prepared to live quietly and dress like Mum and Dad. They demanded the freedom of their own fashions, places of entertainment for themselves as well as their own music. The establishment felt unable to cope with this rebellion. They had never experienced anything like it, as teenagers, unlike their parents at this age, now had money to spend on themselves. They were no longer content with the frumpy fashions of cardigans and beads, simple skirts and pinafores.

"Now teenage fashions began in the City Streets and worked their way onwards and upwards." (Clancy 1996 page 45)

All rules in fashion were broken as teenage fashion ran riot - they wore what they wanted - where they wanted.

“Sixties clothes were designed to be sexy, on ultra-thin models like Twiggy, although they had a curious innocence. Mary Quant’s dresses consciously aped school-girl gym-slips. The mature figure of the fifties was definitely out. To have the sylph-like forms of an adolescent was everything for fashion conscious women.” (Cawthorne 1989 page 60)

“What does fashion represent? (Clancy 1996 page 44) Vogue asked when they realised that :

“their domain was beginning to show signs of insubordination. Decoration disguise, a mood of Society. For millions of working teenagers clothes are the biggest pastime in life - a symbol of independence and fraternity of an age group. The origin of the teenage look might be urban and working-class but it was taken up with alacrity by the King’s Road. It owes nothing to Paris or Saville Row; something to entertainment idols (The Tommy Steele haircutthe Bardot sex babe look) and much to Italy. (Clancy 1996 page 44)

The young, for the first time in the History of Fashion led the older generation. They stood against the “social and imperialist ethos of their parents generation, everything their elders fought for was rejected as culturally irrelevant.” (Clancy 1996 page 44)

The world turned to London for inspiration for the rest of the decade. British Fashion began to lead the Fashion Scene through new boutiques and chain stores such as ‘Marks and Spencer’ and ‘Wallis.’ Never was there such a variety of clothes available at such competitive prices. Barbara Hulanicki and her husband Stephen Fitz-Simon made a significant contribution to the Sixties Fashion with their own range of clothes - ‘**BIBA**’ which they sold through their own boutiques.

The structure and layout of the ‘**BIBA**’ boutique was also revolutionary. Dark interiors - dimly lit, decorated with brown feather boas, ostrich feathers and beads.

Nostalgia became hip!

An example of the interior of a 'BIBA' can be seen in Fig.26



FIG 26

PICTURE OF THE INTERIOR OF A BIBA STORE

Twiggy remembers:

“It ('BIBA') wasn't like any other shop I had ever seen. There were no rails, just clothes hanging off wooden hat stands and wicker baskets filled with T-shirts like vests with shoe-lace necks. There wasn't even a proper changing-room and not even much choice. The clothes changed all the time. If you didn't buy what you wanted there and then it wasn't worth coming back next week and hoping it would still be there.”
(Lawson 1997 page33.)

Fig.27 is an example of an exotic 'BIBA' fashion.



FIG 27
'BIBA' TROUSER SUIT - 1970
Pink and green cabbage rose printed cotton.

“**BIBA**’ kept one pace ahead of the mood on the streets. Its strength lay in colouring and accessories and it was popular for its dyed T-shirts, minuscule bikinis, cloche hats, beads, satin day wear, sultry make-up and berry colours. Trend-setters squeezed their way into these crammed joss-stick scented caverns where they couldn’t even push in front of a mirror to try on clothes - they simply bought and left.

(Fraser 1981)

However, although ‘**BIBA**’ made a considerable contribution to the Fashion of the Sixties it did not hold the monopoly on this era. As Kennedy Fraser puts it in his book ‘The Fashionable Mind’ ‘**BIBA**’ and Mary Quant are usually lumped together as indistinguishable components of the Sixties fashion impulse.’ Both designers were ‘very Sixties’ but Mary Quant was smart and modern while ‘**BIBA**’ was nostalgic and dreamy. ‘**BIBA**’S’ clothes were, however, much cheaper.

Twiggy confirmed this in her new autobiography ‘Twiggy in Black and White.’

‘Mary Quant might have invented the mini-skirt, but her shop - Bazaar - in King’s Road was for rich girls - ‘**BIBA**’ was for everyone.’ (Lawson 1997 page 32)

Mary Quant - another name synonymous with the Fashion of the Sixties - also had her finger on the pulse of change. “She was so in tune with the mood of the moment that her clothes sold instantly.” (McDowell 1984)

Her clothes mirrored the mood of the Sixties - the physical and social freedom. They were designed to appeal specifically to the young. Mary Quant had not, in fact, intended to make her own clothes but was driven to it since she was unable to find the correct stock or a manufacturer to adhere to her strange demands; for example she asked established knitwear companies to lengthen their classic cardigans by eighteen inches so that she could sell them as a mini-dress. To fill a gap in the market that she

could not do otherwise,

“she hurriedly attended night classes, bought material from Harrods and made up her stock in her Chelsea bedsitter. The ‘gear’ had to sell within twenty-four hours of arrival in the shop so that materials could be bought to restock, and it did. ‘Bazaar’ was a sensation with a permanent queue waiting to get in.”
(Mulvagh page 240)

This radical change in Fashion was a shock to the system as most parents silently watched this terrific trade.

“The idea that teenagers should choose their own clothes seemed to be a radical and defiant stand against propriety, and members of the Establishment were outraged by the clothes, which they thought perverse. (Mulvagh page 240)

‘Bazaar’ continued to expand and supplied to one hundred and fifty shops in Britain and three hundred and twenty stores in America. It, like ‘**BIBA**’, “became a well-known meeting place and Chelsea ceased to be just a part of London - it became a way of life.” (Mulvagh page 240)



FIG.28

**Picture of Mary Quant mini-dress in rayon crepe with
pleated hem ruffle on attached underskirt. C.1962**

Fun clothes were the hallmark of designers - Foale and Tuffin in the Sixties. These two women found themselves fulfilling their ambition of running a successful business without the help of a man. They designed trouser suits, op-art prints, curtain-lace suits and their famous 'Gruyere' designs with holes in the sleeves. Their little shift dresses had prints of American art, pop art, targets, triangles and zig-zag primary colours, and the silhouette became less important than the pattern on it.

These, they exported to the American market in 1965 at the request of a large American Firm - 'Puritan Fashions' who recognised, 'London was the focal point of the World of Fashion.' (Bernard 1978 page 38)



FIG.29
White lace suit -
Foale and Tuffin

Ozzie Clarke is another name that belongs to the Fashion World of the Sixties. He too, like Barbara Hulanicki and Mary Quant designed for his dream generation.

He competed with the other designers of the time for the shortest hem-line and the most cut-away armhole. He bared a few backs, created the see-through dress and was hailed as 'The King of King's Road.' He used superb prints as a feature of his evening wear, which were designed by his wife, Celia Britoil. One such design can be seen in Fig 30. on the following page.

FIG 30

**Chiffon dress with 'handkerchief' points as cuffs and hem.
C.1969 Fabric designed by Celia Britoil
Photograph by Irving Solero**



John Bates is another male designer of the Sixties. His claim to fame was his design that won the title of 'the smallest dress in the world.' This design had the 'added subtraction' of a bare midriff, filled in with netting. This was the first hint of the see-through dresses that were to come. John Bates is also famous for his designs for Diana Rigg in her role in the Television Show 'The Avengers.' For this he designed simple hard-line clothes, belted trouser-suits and white boots, straight close-fitting dresses with hem-lines well above the knee, and white stockings - all in bold black and white. These designs brought the New Look in dressing to the notice of millions of people. Bates designed clothes that

“capitalised boldly on the new freedom from constraints like good taste, sexual modesty and visual consideration for others to produce young sexy clothes which reflected the mood of the time.
(McDowell -1984 page93)



FIG 31

**John Bates dress,
autumn/winter 1974
Embroidered black
worsted crepe**

The Laura Ashley prints, which were established in 1956, challenged the sexy ‘BIBA’ 1930’s image with their version of the Granny look in pinafores and fresh sprigged cottons. Hems dropped to long or mid-calf with dresses featuring tight necks and puffed sleeves in natural fabrics of traditional patterns such as flower prints. Like ‘BIBA’ Laura Ashley provided an holistic look and is still successfully selling women’s and children’s fashion as well as a wide range of household goods such as furniture, wallpaper, paints, curtains and lamps.



FIG 32
Laura Ashley Dress

There were many other international designers around in the Sixties and Seventies, many of whom or whose design houses are still designing today, such as Courrèges and Paco Robanne, Liz Claiborne and Yves St. Laurent.

Many of these designers were inspired by fashions for the future during the Sixties and Seventies, again creating a youthful look.

BIBA - THE FASHION EMPORIUM

CHAPTER 3

BIBA INFLUENCES AND INFLUENCES ON BIBA

The Sixties was to mark a very important change in 20th Century Fashion. As Society became more affluent the youth of the Sixties began creating their own individual styles. As this influence spread young people felt free to wear what they liked themselves, thus making their own individual fashion statement.

In her book 'Looking good: The Liberation of Fashion' (1976), journalist Clara Pierre argued that 'women designers came back on the scene in the Sixties....'

At their helm was Betsey Johnson, followed by Liz Claiborne, Jean Campbell, Luba, Mary McFadden, Britta Baner, Carol Horn, Maxine de la Falouse, Homae Mori, Diane Von Furstenberg, Holly Carp and Cathy Hardwich. In the United States the current pre-eminence of female designers is due partly to the fact that they originate ideas for their own use.... The other reason is "that in these days of female emancipation, the ladies have shown that they too can make it in the former male dominated world of business" (Steele, 1991 page 133)

However, looking back from the 1990's women's role in fashion in the 1960's is much more difficult to analyse, both because men were still much more influential i.e. Andre Courreges. Pierre Cardin and Yves St.Laurent and because the ideal women of the Sixties was still regarded as 'the Dolly Bird' or 'Chick.'

"There were a number of women all over the world who helped to create a new look to contrast with what Mary Quant described as 'adult appearance' which was very unattractive, alarming and terrifying. It was something I know I didn't want to grow into.'

'Squares, she claimed, did not know how to look exciting.'
(Steele 1991 page 154.)

Barbara Hulanicki agreed ' Fashion in the late 50's was designed for 30 year olds and over. Shops were packed with matronly clothes - the standard look being three rows of pearls and a black dress.'

(Steele 1991 page 155.)

However, the first signs of fashion that came from the High Street soon emerged.

Young designers wanted clothes that were going to be 'fun to wear' as Mary Quant put it. She was one of the first designers who began to capitalise on the emerging popular culture. 'I had always wanted the young to have a fashion of their own...'

Commenting on her role in the 60's revolution Quant once stated "No designer is ever responsible for such a revolution...I just happened to start when that 'something in the air' was coming to the boil." (Lobenthal 1990 page 10)

Other designers around at the time were obviously, Barbara Hulanicki of '**BIBA**' as well as Foale and Tuffin, John Bates, Ozzie Clarke and many others. They were all designing at the beginning of a time known as 'The Swinging Sixties' which marked the end of the 'drab and dutiful fifties' Changes, which were characterised by a 'youthful frivolity and audacity.'

As Barbara Bernard puts it in her book 'Fashion in the Sixties' 'It is a decade which has been described as a renaissance and a revolution.' These changes actually began to occur in the late Fifties. Teddy Boys and Beatniks of the Beat Generation had 'sown the seeds of discontent and established a subversive energy which was to be inherited by the rockers and the fashion conscious Mods' (Bernard 1978 page 5)

Young people wanted to wear different clothes from their Mothers - they wanted their own fashion styles.

It was Mary Quant in the late 1950's who began designing these clothes creating fashion for the young generation. Young people were spending money more freely rather than saving. They seemed eager to spend their wages on 'new clothes in which they could appeal to their bosses and yet which felt comfortable and unrestricting.'

(Bernard 1975 Page 15)

The Mods were probably the most fashion conscious of the Sixties youth groups - fashion was their essential identity. They were in direct opposition to the greasy leather-clad Rockers.

"It was the Mods," says Quant "who gave the dress trade the impetus to break through the fast moving, breath-taking, uprooting revolution. (Bernard 1978 page15/16)

There was a very obvious aggression towards anything that was old and established. Everyone wanted to be young, and the youth were essentially anti-establishment.

'The voices, rules and culture of this generation are as different from those of the past as tea and wine,' wrote Mary Quant 'and the clothes they choose to evoke their lives - daring, gay but never dull.'

Quant designed clothes which:

"expressed the spirit of the age and its desire for physical and social freedom in deceptively simple, pared-down garments with abbreviated skirts - (Christened by the British Press - The Mini) (Nunn 1984 page 212)

This hem line, above the knee was to become the focal point of the decade.

Hipsters, Bell bottoms and sailor trousers all became accepted fashion garments for women in the Sixties.

Thus London had become the focal point for the World of Fashion and the mini-skirt became firmly established in the world. Even a society for the Preservation of the mini-

skirt was established 'Mini-skirts for ever!' was their cry, along with 'support the mini-skirt.' Members were even heard to claim that their Society existed 'for the good of mankind.' However, they need not have worried - the mini-skirt was here to stay. Although Mary Quant invented the mini-skirt it was '**BIBA**' who claimed to be the first with it on the High Street. As sales soared so also did the hem-line. It became shorter and shorter to the delight of both girls and their admirers.

Barbara Hulanicki designed with the total look in mind, not just a hem-line. She designed clothes that emphasised the 'new skinny shape' ideal. High armholes, narrow sleeves cut in on the shoulder and flared skirts, which all helped to emphasise and create 'THE LOOK.' Her sludge tones - plums, prunes and greys were a huge success, these colours were different from anything else in the High Street - They were nostalgic and to be nostalgic was to be hip!

"BIBA" became a way of life. The shop itself had been designed with the greatest care. It was dark like a discotheque with a Hi-Fi system playing rock music. There were dark mahogany screens everywhere, twenty potted palms and twenty -nine hat stands, laden with hats, feathers and assorted clothes."(Bernard 1978 page 59)

In the Summer of 1967 London was 'ablaze with colour' - pink and orange, pink and purple, yellow and red - all very shocking combinations. It was the beginning of what was to become 'The Hippie Culture.' Clothes which were widely available and second-hand became fashionable and no-one looked the same. Soon a natural progression from changes in both men's and women's roles and the beginning of the uni-sex era began to show in fashion. The jeans and T-shirt look became a growing cult.

Men had long hair and the twiggy frame - small and flat-chested, made it hard to distinguish a boy from a girl.

Another look of the time was one which was more sophisticated. '**BIBA**' was, at this time, in Kensington High Street and was now concentrating on the Thirties look of satin, ostrich feathers and long dresses.

Without the Sixties Revolution today's Fashions could not have been developed into what they are now. Without it we could not have our boutiques, bistros, coffee bars and discos, which were all derived from the culture of the Sixties.

"Fashion and Design became a matter of concept more than, merely, good taste.... The Sixties made Fashion fun."(Bernard 1978 page 87)

'**BIBA**' has again re-opened its doors after the successful business woman, Ellen Shek from Hong Kong, who was an avid fan back in the Sixties, acquired the Company. Ellen's dream was to bring '**BIBA**' back and, with that aim in mind, began sourcing the right creative team of people to nurture the strong personality, mood and attitude that is '**BIBA**.' Now that her dream has become a reality the Nineties '**BIBA**' captures a new sense of nostalgia, bringing the spirit and essence of '**BIBA**' forward to take it into the next Millennium. Backed by the design talents of the '**BIBA**' team the ranges cleverly combine both new and familiar pieces in rich fabrics to form a strong identity for '**BIBA**.'

'**BIBA**' are currently launching their third collection for Autumn/Winter 1997/1998 throughout their outlets. Covent Garden hosts the Flagship store which offers the complete collection within the ambience of the '**BIBA**' boutique.



FIG.33
PHOTOGRAPH OF BIBA SHOP SIGN

On my recent visit to the '**BIBA**' Store I was very disappointed by the shop. It did not come up to my expectations of what '**BIBA**' was. In fact I thought the shop was quite ragged and worn looking. In my research of '**BIBA**' I had conjured up a beautiful picture of the old '**BIBA**' in my mind from the sources in the archives of the Victoria and Albert Museum and from reading Barbara Hulanicki's book from 'From A to Biba.' I can just imagine these dark stores, filled with treasures and exploding with people, music playing and friends chatting - a general buzz around the shop. My view was confirmed by my Aunt whose only memory of a visit to the '**BIBA**' store is of a dark interior with brown feather boas everywhere.

However, to my disappointment the new store had none of this atmosphere. The clothes were beautiful but they seemed lifeless. '**BIBA**' needs atmosphere to work. Sitting in the old '**BIBA**' store having lunch (now B.H.S.) I was trying to imagine what it was like as '**BIBA**,' the Rainbow Room, The Food Hall, the dark interior, now it looks like a dreary tired old building with a very sparse restaurant with Formica tables and chairs and absolutely no atmosphere. Obviously the Nineties aren't going to cater for this particular nostalgia - what a pity!

The Sixties marked a momentous change in 20th Century Fashion. There was a rebellion against Establishment and adult fashions as the youth of the day began to create their own individual styles and felt confident to wear what they liked when they liked.

In 1993 the Laing Art Gallery in Newcastle-upon-Tyne held an exhibition entitled, 'A Label, A Lifestyle, A Look.' This was an exhibition about The '**BIBA**' Emporium.

Mr. Steve Thomas launched the exhibition with the following Press Release:

"In the Sixties and Seventies '**BIBA**' was revolutionary. It was popular, accessible, to all and affordable. Barbara Hulanicki, the inspiration behind the '**BIBA**' label, brought the fashion off the Paris Catwalk and on to the street. It is fitting that this celebration of her work should be happening at the Laing Art Gallery where Tyne & Wear Museum staff are imaginatively working to attract an audience representative of the whole of local Society and not just a privileged few - a strategy which is enjoying great results here in Newcastle-upon-Tyne where the museums now attract nearly half a million visitors a year, an increase of 60% over the last two years.

'**BIBA**' a Label, A Lifestyle, A Look' has been four years in planning. Its timing could not have been better as the High Street Stores are currently crammed with '**BIBA**' copies and fashionable young women emulate the Seventies Look. The Laing Art Gallery has been overwhelmed by public response to the Exhibition and looks forward to welcoming '**BIBA**' fans both old and new, into the Gallery during the coming weeks.

Fashions may come and go but the public interest in the fashion-related exhibitions is always high. I'm sure that the audience here today will be delighted to learn that from Summer 1993 Newcastle will have its own permanent Gallery dedicated to the display of costume and fashion history and the exploration of the issues behind this popular industry.

On that expectant note it is left to me to wish '**BIBA**' A Label, A Lifestyle A Look,' every success as the first of many fashion exhibitions to come."

Sadly, according to Georgina Godley, who wrote an article about the Exhibition in 'Blue Print,' a leading magazine of Architecture and Design, in April, 1993, the Exhibition failed to "capture the glamour, excitement and spirit of this formative design phenomenon." Although over five thousand people visited the Exhibition in its first week the tragedy is that they will not feel the spirit of '**BIBA**.' The idea of an exhibition by Caroline Imlah was a wonderful opportunity to bring '**BIBA**' back to life. However, all her hard work didn't quite pay off even though there was merchandise on sale from the original stock and the museum printed the '**BIBA**' logo on T-shirts, mugs and erasers. This exhibition failed to bring '**BIBA**' back to life, it failed to display as it should be seen with all its style and panache that was its very soul.

CONCLUSION

I hope that I have been able to convey the sense of change and excitement of the Sixties and Seventies and the impact that **'BIBA'** had on the world of Fashion of this era, and which, I feel, was much greater than other designers of the same time.

Unlike Mary Quant, Sally Foale and Marian Tuffin, John Bates and Ozzie Clarke, Barbara Hulanicki's vision did not begin and end with Fashion.

'BIBA' was 'The Look.' Barbara Hulanicki's strength lay in the way she envisaged the whole person in this changing, vibrating world - she knew what she wanted for her dream and she worked hard for it.

Barbara Hulanicki dedicated her book 'From A to **'BIBA'** 'to all optimists, fatalists and dreamers.'

I think she was indeed an optimist and a dreamer who, through her exceptional personal drive, ambition and talent, made her dream a reality - a woman who was a cog in the wheel that literally turned the world of fashion on its head. Fashion no longer began in Paris and ended up in the streets. Now, because of the Sixties Youth Rebellion, it began on the streets and ended in Paris. Her insight into the mood of 'The Sixties' did not stop at clothes. She, like Mary Quant, embraced the whole person and therefore included cosmetics and accessories, as well as including clothes for men and children. Household wares and foodstuffs in beautiful **'BIBA'** packaging and labels.

'BIBA,' the business, is dead but its spirit lives on.

LONG LIVE 'BIBA!'



FIG 34
Photograph of 'BIBA' Shop Sign
December, 1997
Covent Garden

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