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SHOCKING
by
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Schiaparelli (1890-1973)

The name 'Schiaparelli', to those who are familiar with it, immediately connect it to 'Elsa', the fantasy fashion figure of the 1930's. She is reknowned for the sense of fun and colour she brought into peoples lives through fashion. Indeed, those who still possess garments with her signature on the inside label are to be considered very lucky. For to own one of her works is as valuable as owning a priceless museum piece. For that is how much value I would place on them.

The following account deals with her extraordinary life, leading up to her career and up until the second world war. It tells of her first failures and the many successes which followed later. There was never a dull moment. "Dare to be different", she had once advised women in her time. She followed her own advice - with great panache. Each of her creations took on a 'personality' of their own. This was a rare quality for a designer to possess. Perhaps that is why I admire her work so much. I hope some day that I, too, can inject such life into a piece of cloth.

Her autobiography, "Shocking Life" was a fascinating read. She had poured so much of herself into it. Indeed, if she had not become a designer, I believe she would have been a great author, but thats another story

On September 10th, 1890, In an upper middle class area of Rome in the Palazzo Corsini was born one of the world's greatest fashion innovators, Elsa Schiaparelli (Pronounced 'Skaparelli'), The daughter of a comfortable and prominent intellectual family. Her father was a professor of mathematics and also dean of the faculty at the University of Rome. Her uncle Giovanni was an astronomer credited with discovering canals on Mars in 1877. On her mothers side, Elsa was part Egyptian, and always retained an affinity for Egyptian art and history.

At the age of five she started school which she hated. Owing to her somewhat rebellious nature she attended many, all private schools, in Italy, Switzerland and England and was fluent in English from a young age.

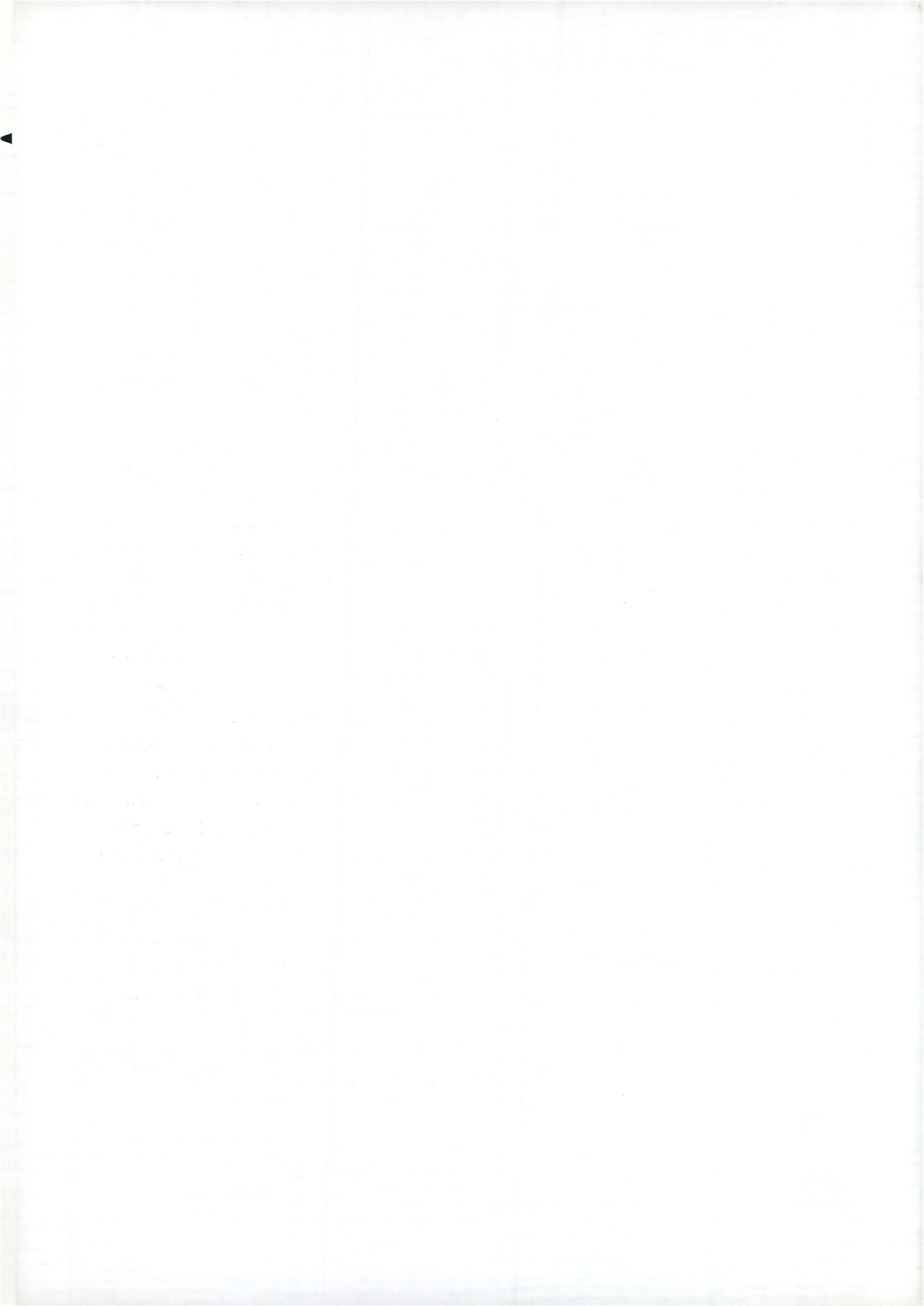
In 1904, at the age of fourteen, Elsa wrote a book of poetry which was then published. Her parents were horrified. Her father considered this to be a terrible disgrace and refused to read the book. As punishment, Elsa was sent to a convent in German Switzerland, where she went on hunger strike. Her stay there lasted ninety-nine days, after which her father brought her home again.

Apart from writing poetry, Elsa also wrote articles on music. She also loved the theatre and her biggest disappointment in life was that she could not sing. She also thought herself ugly and wished she could be beautiful, like her only sister. Believing this to be true, it made her very shy and this trait remained with her right through her career.

When Elsa left the convent, she remained at home in Italy for a while, until a Russian friend of the family sought her hand

in marriage. However, she did not want him as he was too old and she did not love him anyway. Feeling under pressure, Elsa was relieved when she had an opportunity to go to London to help her sister's friend with her adopted children. She travelled as far as Paris en route with some friends of the family. This was her first time in Paris and it was here that she experienced her first couturière's failure. She had been invited to a 'very grand' ball in Paris by an old friend and having nothing to wear she went out to buy four yards of dark blue crepe de chine and two yards of orange silk which cost an extravagant sum. She did not sew up a dress, but very cleverly draped the material around her body and for safety passed it through her legs to give a zouave effect. Then with half of the orange silk, she made a sash to go around her waist, and with the remaining part she made a turban to go around her head. This she did mainly because she hadn't enough money to get her hair done. So off she sailed happily to the ball and created quite a sensation as no one there had seen the like of it before. Only when she danced the tango, did her creation start to tumble around her feet.

Elsa stayed in Paris for a while, then crossed the channel to England. On her arrival, she was immediately taken to the country, where she stayed with her host family for only a short period. During this time she went as often as she could to London as she loved the essence of mystery and intrigue she felt it possessed. One day, she attended a lecture on Theosophy by quite an unknown man, who was partly breton and part polish. Elsa was rather attracted to him and remained after the lecture to speak with him. Their immediate feelings towards one another were so intense, that the next day they were betrothed. Elsa's family were informed and they tried in vain to prevent the untimely union. They were married quietly in a registry office in Picadilly, but outside they were invaded by a surging flow of suffragets - out marching for the vote, led by Sylvia Pankhurst.



Elsa, now twenty four years and her new husband (of whom nobody knew very much about) rented a mews in London for only a short while. Then they moved to Nice where her husband's family lived and found a small apartment there. Elsa assumed that here they would stay as she felt a great need to attach roots somewhere. However, this was not to be. Her husband's restlessness resulted in their leaving for America and neither of them knew what they were going to do once they arrived there. They stayed in various hotels, surviving only on Elsa's dowry, which was now beginning to dwindle. She realised that one of them must find some sort of employment soon and her husband was not physically fit to deal with the pressure of New York. Elsa then found herself a stand-in job for a while with a film company who were experimenting with colour photography for the movies. She had ^{name?} ~~had~~ ^{was} unfortunately been forced to leave as the experiments burned her eyes to such an extent that she was quite blind for several days.

During this period, her husband became something of a womaniser and left Elsa more or less on her own - despite this however, she became pregnant. She had a baby girl, called Marisa - but she quickly ^{soon} nick-named her Gogo. Hardship now fell upon them, ten days after the baby's birth, Elsa realised she couldn't spend the rest of her days in hotels now her money was running out. The next problem was where would they live? Her husband was away - she knew not where, and other hotels refused to take a lone woman and a child. Eventually, she discovered a small hotel and managed to coax the manager into letting them stay. Her next move was to look for work. She tried many different things for short periods with no success. In desperation, Elsa managed to procure some money from her family in Italy, and with this she took a room in Patchin Place, a famous square in Greenwich Village. Elsa made a few friends here, one of them, Blanche, who was the wife of a famous author, Arthur Scarfield Hays.

It was through Blanche that Elsa managed to get a position of companionship to a Polish singer who was about to go on a tour of Cuba.

Elsa had now left Gogo in the hands of a nurse, and it was on one of her weekend visits to see Gogo, she saw her husband for the last time. It had been ten months since she had seen him last, and she no longer desired to see him or talk to him. She knew that was the end of that marriage and she vowed there would never be another.

One trauma seemed to follow another. Gogo became ill, so much so she could hardly walk. Elsa's friend Blanche suggested that they go to Paris so that Gogo could receive the best possible attention. It was 1927 and Elsa was now thirty seven. She had made up her mind to start divorce proceedings which went through very quickly. She then found herself a small flat in the Rue de l'Université, and a position working with an antique dealer. She also met Paul Poiret for the first time, a man she greatly admired and respected. She accompanied a rich American friend to Paul's house - and she was instantly moonstruck. It was her first visit to a Maison de Couture. Paul presented her with a magnificent coat, and later he gave many things. His generous nature overwhelmed her and she thought him to be "the Leonardo" of fashion", with great personality and fond of good living.

She also met Jean-Michel Franck (who revolutionised interior decorating) and they became firm friends. Elsa, becoming more influenced by her bohemian friends, felt she could do something worthwhile. She could paint and sculpt fairly well, and she thought of inventing dresses or costumes. Dress designing, Elsa felt, was "an art, not a profession". She also considered it to be a "most difficult and unsatisfying art, because as soon as a dress is born it has already become a thing of the past" (Pg. 46 - 'Shocking Life', 1954).

With her head full of wild ideas, she approached one or two people, one was Maggie Rouff. They told Elsa in so many words that she had neither talent or workmanship and would do better planting potatoes. Elsa, however felt not at all put out by this remark and still felt as determined as ever.

One day, an American friend visited Elsa wearing a knitted sweater. Elsa considered it plain and ugly in colour and shape, but she was intrigued by it. She discovered it had been knit by an American peasant woman, whom she sought out and became friends with. She asked her new friend that "if she was to design a sweater, would she knit it?" So Schiaparelli made a sketch of a jumper with a contrasting colour bow knitted into the jumper itself creating a trompe-l'Oeil effect. The first attempt however, was a disaster. The second was better, and the third, Elsa thought - was sensational. She wore it herself to a smart lunch where she knew "fashion people" would be and created a furore. (Fig. 1).

Women were very "sweater-minded" at this time. Chanel had been producing machine knitted dresses and jumpers for some time now. This sweater of Elsa's, however, was 'different' and everyone wanted one. Immediately. She accepted her first order from a New York buyer for Strauss - forty sweaters and 40 skirts, to be made in a fortnight. Eureka! She had done it. Her first debut into fashion and she had no idea how to set about her task. With the help of her American friend she scouted out more armenian volunteers to tackle her order. In three weeks the order was completed and paid for. A place to work was now in order, and she took a garret in the fashionable Rue de la Paix. She had now established herself as a sweater designer as her famous sweater made the pages of Vogue and other orders were promptly coming in. Trompe-L'Oeil became her speciality - she designed amazing sweaters with tattoo patterns and African motifs.

Elsa became more daring, mens' ties followed in bright colours and handkerchiefs to wrap around the hips. Anita Loos, an



FIG 1. 1927. - THE SWEATER THAT STARTED IT ALL.



FIG. 2. BEACHWEAR. 1928.

actress at the height of her career with "Gentlemen prefer blondes" was Elsa's first private customer and helped boost her to fame. Her 'Skeleton' sweater hit the headlines in the newspaper which was a rare occurrence for the press did not take much notice of the fashion world at this time.

Elsa also started designing sportswear, bathing suits and wraps (Fig. 2,)

One of her designs consisted of a fish wriggling on the stomach of a bathing suit! This period also marked the flight of the Lindbergh across the Atlantic which had everybody geared towards flying. So Schiaparelli designed flying suits, sports suits, in tweeds (fig. 3,) then Golf suits and her first evening dress, complete with jacket. It was the first of its kind in the fashion world and it created a turmoil. It consisted of a plain black sheath of crepe de chine down to the ground, with a white crepe de chine jacket with long sashes that crossed in the back, but tied in front. Very simple - and Elsa called this "the most successful dress of my career" (page 51, A Shocking Life - Lond. 1954). It was finally reproduced all over the world.

Elsa with her abundant sense of fun, made the inside of her studio look like the interior of a boat, and outside she had a sign on the entrance of the shop stating "Pour le Sport - Pour la Ville - Pour le Soir". She had three girls working permanently with her now, and was adding extra staff to cope with the heavy demands. Her greatest customers were the Ultra-Smart and conservative women who liked her severe suits and plain black dresses. However, Elsa felt that she really knew nothing about dressmaking, and she had taught herself a few principles about clothes, principles she set for herself. As it happened her views were in harmony with the times. Everyone was tired of the boyish and shapeless silhouette of the twenties. So Elsa declared



FIG. 3. 1932.

A SPORTS SUIT - IN A GREY AND YELLOW TWEED SKIRT AND JACKET, WITH HIGH NECKED BLOUSE IN SILK JERSEY STIFFENED WITH YELLOW TAFFETA.

ALSO FEATURES THE NEW TYROLEAN HAT.



FIG. 4 1933.

that "Clothes had to be architectural, that the body must never be forgotten and it must be used as a frame is used in building the more the body is respected, the better the dress acquires vitality ! Up with the shoulders! Bring back the bust into its own! ... Raise the waist to its forgotten original place!" These principles were the guidelines on which she produced her beautifully tailored garments, and so she emerged as the new artistic designer of the thirties who incorporated the works of famous surrealist artists in her designs.

In 1931, ^{the} "Exposition Coloniale" arrived in Paris, there was a military feel in the dress of the Indo-Chinese temple dancers and the dress uniform worn by English guards. Elsa, inspired by the 'built up' shapes, concentrated on her sleeves, gradually building them up and out. In 1933, she hit the headlines with her pagoda sleeve or Egyptian look, (first shown in Vogue). (Fig.4) The head of the sleeve was enlarged to form a big epaulette - from here on fashion acquired a new direction. Women were going to have wide shoulders for the next fourteen years - until the arrival of Christian Dior's new fashion in 1947. They were the outstanding feature of pre-war and wartime fashions. Shoulder pads were used on everything and it was possible to buy them at all stores, ready to be tacked into all kinds of garments.

Elsa took a trip to London to buy tweeds for her next collection. It comprised mainly of trouser suits made for every occasion, for travelling, sportswear and evening wear. To her mind, they were graceful and feminine and more modest than skirts. However, the controversy they created was violent and unexpected as she had known Poiret had tried it before. People had written angry letters to various newspapers, asking that "it should be



FIG 5. 1932.

COCK FEATHER BOA AND DRESS FOR EVENING.



FIG. 6. 1934.

TALLULAH BANKHEAD IN SCHIAPARELLI'S SATIN GOWN.

made a penal offence for a woman to appear in male attire". How ridiculous that statement would appear to-day! And there was more. In the Daily Express: "If any woman dares to appear at Wimbledon in that divided skirt, she should be soundly beaten". The tennis player, Lily Alvarez wore this trouser suit at a match at Monte Carlo, and was greatly admired and discussed for it. However 'displeased' some of the public were, the new trend was quickly adopted and much talked about. Schiaparelli was much on the tip of everyones tongue, much to the annoyance and hatred of her arch rival, Chanel, who dismissed Elsa as 'that Italian artist who makes dresses'. She felt that Elsa threatened her primacy in the fashion world. In a way, Elsa had become the 'queen of fashion', because of her inventiveness and sense of fun - no-one knew what she would do next.

In comparison, Chanel and Schiaparelli created opposing silhouettes. Chanel projected herself in creating the 'garconne' whereas Schiaparelli projected herself as the 'belle laide'. She made no concessions to prettiness, giving women disciplined clothes: fitted waisted jackets and tight skirts, immaculately tailored. Chanel on the other hand, had given women casual ease and softened the ideas she adopted from men's clothes. Schiaparelli, however, exaggerated them: with elaborate embroideries and sprays of gilded or glycerined coq feathers. Elsa also invented the long evening suit and her little black dresses rivalled Chanel's. The competition to ensue between them became an "unremitting vendetta". However, Chanel was 'lucky' in that she was very well established in the fashion world for the competition to damage her bank balance.

In the same year, 1933, Elsa went to Hollywood for the first time - and found her padded shoulders adopted here. Adrian enthusiastically took them up and they became oversized and monstrous. She stayed in America only a short while and then returned to France. Later, Sciaparelli had an English beau



FIG. 7. 1934.
SILVER CAPE WITH ELIZABETHAN
RUFF, OVER FIGURE-HUGGING
LONG DRESS.

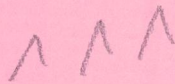


FIG. 8. 1935.
BLACK SATIN DRESS MOULDED
TO THE BODY.



FIG. 9 1936.

CAPE AND STRAIGHT EVENING DRESS
SHOWING THE INFLUENCE OF THE
SURREALISTS.



who followed her everywhere she went, and he persuaded her to open a house in London. In 1934, No. 36 Upper Grosvenor St., was born. It was a great success, people streamed in and out all day to wonder at the novelties in her shop. This was a very 'rich' period for Elsa, in terms of ideas and she travelled far and wide gathering inspiration.

1935, was a very important year for Schiaparelli, and such a busy one. She states in her autobiography "A Shocking Life" (London 1954) "I wonder how I ever got through it". She initiated the first boutique, 21 Place Vendome, selling ready-to-wear clothes. It was an instant success and the idea had since been copied not only by all the great Paris couturiers, but caught on all over the world, especially in Italy. Her shop was a haven of fantasy and fun, as many of her artist friends, namely Salvador Dali and Jean Michel Franck made gimmicky things for her. Dali created window effects, among them a fantastic life size bear with a stomach that was a chest of drawers and dyed bright pink - this was Elsa's own personal colour which she invented herself, and she christened it 'Shocking'. It was to become her hall-mark. Not only did she introduce a myriad of bright colour into fashion, she also invented a multitude of different fabrics and launched novelties, even though hazardous, tree bark, cellophane, straw, also glass. She designed a range of materials for Viyella and designed garments for that Company. With Schiaparelli, fantasy knew no bounds. She set off as she puts it "Cascades of fireworks". Tweeds were used for evening wear, padlocks were used to fasten belts, her friend Jean Hugo designed buttons that became animal masks, miniature guitars, paper weights, feathers, lolli-pops, and "not one", she said, "looked like what a button should look like".

She approached adventurous textiles printers, such as Colcombet to print her designs. There were fabrics printed with elephants, clowns and horses and everything imaginable. She also was intensely interested in British Textiles and visited factories.



FIG. 10. 1935.

A STRIPED TAFFETA CLOAK AND GOWN THREADED WITH GOLD - SHOWS AN ARABIAN INFLUENCE.



FIG. 11. 1935.

AN ORIGINAL DRAWING BY SCHIAPARELLI, SHOWING A BUTTERFLY PRINT DRESS, AND BUTTERFLY FASTENINGS ON THE CAPE.



FIG. 12. 1936.

MARLENE DIETRICH IN ONE OF SCHAPARELLI'S GLAMOROUS
RUSSIAN FURS.



FIG. 13. 1936.

SCHAPARELLI GIVES A HURRICANE TWIST
TO THIS FLAME RED VELVET HAT.

regularly to buy their tweeds.

Tweeds were also used from Ireland, Scotland and the Isle of Skye. In Scotland she saw the first black sheep - she had them shorn, and the wool was made up into startling fabrics reminiscent of heavy arab wools. On top of this, she made the 'zip' a high fashion feature. They appeared for the first time on evening wear. Zips, however, were not new by any means, they had already been around from the previous century. Gorin was the first couture house to use them in Spring 1930, but had concealed them under ruching. Schiaparelli made them obvious, very much so, in using them as decorations in coloured plastic from ICI.

Schiaparelli visited Scandinavia about 1936-7. She wandered into a fish market in Copenhagen one day and studied the old women who wore on their heads newspapers, twisted into queer hat shapes. Back in Paris, she sent for Colcombet again, and asked him to make her material printed like newspaper. He was filled with terror at the idea and thought it would never sell. However, Schiaparelli clipped newspaper articles about herself, complimentary and otherwise, in all sorts of languages - stuck them together like a puzzle and had this printed on silk, cotton in a rainbow of colours. Thousands and thousands of yards were sold. They were made into blouses, scarves, hats and all sorts of bathing paraphernalia. Incidentally, Schiaparelli always made a point of paying for her materials even if she had invented them. She acknowledged this period of her life to have been a rich and rewarding one, and realised the importance of having artists working with her. So many of her colleagues and friends were artists, like Bebe Bérard, Jean Cocteau, Dali, Vertès, Van Dongen, also photographers

FIG. 14. 1938.

A SCHIAPARELLI EVENING GOWN
AND CAPE- IN A FABRIC DESIGNED
FOR HER BY DALI.

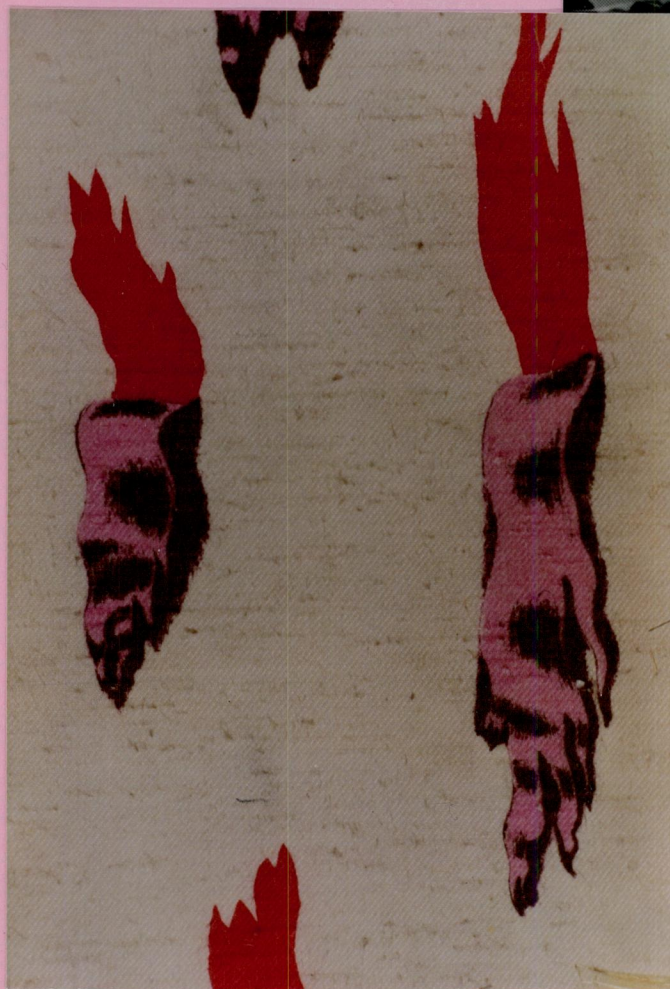


FIG. 15. A CLOSE-UP OF DESIGN
USED IN THE DRESS.



FIG. 16 1939.

A SCHIAPARELLI SUIT WITH PADDED SHOULDERS, EMPHASISES WAIST AND HIPS. THE MULTI-COLOUR PRINT COMPOSES A GEOMETRIC PATTERN.

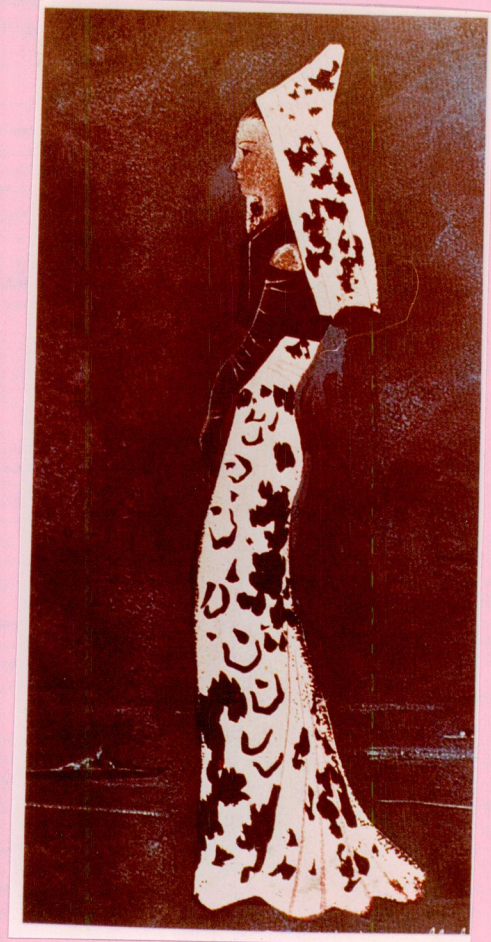


FIG. 16. 1939.

A PRINTED SILK GOWN WITH BLACK BOLERO, WITH A SEMI-MEDIEVAL POINTED HEAD-DRESS THAT COVERS THE SHOULDERS.



FIG. 17. 1939.

A SELECTION OF HATS INCLUDING THE FAMOUS HAT IN THE FORM OF A SHOE; FROM SCHIAPARELLI'S SKETCH-BOOK.

Honington-Huni, Horst, Cecil Beaton and Man Ray.

Towards the end of the thirties, fashion was entering its most difficult years, but Schiaparelli's ingenuity and hard-work saw her through these depressed days as she continued to tease and amuse the public with her inventiveness. In 1937, Elsa had been invited to design costumes for film stars. Mae West was one of them. However, Elsa refused to desert her salon on the Place Vendome for the work-rooms at Paramount. So, instead, Mae West came to Paris, in the form of a plaster statue, an exact replica of herself, naked in the pose of Venus de Milo. When the completed gowns at last arrived in Hollywood, everyone found to their horror that the dresses were inches too small to accomodate the curvaceous Mae. However, the paramount wardrobe staff worked furiously to remake Schiaparelli's entire collection in time for filming.

One thing, it seemed, for Schiaparelli, merged into another. From the hour glass silhouette of Mae, she felt inspired to use the silhouette for the shape of a perfume bottle, to hold a perfume she had already starting working on. She engaged the help of Eleanore Fini to model it. The result was sensational. All that remained was for Schiaparelli to christen it and to chose the colour it should be presented in. It had to begin with an 'S', this being one of Schiaparelli's superstitions. The colour flashed once again before her eyes, bright and vibrant, her shocking colour, pure & undiluted pink. So, the perfume was called 'Shocking'. Presentation would be shocking and most of the accessories and gowns would be shocking. The success was immense and immediate. The perfume didn't need advertising and it took a leading place. The colour 'Shocking' established itself forever as a classic. The royalties from this proved her salvation during the hard times.

Salvidor Dali was a constant caller to Schiaparelli's. Together they devised the coat with many drawers from one of his pictures. Elsa also thought up a black hat in the form

of a shoe with a shocking pink velvet heel standing up like a small column. The honarary Mrs. Reginald Fellowes, 'Daisy' to her friends, the most talked of and well-dressed women had the courage to wear it. There was another strange hat resembling a lamb cutlet with a white frill on the bone. This, more than anything resulted in Schiaparelli's fame for eccentricity.

Jean Cocteau made some drawings of heads for Schiaparelli, which she reproduced and embroidered one, a head with flowing hair down an evening cloak. Christian Berard designed the famous Medusa head in sparkling sequins for the back of a short evening cape. Salvador Dali made up a lobster print, and this Schiaparelli used with her usual panache on an evening dress, complete with parsley dressing!

In 1938, she used three themes for inspiration. For example, the 'Pagan Collection', when women looked as if they had come out of a Botticelli painting. An 'Astrological Collection', which featured signs from the Zodiac, the stars, the moon and the sun, glittering at every step. She embroidered all these wonders onto evening wear and jokey day-wear. She did the same with the 'Circus' collection. "A most riotous and swaggering collection" were Schiaparelli's own thoughts of this show. There were clowns, elephants and horses, decorating the fabrics, and the words "attention a la peinture" was splashed into the prints. Balloons used for bags, spats for gloves, ice-cream cones for hats.

It was a tremendous success and Schiaparelli made many new customers, including nearly all of the filmstars. Apart from this, Schiaparelli also designed jewellery, enamelled necklaces which were very popular. One artist friend designed strange gadgets for her so she could apply them to her garments, for example, a strange brooch that would light up at night, and many other oddities.

Although she was enjoying her success, she had feelings of insecurity for the war was looming up ahead. She was forced to close down her shop in London in 1939. This saddened her a great deal, for she considered her London years to be the happiest in her life. Also at this moment, her latest success on the fashion scene in Paris, was her miniature 'dolls hat', but the novelty soon wore off as Europe plunged into War. However, Schiaparelli still felt she had to go on producing and she built up a collection in a few weeks, hoping for a response. The war had temporarily 'killed' the fashion industry. The collection, as Elsa called it herself was a "cash and carry" one, with huge pockets everywhere, so enabling a woman, obliged to leave in a hurry, or to go on duty without a bag, could pack all that was necessary to her person and still manage to look feminine.

She designed an evening dress camouflaged to look like a day dress - when one emerged from the sub-way at night to attend a formal dinner, one merely had to pull a ribbon and the day dress was lengthened to an evening dress. These were just a few of the "innovative convenience" garments she made.

Gradually her customers dwindled - but she was proud of the fact that she could show a collection in such difficult times. She went on a short trip to America to persuade buyers there to buy from Paris and therefore help the flagging industry. While she was there she exhibited another collection. As there was a great lack of buttons and safety pins, Schiaparelli had used dog chains to close her suits and to hold up skirts. The tweed skirts were split on the side for bicycling, which revealed brightly patterned bloomers to match the blouse.

So her couture house relentlessly carried on, putting fun and humour in her clothes to prevent the soul sinking in despair. Eventually, though, she was forced to leave le Place Vendome as



FIG. 19. 1940

A LITTLE BLACK WOOL SUIT FROM THE SPRING COLLECTION IN 1940. SCHIAPARELLI SHOWS A TYPICAL INNOVATIVE TOUCH WITH A CHAIN FASTENING.



FIG. 20. 1948.

SCHIAPARELLI'S NEW SHARPLY ANGLED SILHOUETTE. THE SPIRAL FLOUNCES OF THE SKIRT ARE WIRED TO WING OUT, CONTRASTING WITH THE SEVERE BLACK SILK JERSEY SWEATER.



FIG. 18 1937-8

A JACKET OF PINK SILK
BROCADE WITH CIRCUS HORSES.
THE BUTTONS ARE LEAPING
ACROBATS. (FROM THE
CIRCUS COLLECTION).

the Germans were coming. Some of her faithful workers still remained behind to try and keep the place in operation, while Elsa decided what she had to do. She discussed the situation with her fellow couturiers and she was urged to go to America. This action of hers, though, received severe criticism. Whilst in America, she visited her daughter Gogo - who was in good spirits. She was engaged to a young American, Berri Berenson. Elsa then travelled much of America, and gave her first lecture in New York and in Minnesota. The crowd here overwhelmed her, there were 40,000 people present to listen to her accounts of France and the fashion industry. Later, feeling an ache for Paris, she made a rash decision to return, much to the astonishment of her daughter and friends - but this trip was short-lived. She had been forced to leave again and arrived back in New York on 11th January, 1942. It was in the year 1943 that she volunteered for the American Red Cross. She seldom thought of designing in this War-torn period, but she still carried on business in a small way in the Place Vendome.

AFTER THE WAR

On her return to Paris after the war - she found clothes were short and square, and hats, awful turbans, possibly evolved from the turbans she so often wore herself. She was frightened at the prospect of starting all over again. Could she pick up the pieces again and reach the same heights she had done before? In December, 1945 - the reviews in the paper were, "Cologne falls, Strikes in Detroit, and the headline "Schiaparelli Emphasises Colour in Fashions". This nurtured in her heart a new beginning. Materials, though were still lacking, and it was hard to come by pins and needles. There was also a shortage of work people. The models were too thin for the clothes, no fur, and no dress could have more than three yards of material. Finally, only sixty models could be shown at a collection. Elsa's first reaction from the towering turbans, hats like Storks nests,

and shoulders as wide as the street, was to throw away all the padding and bulkiness. A 'new line' must be established. This began at the shoulders which now drooped, longer skirts and dresses and high bosoms. Simplicity was the sewing plan. She continued to have visions of women dressed dignified and practical like Chinese ladies and their simple clothes. From these inspirations she made flat dresses with sloping lines, that were easily packed and carried, light in weight and becoming to the figure. She made an entire collection, a trousseau, in a specially designed constellation bag weighing less than 10 lb. She considered this collection to be the most intelligent one she had ever executed, but the results were no sale. No one wanted 'logic' anymore - women insisted on looking youthful, like little girls.

However, in 1946, life was rising again, women of fashion breathed easily, there were plenty of sumptuous materials, jewels and little frivolities. Buyers flocked once more to see Schiaparelli's shows. Everything seemed normal again. At this time she brought out a new perfume called "The Ray Soleil", in an extravagant glass bottle, designed for her by Dali. It consisted of a gilded sun and swallows which stood on a gold and blue sea in a golden shell. This item though was too expensive and too lovely for the general public to appreciate it, but it was not destined to die.

Schiaparelli spent most of her time travelling now, after showing collections, and she went to New York again (as she had done every year) to see her first grand-child Marisa. Gogo was already expecting another child. In July 1949 in Paris, she started preparing for her winter collection. Apart from the strikes that hindered production from time to time her shows were scheduled on time and were sensational. Some coats possessed no sleeves,

others only one. There were few buttons, and no button-holes, as these were difficult to make. Sketches were pinned to the dresses, and snatches of materials stuck on the muslins to show what colours they would finally be made up in. Elegant evening dresses cut in muslin were made to spring to life with costume jewellery. Across the whole collection, here and there, were explanations written in bold hand. The whole show was a great publicity stunt and the cheapest collection she had ever done - and suprisingly sold very well. It had it's desired effect - all of Elsa's staff returned to work the next day.

In 1952, Schiaparelli visited Ireland, where she was invited to the Annual Antostel to judge mass produced clothes. This was a new industry then and Schiaparelli considered it "full of promise".

In 1954, Elsa decided to retire, although her flourishing perfume trade and the royalties from her best selling autobiography "A shocking Life", (1954), kept Schiaparelli in her usual opulent style. In contemplation of her own life Schiaparelli wondered "Had I not by pure chance become a maker of dresses, what could I have become ? A Scupltor ?" Sculpture seemed to Elsa to be one of the arts nearest to creation. This word, however she disliked. She would not use it in terms of her own work. She is reported to have said by 'The New York Times', - "I never use the creation for anything I did because I think its too funny, too self-important to use the word in that connection". Yes, she would have been happy to have been a Scupltor - but not a painter.

With Schiaparelli's ambition, her love of beauty and unflagging hard work, she may have made a sucess of many things - but she chose fashion. Although her designing career ended in 1954,

she remained a consultant for Companies licensed to produce stockings, perfume, scarves, and other products under her name. In her last few years of retirement, she was as outspoken as ever, in an interview she had said about 1971 fashions that "the boots are very vulgar" and "the pants you see on the streets don't fit and they look dirty".

Elsa Schiaparelli died on Tuesday 13th November, 1973, leaving behind her the legacy that "Beauty is not necessarily conventional, soft and romantic, but instead may be outrageous, imaginative and above all - amusing".

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Acknowledgements

Grateful thanks is extended to Ms Penelope Byre of the Costume and Fashion Research Centre, Bath, for supplying examples of Schiaparelli's work, and a list of Vogue references. Her reply is inserted overleaf.

*What about
the material
she refers to*

Bath City Council



Bath Museums Service
4 Circus
Bath BA1 2EW
Curator
Simon Hunt BA AMA

Director of Leisure
and Tourist Services
Denis G. Easterby BSc
PhD FJIM FBIM

Miss M. Forkan,
114, Clonliffe Road,
Drumcondra,
Dublin,
Éire.

Telephone: (0225) 61111
Extension: 425
Your ref:
Our ref: PB/MJ
Date: 13th January 1984

Dear Miss Forkan,

Thank you for your letter of 4 January.

I am afraid we have only one illustration, at present, of a Schiaparelli dress in the Museum of Costume's collection and this is a colour plate in the Museum of Costume Brochure (photocopy attached). Unfortunately it is rather dark (the dress and jacket are of bottle green velvet) but perhaps you can make use of it. We can provide a duplicate slide of this but if you want a print it would be easiest and cheapest to buy a copy of the brochure and I have attached an order form (see no. 211).

Apart from this we have various magazines and clippings in our library illustrating her work and I have photocopied a number of them for you. We do have to charge 10p per photocopy and I am sending you an invoice for the full amount which I hope you will find acceptable. Unfortunately we are not able to photocopy illustrations from Vogue as they are in heavy bound volumes which our machine cannot cope with. However we have a list of references to Schiaparelli in the copies of Vogue which we have here and I am sending you a copy of that if it is of any use. Perhaps you can get access to back numbers of Vogue in Dublin?

If you want proper photographs (colour or black and white copy prints) of any of the illustrations we could get them done for you but we do need to charge the full cost of new photography and it would work out at approximately £10 per photograph.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Penelope Byrde" with a period at the end. The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Penelope Byrde (Miss)
Keeper of Costume

