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Women, Dress & Liberation: The Liberating & Revolutionary Work
of Mary Quant & Zandra Rhodes

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I declare that this **Critical Cultures Research Project** is all my own work and that all sources have been fully acknowledged.

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Table of Contents

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS	5
INTRODUCTION	8
Chapter 1: WOMEN, DRESS & LIBERATION	10
Women's Relationship with Dress & Clothing	
Liberation & Fashion: The Swinging Sixties	
Chapter 2: MARY QUANT & YOUTHFUL LIBERTY	17
Early Life & Love of Quant	
Opening of Bazaar	
“The Thigh’s the Limit”: The Miniskirt	
Chapter 3: ZANDRA RHODES: TEXTILE REVOLUTIONARY	24
Early Life & Education	
Career in Fashion	
CONCLUSION	31
BIBLIOGRAPHY	33

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Fig. 1. My own photography of 1960s & 1970s vintage printed clothing, Brighton 2021.

Fig. 2. Christian Dior, The Bar Suit, photographed by Serge Balkin for Vogue 1947. (source: <https://www.vogue.com/article/christian-dior-archival-looks>) Accessed 27 November 2021.

Fig. 3. TIME Magazine cover of “Swinging London”, illustrated by Geoffrey Dickinson, 1966. (source: <https://www.worthpoint.com/worthopedia/time-magazine-april-15-1966-swinging-46217762>) Accessed 6 January 2022.

Fig. 4. Twiggy photographed by Richard Avedon for Vogue 1967. (source: <https://wearzeitgeist.com/vintage-fashion/twiggy-60s-fashion-trends>) Accessed 6 January 2022.

Fig. 5. Mary Quant with her husband Alexander Plunket Greene. From Bettmann Archive/Getty Images. (source: <https://photos.com/featured/mary-quant-with-husband-bettmann.html?product=art-print>) Accessed 8 January 2022.

Fig. 6. Quant’s Bazaar on King’s Road, Keystone Getty Images. (source: <https://www.gettyimages.co.uk/detail/news-photo/british-fashion-designer-mary-quant-shop-bazaar-on-kings-news-photo/1204585835>) Accessed 8 January 2022.

Fig. 7. Miniskirt protest, photo by Larry Ellis, 1966. (source:

<https://www.gettyimages.ie/detail/news-photo/girls-from-the-british-society-for-the-protection-of-mini-news-photo/3137626>) Accessed 11 January 2022.

Fig. 8. Zandra Rhodes print titled *Top Brass*, purchased by Heal's Fabrics. (source: <https://www.moma.org/collection/works/223844>) Accessed 21 January 2022.

Fig. 9. Foale and Tuffin with *Star Trellis* print by Zandra Rhodes, model Jill Kennington, *Queen Magazine* 1964. (source: Zandra Rhodes: Textile Revolution)

Fig. 10. Knitted Circle print by Zandra Rhodes. (source: <https://www.pinterest.ie/pin/570831321503887816/>) Accessed 24 January 2022.

Women, Dress & Liberation: The Liberating & Revolutionary
Work of Mary Quant & Zandra Rhodes

INTRODUCTION

At the heart of this entire research project is the Swinging Sixties era of fashion and how two designers of this period, Mary Quant and Zandra Rhodes, were both liberating and revolutionary designers for women's fashion. They both brought something new to women's fashion, and can be seen as liberating in different ways. Mary Quant, credited with creating the miniskirt and making fashion affordable for the public in the 1960s, "provided outfits to women that allowed them to function just as a man could and paved the way for gender equality and female emancipation, utterly revolutionising the way women functioned and lived in modern society" (Ebeling, 2021). She is the most iconic fashion designer of the 1960s, her designs reflecting and embodying the energy and freedom of the time. Zandra Rhodes is described as one of the new wave of British designers who put London at the forefront of the international fashion scene. "Rhodes is world renowned for her fantastically innovative and bright hand-printed designs as well as her own colourful appearance" (Safer, 2010, p. 10). It is worth noting that even though these two designers' styles are very different, they are both very liberating and of the time. Mary Quant's work is graphic, with simple silhouettes using block colours. Zandra Rhodes' work is highly intricate and colourful, using lots of fabric and print. Despite these differences, they both emulated the mood of optimism and freedom of the time and revolutionised women's dress.

In this research project, chapter one will discuss women's relationship to dress and clothing and give an overview of the 1960s era in fashion, in particular focusing on Swinging London and the flourishing society of this period. Chapter two will be based on Mary Quant, her design journey and her contributions to shifting the design and functionality of women's dress. Finally, chapter three will discuss Zandra Rhodes' work, focusing on the beginning of

her career which began at the tail end of the Swinging Sixties, and her revolutionary approach to textile print design for fashion.

As a student of Textile and Surface Design specialising in print design for fashion, naturally my interests lie primarily within print and fashion design. My own personal style and aesthetic is bright, bold, free and youthful. Feminine freedom and liberation is the basis of my concept for my final year degree project, presenting sexual motifs and cheeky humorous slogans in a provocative way yet also taking control of and prioritising female sexuality. The Swinging Sixties era of fashion and print design has had a big influence on my print collection in the studio. My love of sixties and seventies pattern and fashion design has come from years spent browsing vintage clothing shops, perusing the beautiful, bright, bold pieces which were created so carefully and lovingly all those decades ago. An area that had the most amazing vintage printed clothing in my experience was Brighton, England which I visited during the summer. My wonderful summer spent completing a fashion design internship in Margate inspired me to make the UK quite central to my research, with the Swinging Sixties being centred in London and both of my designer case studies being British born and bred. The feeling of joy and confidence that colour, pattern and fashion brings me is truly incredible and is such a freeing, liberating experience, which is what has inspired and motivated me in writing this research project.



Fig. 1. Emily Bourke, 1960s & 1970s vintage printed clothing, Brighton 2021

Chapter 1: WOMEN, DRESS & LIBERATION

Women's Relationship with Dress & Clothing

Clothing is so much more than just the fabrics, silhouettes or patterns we choose to wear on a day to day basis. Fashion is a physical, visual form of self-expression and reflects mood, personality, gender and countless other facets of a person. The way a person presents themselves through clothing communicates a lot about them, whether they are aware of this or not. In Barnes and Eichner's book *Dress and Gender: Making and Meaning*, the word "dress" is used as a "comprehensive term to identify both direct body changes and items added to the body" (1992, p. 15). It's rare to be completely "undressed" so to speak, as we "dress" our bodies in more ways than just clothing; for example we also dress ourselves through piercings, tattoos, and makeup.

Fashion and dress have a complex relationship to identity: on the one hand the clothes we choose to wear can be expressive of identity, telling others something about our gender, class, status and so on; on the other, our clothes cannot always be 'read', since they do not straightforwardly 'speak' and can therefore be open to misinterpretation (Entwistle, 2000, p. 112).

Fashion and dress can provide an opportunity for transformation, both visually and of the psyche. We've probably all worn a fabulous new pair of shoes out of the house for the first time and felt like the town was our red carpet. To feel so much joy and unbridled pleasure from the clothes we wear and present to the world is definitely a liberating experience. "Sometimes (but not all the time) women's consumption and use of clothes moves beyond just 'changing the packaging' to creating 'moments of freedom'" (Banim, Green and Guy, 2001, p. 1). To feel this intrinsic freedom and liberation through clothing is something that probably comes as no surprise to any of us. In fact, the world being in lockdown during the coronavirus pandemic may have something to do with the increase in the significantly more free and playful colours and patterns in people's wardrobes. Though it was a time of serious mental health struggles for many in terrifying and unprecedented circumstances, it was also a time for self-reflection. More people experimented and took liberties with their style and what they liked to wear and how it made them feel, and we now see more and more people embracing colour, pattern and caring less for what they feel is the current trend. Jessica Byrne, a writer for youth culture website, *Thred Media*, states:

Psychologists in the business of fashion believe that we are starting to 'dress ourselves happy', harnessing the power of bright colours and mix-and-matched designs to shake off the last two years and offset coming cloudy days – or moods (Byrne, 2021).

However, to some, fashion may seem a frivolous endeavour. Kawamura (2005, p. 9) explains that "a reason why fashion as a social phenomenon has been treated as futile is because the phenomenon is linked with outward appearance and women." Despite this, fashion can be observed, as listed by Herbert Blumer in his article (1969, p. 275), across the following fields: "painting, sculpture, music, drama, architecture, dancing, and household decoration," all of which come as no surprise to the average eye; but he also goes on to state that the presence of fashion is also within the fields of science, literature, medicine, modern

philosophy, mortuary practice and business management. He asserts that “to view fashion as an irrational, aberrant, and craze-like social happening is to grievously misunderstand it” (1969, p. 277). Fashion is ever changing and continues to reflect life and society of the time.

Fashion is dress in which the key feature is rapid and continual changing of styles. Fashion, in a sense, *is* change, and in modern western societies no clothes are outside fashion; fashion sets the terms of *all* sartorial behaviour (Wilson, 1985, p. 3).

A revolutionary era of fashion and a time when the fashion world turned “topsy turvy”, as noted by TIME in 1967, was the 1960s. Though we may look back on this era with rose-tinted glasses, the sixties was not all beautiful, bold and liberated. There were, of course, negative aspects, with the infantilization of the fashion world and the commercialized obsession with youth at the forefront of society being a contentious issue.

Liberation & Fashion: The Swinging Sixties

To understand the sixties better, there must be a brief overview of fashion during the fifties. The fifties in women’s fashion was a time of conservatism and ‘stuffiness’. There was a standard of beauty established for women post-war, which reflected the domesticized role of women during this time. Christian Dior’s “New Look” was introduced in 1947 with cinched waists, full-skirt silhouettes and tight jackets, and women were very much encouraged to look “orderly, structured and ‘feminine’ in the most traditional sense” (Taylor and Wilson, 1989, p. 157). Hemlines of skirts were lowered to mid-calf, with Dior saying that short dresses to him were “the fashion of restriction and war” (Komar, 2022). With this he rebelled against the pragmatic wartime styles that had to ration fabric. There was much criticism of the New Look, with Coco Chanel commenting that “Dior doesn’t dress women, he upholsters them”

(Baker, 2019). Many were not happy with the hip padding, draperies, pleats, embellishments, and other exaggerations of the New Look. These were seen as regressive ideas, and many criticized Dior for taking away women's newly attained independence by lacing them up in corsets and making them wear long skirts again. However, what is fashion if not change? Linda Grant says, “the radicalised 1960s was a decade whose true and enduring revolution was the sexual one. Clothes were part of the physical liberation of the body, the undoing of what Dior had made twenty years earlier” (2009, p. 157). Women wanted to be free, not constrained by the restrictive fashion of decades prior.



Fig. 2. Christian Dior, The Bar Suit, photo by Serge Balkin, Vogue 1947.

Change certainly came with the Swinging Sixties, a mid-sixties fashion and cultural explosion dominated by the youth, or a “youthquake”, as coined by Vogue magazine’s

editor-in-chief at the time, Diana Vreeland. It took place in the United Kingdom, with Swinging London at the centre of it all. The young, modern and new was emphasised, and it was a period of fun-loving hedonism, liberation and optimism. “The 1960s was perhaps the first decade created by the media. It was ‘invented’, chronicled and examined whilst it was unfolding, rather than labelled and analysed with the benefit of hindsight” (Breward, Gilbert, and Lister, 2006, p. 80). Art, music and fashion was flourishing and so too were the people. TIME magazine had coined the term “Swinging London” in their April 1966 issue, which cemented the association of London with everything fashionable and on trend. In contrast with previous decades, “the 1960s are the years of liberation, of flower power and swinging London” (Taylor and Wilson, 1989, p. 155). There was much more freedom in everyday clothing, “the liberating formlessness of the dress, the low-heeled, round-toed shoes, the dying away of the perm and shampoo allowed us to be different kinds of women. It’s impossible to imagine the women’s movement dressed in the New Look” (Grant, 2009, p. 157).



Fig. 3. TIME Magazine, illustrated by Geoffrey Dickinson, 1966.

By 1960, half the population was under 20 years of age. Baby-boomers ruled, and postwar Europe and America were rocked by a general rebelliousness among the young, who trusted no one over 30. The establishment, after all, was responsible for two world wars, the bomb, and Vietnam. The young wanted nothing more than a separate identity from the power elite - politically, culturally and sartorially (Torre, 2012, p. 13).

This desire to be distanced from the past may explain the cultural obsession with youth at the time - after all, World War II had ended only 15 years previously, a significant time of rationing and restrictions. It is therefore no wonder that society then flourished in an all-encompassing explosion of liberation and optimism.

Lesley Hornby (popularly known as Twiggy) and Mary Quant rose to fame in the fashion world during this time. English model and British cultural icon, Twiggy, was fashioned to look well below the age of 16. She was dubbed “the face of 1966” (Milligan, 2009). The debut of “Lolita”, defined by the Collins English Dictionary as “sexually precocious young girl”, came during this time to change the beauty standards and infantilize the fashion world, epitomized by Twiggy with her dollish, youthful look and thin frame. A “mature” body shape was no longer within the beauty standard for women. “Twentieth-century fashion has typically defined itself against the maternal body; early 1960s fashion was hysterical in this respect” and the sixties brought with it a “mania for thinness” (Evans and Thornton, 1989, p. 2). Though many women basked in the liberation and freedom of this era, some did not feel included in the conversation at all. That is definitely a downfall of an otherwise revolutionary time for women and fashion. This unrealistic body standard completely rejected the average woman’s body. This “look of exaggerated youthfulness expressed the associated sensibility that maturity, in dress or behavior, was a dirty word, a sign of premature death, and therefore something to be ward off as long as possible” (Braunstein and Doyle, 2013, p. 246).

Twiggy’s childlike face and androgynous body suited the mood of the mid-1960s. She was

“often photographed in movement - leaping across a room, for example - to emphasize her youth” (Breward, Gilbert, and Lister, 2006, p. 91). However, we cannot give an accurate overview of 1960s fashion without discussing a key figure of the Swinging Sixties who liberated and revolutionised the way women dressed: Mary Quant.

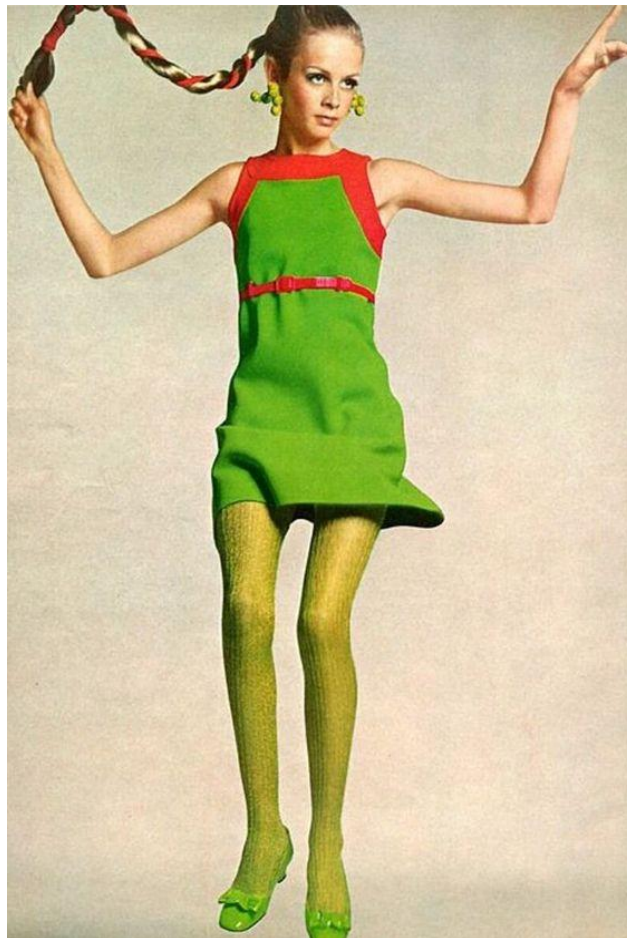


Fig. 4. Twiggy, photo by Richard Avedon, Vogue 1967.

Chapter 2: MARY QUANT & YOUTHFUL LIBERTY

Early Life & Love of Quant

Mary Quant was born on 11th February 1934 in Blackheath, London. She was a self-taught designer, and “cut up bedspreads to make clothes when she was only six; and as a teenager, she restyled and shortened her gingham school dresses” (Steele and de la Haye, 2010, p. 586). Her interest in fashion began at a very young age. Her parents were school teachers, who both came from mining families. They dissuaded her from studying fashion design, thinking that the fashion world was “far too chancy”, but when she won a scholarship to Goldsmith’s they compromised and allowed her to go, so long as she did the Art Teacher’s Diploma. There she studied illustration and art education. It was here at a fancy dress ball that she met her future husband and business partner, Alexander Plunkett Greene. In her autobiography *Quant by Quant*, she begins her story from the moment she first laid eyes on him, saying “life as I know it began for me when I first saw Plunket” (1996, p. 1). He has been described as “a flamboyant, silk-pyjama-wearing charmer” (Nicolson, 2020), and it truly was love at first sight for her. She finished her degree in 1953 and then went on to apprentice in the workroom of Erik, a milliner on Brook Street, London. When she graduated, “London was experiencing a seismic social and cultural shift driven by the younger generation’s rejection of the post-war status quo” (Davies, 2019). From this she then began her journey into the fashion industry as a young entrepreneur, budding designer, and soon to be style icon.



Fig. 5. Mary Quant with husband Alexander Plunket Greene, Bettmann Archive/Getty Images.

Opening of Bazaar

Plunkett bought Markham House on London's King's Road in 1955 and this is where they started their shop Bazaar with friend, lawyer and photographer Archie McNair. This "club-like shop sold a bizarre and bazaar-like mix of Quant's own (self-taught) designs and a varied collection of jewellery and accessories commissioned from their art-student friends." (Nicolson, 2020). Quant bought the stock for Bazaar, Plunkett handled sales and marketing, and McNair handled the legal and commercial side of the business. It was during this period that Quant designed her iconic five-petaled black daisy logo. According to the company website of Mary Quant, the daisy brand logo "not only became an emblem of the freedom that Mary promulgated, along with her desire to break societal norms and show individuality, but also the emblem of our brand" (Mary Quant website, 2022).



Fig. 6. Quant's Bazaar on King's Road, Keystone Getty Images.

So initially, Quant sourced stock for Bazaar from wholesalers, and stocked clothes that she would actually wear herself. She wanted to create “a new way of dressing which moved away from the idea that one of clothing’s primary functions was to be an indicator of social status.” (Lester, 2010, p. 22). She created a pair of house-pyjamas for Bazaar’s opening, which was featured in *Harper’s Bazaar* and an American manufacturer purchased it to copy. *Harper’s Bazaar* began just before the opening of Quant’s Bazaar, and in their September 1955 issue they became the first publication to feature an editorial on Quant. It featured a photograph of a “sleeveless daytime tunic worn over culotte trousers” and was captioned “big penny spots on smart tan pyjamas, 4 guineas, from Bazaar, a new boutique”. Quant described these pyjamas as “mad”, however, “*Harper’s Bazaar*, with its uniquely agile finger on the social pulse, was alert to her potential” (Nicolson, 2020). She was very encouraged by her success, and decided to design her own stock as she wasn’t satisfied with what was

available in the market at the time. She redesigned a few Butterick patterns (Butterick being one of the oldest sewing pattern companies in the world) to create the style she wanted. Then by 1964, she was working for Butterick, with some of her pattern designs selling over 70,000 copies. “Each day’s sales at Bazaar paid for the cloth made up that evening into the next day’s stock. As business took off, Quant employed a dressmaker to help her, and then another, and another, and so on” (Steele and de la Haye, 2010, p. 586). These three entrepreneurs realised, by luck, they were on to something huge. Quant says, “we were in at the beginning of a tremendous renaissance in fashion. It was not happening because of us. It was simply that, as things turned out, we were a part of it” They were at the right place, at the right time, with the right ideas. Reflecting on the sixties and now, Quant writes:

In the sixties, young people were longing for something revolutionary and new but were afraid of being sneered at or being out of step with convention - convention inevitably being the acceptable past. The easy thing was to call anything new in fashion ‘vulgar’. New and vulgar are not necessarily the same thing, but it is an easy argument to make, and it caused the city gents to beat on our shop window with rolled umbrellas and complain. But young writers, artists, photographers, actors, architects and top models loved it, so I was not afraid of my designs being described in this way (2012, p. 208).

Quant had come to symbolize a “moment when the city rediscovered its confidence following the devastation wrought by war and a period of grinding austerity” (Breward, 2004, p. 151). She created a “complete corporate identity, made instantly recognizable through the use of the daisy logo. This was circulated alongside countless reproductions of the designer’s own image, with her distinctive Vidal Sassoon hairstyle” (Breward, Gilbert, and Lister, 2006, p. 40). She also brought a new approach to fashion retail in creating an informal atmosphere in the shopping experience,

In contrast to traditional fashion retail outlets, which ranged from high-class couturiers through staid town-center department stores and chain stores such as C and A Modes to High Street dress shops, Bazaar set out to make shopping for clothes enjoyable: loud music played, wine flowed, and the boutique stayed open until late in the evening. Most importantly, the stock was constantly replenished with new and

highly desirable designs (de la Haye, 2010, p. 586).

“The Thigh’s the Limit”: The Miniskirt

Mary Quant is often credited with “inventing” the miniskirt, however, in reality the rising of hemlines to above the knee was a gradual process, and “by 1960 her hemlines were above the knee and crept up the leg to reach thigh level by the mid-1960s” (Steele and de la Haye, 2010, p. 587). As mentioned earlier, Christian Dior with his New Look lowered hemlines of skirts to mid-calf, saying that short dresses to him were “the fashion of restriction and war”. The 1960s are said to be “unmistakably interwoven” with short hemlines, and the arrival of the miniskirt was “the physical embodiment of a world daring to push new boundaries” (Koo-Seen-Lin, 2013). Little girls, however, had been wearing short skirts for generations, so the trend of women wearing the miniskirt definitely further contributed to the infantilization of women that happened in the 1960s. Paris designer André Courrèges released a couture collection in 1964 with hemlines two inches above the knee. Therefore, he is often given credit for inventing the miniskirt, because “his work gave the above-knee hemline high fashion credibility” (Walford, 2013, p. 61). It’s easy to assume that it was in fact Quant who first created the miniskirt, with “Quant and the rising hem constantly in the fashion news throughout 1965, the two became inextricably linked” (Walford, 2013, p. 62). She said on many occasions that her customers would hem up their skirts regardless of what length she sold them at.

Mary Quant has always been phlegmatic in the face of competing cross-Channel claims from Pierre Cardin and André Courrèges, saying dismissively, ‘It was the girls on the King’s Road who invented the mini. I was making easy, youthful, simple clothes in which you could move, in which you could run and jump, and we would make them the length the customer wanted. I wore them very short and the customers would say, “Shorter, shorter” (Polan and Tredre, 2020, p. 142).

It was the youth who pushed the boundaries and strived for liberation. “It was the young women buying the dresses who shortened the skirts, taking hemlines higher and higher during the summer of 1965 until they had created the thigh-high miniskirt” (Walford, 2013, p. 62). When asked what the mini-skirt means, Quant says,

The sixties mini was the most self-indulgent, optimistic ‘look at me, isn’t life wonderful?’ fashion ever devised. It expressed the sixties, the emancipation of women, the Pill and rock’n’roll. It was young, liberated and exuberant. It was the beginning of women’s lib (Quant, 2012, p. 275).

Interestingly, Quant’s 1966 autobiography *Quant on Quant* never mentions the word “miniskirt” even once. However she did give the short skirt its iconic catchy name, often credited with naming the style after her favourite car, the Mini Cooper. She said “the mini car went exactly with the miniskirt; it did everything one wanted, it looked great, it was optimistic, exuberant, young, flirty, it was exactly right.” In fact, young women loved the miniskirt so much that a group of women known as “British Society for the Protection of Mini Skirts” stood outside Dior’s fashion show in 1966 to protest because he didn’t include miniskirts. Miniskirts had become so politicized, women were willing to go to great lengths to retain their newfound liberation.

Quant truly is a fashion revolutionary, who completely personified the energy and fun of Swinging London, challenged conventions, and encouraged a new age of feminism. In the words of Ernestine Carter, influential fashion journalist of the period, “It is given to a fortunate few to be born at the right time, in the right place, with the right talents. In recent fashion there are: three: Chanel, Dior and Mary Quant.”



Fig. 7. Miniskirt protest, photo by Larry Ellis, 1966.

Chapter 3: ZANDRA RHODES: TEXTILE REVOLUTIONARY

Dame Zandra Rhodes is an iconic British textile and fashion designer, who began her career at the tail end of Swinging London. Her revolution was in large printed textiles forming the finished shape of the whole garment, something which had been previously unheard of in textile print design. In her book, *The Art of Zandra Rhodes*, she describes the prejudices against her wanting to design clothing, with people telling her “Once a textile designer, always a textile designer” (1984, p. 26). Of course, she completely ignored this, going on to dress icons such as Princess Diana, Freddie Mercury and Diana Ross and over the span of her 50 year long career has collaborated with brands such as Valentino, Topshop and Mac Cosmetics and most recently released a collection with IKEA. She is just as resilient today as she was then: “In fashion, you go up and you go down, and my hope is that I can keep swimming along. You have to find a way to keep going — that’s the main thing” (Conti, 2019).

Early Life & Education

Zandra Rhodes was born in Chatham, England in 1940 and grew up there. Her father was a lorry driver and her mother was a lecturer in the fashion department at Medway College of Art. Rhodes says that her mother was her strongest influence,

She was an exotic woman, dramatically dressed, stylish and chic, always immaculately and heavily made-up, very opinionated, dominating our house, dazzling my childhood, embarrassing me in my awkward years; but ultimately being my strength and direction (Rhodes and Knight, 1984, p. 11).

In 1957, Rhodes went to Medway College of Art and studied textile print design. After this, she then studied a further two years for her National Diploma of Design at the Royal College of Art. She loved printing, describing herself as a “very flamboyantly messy student, always

with dye on my nails” (Rhodes and Knight, 1984, p.12). From the beginning of her journey in the world of fashion, she has always had a very strong sense of identity. On her involvement in fashion and textile design, she writes “I have rejected the conventional and opposed formal attitudes. I have recklessly injected colour and beauty into my designs and have fought for originality and freedom of choice” (Rhodes and Knight, 1984, p. 12). The fashion industry has been built on the following idea:

The concept of design as personality, by buying dresses by X you were, by extension, a part of X’s world. This idea originally had currency among the haute couture designers but also applied to the young designers of Swinging London that came to prominence in the 1960s. As part of that movement, Rhodes’ work was strongly identified with the extrovert image that she presented to the world (Nothdruff, 2009, p. 34).

Being the “best promoter and advertisement” for her clothes, she says “if I was not going to wear and represent my clothes, who else was?” Rhodes’ appearance was evolving, and she experimented with “how her look could be exploited to court attention and advance her career” (Safer, 2010, p. 20). With her appearance, she says she has always been extreme, “I used myself as a canvas, experimenting with my image, using cosmetics and my hair to create an impact” (Rhodes and Knight, 1984, p. 12) and she gave the textiles that she made at the RCA to her mother, who would then make them up into dresses. By the mid 1960s, very complex and vibrantly coloured textile designs had become Rhode’s signature in the world of fashion. Influenced by Pop Art, Andy Warhol, Emilio Pucci and Roy Lichtenstein, who all used very distinctive, bright colours, it was no wonder that colour became an integral part of her work. When she left the Royal College in the early 1960s, designing furnishing prints for interiors was the most common pathway in print design, and one of her degree prints was actually bought by Heal’s, a British furniture company, to be used as a furnishing fabric. However, Rhodes became more interested in designing prints for clothing as she progressed in her degree. She was definitely ahead of her time in this way of thinking. Being the first student in a very long time to turn away from furnishing textiles to dress fabrics, she

attributes this to her mother's strong background in fashion. Rhodes explains:

In learning to design for dress fabrics, I was involved in a special adventure, that of patterns which would not hang flat but would be cut and put together again in many different ways. Therefore, I treated myself similarly, like a canvas, pinning paper on to myself and walking around, moving, creasing, and studying the effects. (Rhodes and Knight, 1984, p. 12).

Rhodes was surrounded at the RCA by many artists and designers who would leave to be very well known in their fields and who “played a pronounced role in transforming the aesthetic of the 60s”. These artists and designers included David Hockney, Patrick Caulfield, Sally Tuffin, Marion Foale, Peter Blake, and James Wedge. Marit Allen, editor of ‘Young Idea’ in *Vogue* recalls:

The flux started in 1963, ‘64. Things started to hot up, young people were finding a new personal voice; they didn;t want to be like their parents. There was a new universal movement afoot, that wasn’t just about skirt lengths but a new social order. The young didn’t want to be part of the existing social structure but wanted to be valued for their own capabilities, enthusiasms and talents in every possible area. The new designers reflected this (Safer, 2010, p. 20)

Rhodes was immersed in the social revolution of the 1960s, with London providing a stimulating, creative atmosphere with plays, many exhibitions, music and films.



Fig. 8. Zandra Rhodes, *Top Brass*, Heal's Fabrics.

Rhodes' print *Top Brass*, created for her degree show, is an eight-colour print screenprinted onto cotton satten. Heal's then purchased the design from Rhodes in 1964 at the RCA. For her final year project, she chose medals as her theme, influenced by the work of former RCA painting student David Hockney. His piece *A Grand Procession of Dignitaries* from 1961 features medal shapes along the border that particularly caught her attention. Inspired by these medals, she went to the Imperial War Museum and Wellington Museum to sketch the colourful ribbons and medals, and, influenced by military portraiture, added the stars and bows to the medal designs. "These motifs were all translated into designs with bright Pop colours, energetic shapes, and a sophisticated yet childlike positive energy" (Safer, 2010, p. 23).

Career in Fashion

The potential of fashion as a career for textile designers was not yet realised, "in fact the word 'fashion' was not uttered within the textile studio until the late 1950s and early 1960s" (Safer, 2010, p. 19). Rhodes graduated and started trying to sell textile designs to companies, "but they were totally uninterested" and said that her work was "too extreme" (Rhodes and Knight, 1984, p. 20). Her first job was with Marion Foale and Sally Tuffin, the designers behind fashion brand Foale and Tuffin. Three designs were chosen from her diploma show for her first collection with the duo. It was with Foale and Tuffin that Rhodes landed her first magazine cover in December 1964. The print used was *Star Trellis*, which featured in her diploma show. It was made into a long sleeved trouser suit, modelled by Jill Kennington.



Fig. 9. Foale and Tuffin, print by Zandra Rhodes, model Jill Kennington, *Queen Magazine* 1964.

Rhodes was unhappy with selling her textile prints directly to designers and not having any say in how they were used. “I was unhappy that my patterns were just being cut out at random and the possibilities of what the print and the garment could do together were being ignored” (Rhodes and Knight, 1984, p. 20). Marion Foale said that “Zandra always had very strong ideas of her own and was not one for bending too far - just like us in fact! We went on with that until she felt she wanted us to do the designs of the garments as she wanted them designed and we said perhaps it is time for you to do this yourself” (Safer, 2010, p. 48). This strong will and vision for her prints is what set her aside and made her revolutionary at the time as a textile print designer, during a time where the majority of print designers were still designing for furnishing fabrics.

Rhodes then went into a partnership with Sylvia Ayton, opening “The Fulham Road Clothes Shop”, where Rhodes would design the prints and Ayton would make the clothes. Their

designs were received very well by the media, with Rhodes revolutionary textile designs in particular gaining attention. Her style was colourful, new and different. “The prints evoked a youthfulness that reflected the dominant sensibility of sixties popular culture but also reflected the Pop Art idea of ugly as beautiful. Rhodes consciously worked with rude, disquieting colours and ideas in order to produce something new” (Safer, 2010, p. 56). However, Rhodes’ free and bold prints and personality became a cause of conflict between her and Ayton, with Rhodes realising that her prints “had too strong a personality to fit into someone else’s designs”. With Rhodes increasingly experimenting with her appearance, and designing herself as she would her textiles, this became problematic for the business. Ayton would ask Rhodes to stay at the back of the shop so as not to “scare” potential customers and fashion buyers away. Unfortunately, the business collapsed, due to Ayton and Rhodes not having much financial or business sense. Rhodes then decided to take her future into her own hands. This was when she decided to branch out on her own and use her prints just as she envisioned them to look as a garment. There were a lot of prejudices against a textile designer wanting to design clothes, but Rhodes didn’t let that stop her. Two friends who were at the RCA with her, Normaine Baine and Leslie Poole, taught her how to create dress patterns. This allowed Rhodes to hire a machinist in 1969, and together they created her first line of clothing. “Rhodes focused on the prints enhancing the garment instead of being overlooked in favour of the garment silhouette” (Safer, 2010, p. 65). Her first solo collection *Knitted Circle* was then created, featuring mainly the “Knitted Circle” print. The inspiration behind this print was the stitch shapes and patterns in knitting. With this collection, she says “the true Rhodes style came into being” (Rhodes and Knight, 1984, p. 26). From this research into Rhodes’ early career, we can conclude that she was a pioneer in her field, revolutionizing the way textile print designers worked with clothing.

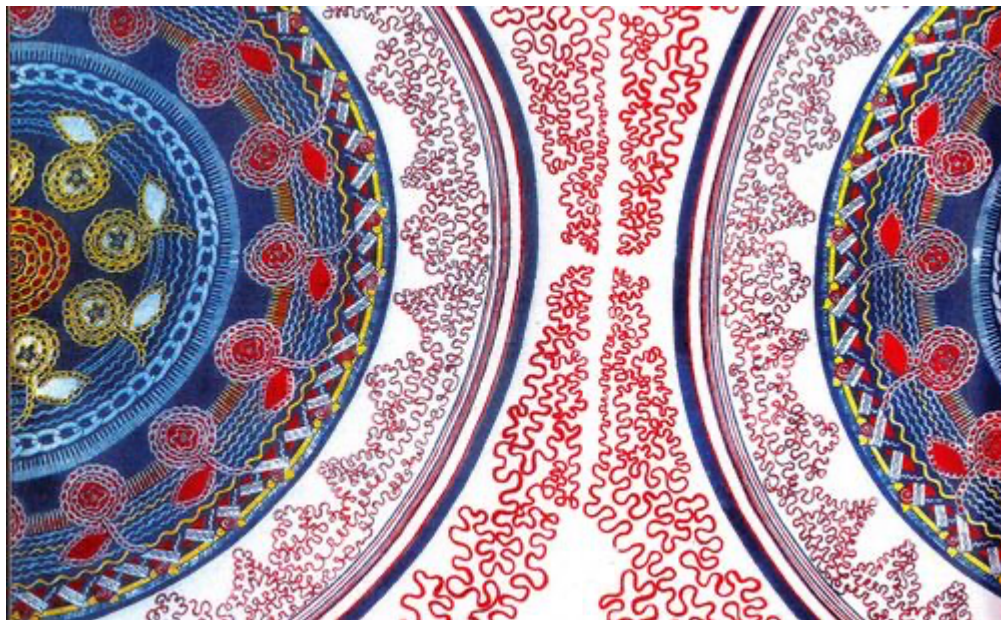


Fig. 10. Knitted Circle print by Zandra Rhodes.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, we can concur that Mary Quant and Zandra Rhodes' contributed to shifting the design and functionality of women's dress and that their work was liberating and revolutionary at the time. As expressed in this research project, both these designers brought something new and exciting to women's fashion, through both fashion design and textile print design. The importance of women's relationship to dress and clothing and fashion was discussed and an overview was given of the flourishing and hedonistic world of Swinging London, with the unfortunate negative aspects being the unrealistic body standards and infantilization of women during this period. The life and career of Mary Quant was then explored, focusing in particular on how she paved the way for gender equality and female emancipation, popularizing the miniskirt and liberating women from the restraints of previous decades. Then, from an analysis of the work of Zandra Rhodes we have concluded that she revolutionized the way textile print designers worked within fashion design, and helped to usher print design from solely being for furnishing, to fashion.

Before beginning my research into this topic, I associated only the likes of brightly printed patterned tights and Twiggy with the 1960s. My love for this era was purely for the aesthetic of it, without any deeper background knowledge of any significant events within culture, fashion and society that occurred during this time. My knowledge on the sexual, economic and political liberations of women attached to these periods has, through this research project, truly been broadened and my once shallow-minded and narrow knowledge of these times now has more depth, colour and understanding than before. From my research into Mary Quant, I was surprised to learn that she hadn't in fact invented the miniskirt, merely named it and popularised it. Another surprising discovery within my research was the rejection Zandra

Rhodes faced in her early career, with textile companies saying her work was too extreme. The unabashed attitude towards this rejection and her unwaveringly strong belief in herself and her work, becoming a trailblazer in the field of print design, is hugely inspiring. Both of these women encountered hurdles in their careers but never let it discourage them from pursuing their goals and dreams. They are two truly exceptional designers, and it was a pleasure to research and write about their colourful careers.

Through this research project I have come to better understand these times in fashion history and culture whilst also having educated myself more on the life of women within these eras, broadening my understanding of fashion in the modern world today. In the everlasting words of my muse Mary Quant, “fashion is not frivolous. It is a part of being alive today.”

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