

VIEW



Fashion Forward, trois siècles de mode, 1715-2015, 7 April –14 August 2016, Musée des Arts Décoratifs, 107 Rue de Rivoli, 75001 Paris, www.lesartsdecoratifs.fr

Fashion Forward sends us on a journey of discovery through French fashion history with a display of roughly three hundred pieces of womenswear, menswear and childrenswear along the way. Travelling through the first series of rooms one experiences glimpses of life over the last three centuries through the garments, accessories and decorative objects that illuminate each period. The mannequins are displayed openly and are in close proximity to the viewer. As a result it is easy to appreciate the fine fabrics and embellishment details whilst virtually becoming part the set. The simple but elegant articulated mannequins, designed by choreographer Christopher Wheeldon, allow quite natural poses and show the garments more realistically. The placement of period mirrors on the staging also provides multiple views of these beautiful 'robes volantes' and justaucorps coats from the Louis XIV era. As Head Curator of Musée de la Mode et du Textile, Pamela Goblin puts it; "Fashion is motion" and the scenography created for this exhibition really gives us a sense of how people moved in these garments.

One very interesting piece, gorgeous in its own right, is an elaborate corset and side bustle undergarment, made from silk damask, boning, linen, leather and metal. Such garments were essential to maintain the silhouette of the 'Robe à la française', popular for court dress during the 1740s through to the 1770s. This is such a fine work, especially

impressive as its construction occurred in a period when all work was done entirely by hand. Projected above is a film segment showing a woman being dressed, illustrating how these garments were worn and how many layers were needed to satisfy the fashion requirements of the day. The beautifully choreographed film adds an ethereal quality to the exhibition. It also makes clear how arduous it was just to get dressed, let alone exist in all those layers. The highly embellished Court Dress, circa 1778, fashioned out of several types of silk with embroidery, beads and sequins would have required the 'architecture' provided by this type of corset. Many of the accompanying accessories in this section of the exhibition are captivating and have distinctly 'modern' elements to them. When looking at these impressive pieces, it is easy to see why designers are always looking back at the history of fashion for inspiration. Two pairs of gloves from the mid-1700s particularly captivated me with their delicate design and fine embellishment. Either of these designs could easily slip into a Christian Lacroix or McQueen collection.

Fast forward to subsequent rooms and further inspiration to find new silhouettes made from delicate cotton voile fabrics for day dresses and 'robes à tranformation', known as the crinoline, celebrated in Claude Monet's paintings of the late 1860s and 70s. Quite a different shape is established with the 'robe de jour', circa 1885, made from a finely woven dark brown cotton with a printed paisley border. The back view is stunning, with a nipped in waist and generous bustle adorned with an enormous paisley bow. This popular new shape also required inner architecture as did the Court Dress of a hundred years earlier.