This volume is published in conjunction with the exhibition "Poiret: King of Fashion," held at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, from May 9 to August 5, 2007.

The exhibition and its accompanying catalogue are made possible by

BALENCIAGA

Additional support is provided by

CONDÉ NAST

Published by The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

Copyright © 2007 by The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording or any information storage or retrieval system, without the permission in writing from the publisher.

John P. O'Neill, Editor in Chief
Gwen Roginsky, Associate General Manager of Publications
Joan Holt, Editor
Paula Torres, Production Manager

Designed by Takaaki Matsumoto/Matsumoto Incorporated, New York

Color photography for The Metropolitan Museum of Art by Karin L. Willis of the Photograph Studio, The Metropolitan Museum of Art

Color separations by Professional Graphics Inc., Rockford, Illinois

Printed and bound by Mondadori Printing S.p.A., Verona, Italy

Front cover: Typography adapted from a poster designed by Georges Lepape for a European tour organized by Poiret in 1920

Frontispiece: Marianne Brandt (German, 1893–1983)

Partisan Impressions, 1926
Photomontage of newspaper clippings, including an image of Paul Poiret

Back cover: Rose adapted from Paul Poiret's couture label, designed by Paul Iribe in 1908 or 1909

Cataloging-in-Publication Data is available from the Library of Congress

CONTENTS

SPONSOR'S STATEMENT
7

FOREWORD
PHILIPPE DE MONTEBELLO
9

PREFACE
THE PROPHET OF SIMPLICITY
HAROLD KODA AND ANDREW BOLTON
13

INTRODUCTION
POIRET'S MODERNISM AND THE LOGIC OF FASHION
NANCY J. TROT
17

DENISE POIRET: MUSE OR MANNEQUIN?
CAROLINE EVANS
27

HIGH PRIESTESS OF FASHION
CAROLINE RENNOLDS MILBANK
31

REFASHIONING THE FASHION PLATE: POIRET'S CLOTHING IN CONTEXT
MARY E. DAVIS
35

THE LURE OF VIENNA: POIRET AND THE WIENER WERKSTÄTTE
HEATHER HESS
39

PAUL POIRET AND THE DECORATIVE ARTS
JARED GOS
43

FORBIDDEN FRUITS: THE PERFUMES OF ROSINE
KENNETH E. SILVER
47

CATALOGUE
HAROLD KODA AND ANDREW BOLTON
52

EXHIBITION CHECKLIST
215

PHOTOGRAPH CREDITS
218

SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY
221

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS
223
Sponsor’s Statement

It is with great pride that the House of Balenciaga is collaborating with The Costume Institute of The Metropolitan Museum of Art on “Poiret: King of Fashion.” The exhibition will allow many to rediscover one of the greatest couturiers of the twentieth century.

Paul Poiret was a remarkable innovator, freeing women from the corseted and buttressed silhouette of the nineteenth century. He ushered in modernist fashion, allowing those who came after him to expand on his revolutionary conceptualizations. Like Cristobal Balenciaga, also known for his radical approach to the body and to dressmaking, Poiret was a powerfully and exceptionally inventive force, a designer who materialized the world of ideas through the sensual métier of dress. We are honored to make this homage possible and pay tribute to his legacy and the ever-evolving tradition of design at its most masterful.

Nicolas Ghesquière
Creative Director, Balenciaga
FOREWORD

In his memoirs, Paul Poiret wrote “Am I a fool when I dream of putting art into my dresses, a fool when I say dressmaking is an art? . . . For I have always loved painters, and felt on an equal footing with them. It seems to me that we practice the same craft . . .” And, indeed, Poiret, more than any other couturier of his time, was influenced by the major artistic trends of the early twentieth century, especially orientalism, primitivism, and Neoclassicism. He introduced the vivid colors of the Fauvists to the haute couture and was fascinated by the exoticism of the Ballets Russes. Poiret collaborated with many artists of the period, including Raoul Dufy, and with the illustrators Paul Iribe and Georges Lepape, whose graphic depictions of his collections are the inspiration for the striking vignettes in “Poiret: King of Fashion,” the first major museum presentation of the work of this artist-couturier in more than thirty years.

The incentive for the exhibition was the discovery of a treasure trove of clothing that Poiret made for his wife, Denise, which came up for auction in Paris in 2005. Many of the costumes had never been seen before by anyone outside of Denise Poiret’s private circle of family and friends. So radical were they in terms of their modernity that they impelled the curators of the The Costume Institute to re-examine the couturier’s contribution to twentieth-century fashion. More than twenty of these costumes and accessories were acquired by The Metropolitan Museum of Art and are featured in this landmark exhibition. This remarkable find is the most important acquisition for The Costume Institute in recent years, and we owe this rare opportunity to the generosity and ongoing support of The Friends of The Costume Institute.

“Poiret: King of Fashion” was organized by Harold Koda and Andrew Bolton, Curator in Charge and Curator, respectively, of The Costume Institute, who have also written texts for this handsome publication. We are extremely fortunate to have a distinguished roster of art and fashion historians as other contributors: Mary E. Davis, Associate Professor of Music, Case Western University; Caroline Evans, Professor of Fashion History and Theory, Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design at the University of the Arts London; Jared Goss, Associate Curator, Department of Nineteenth-Century, Modern, and Contemporary Art, The Metropolitan Museum of Art; Heather Hess, Stefan Engelhorn Curatorial Fellow, Busch-Reisinger Museum, Harvard University; Caroline Rennolds Milbank, independent fashion historian; Kenneth E. Silver, Professor of Modern Art and Chairman of the Department of Art History, New York University; and Nancy J. Troy, Professor of Art History, University of Southern California. We thank them for their efforts in making this catalogue a valuable resource for scholars and students, and an enlightening experience for the general reader.

We are extremely grateful to Balenciaga for their generous and enthusiastic support of both the exhibition and this catalogue. We also thank Condé Nast for their contribution and their continuing support of The Costume Institute.

Philippe de Montebello

Director, The Metropolitan Museum of Art

Opposite: Kees van Dongen (Dutch, 1877–1968). Detail of La Quitalde (Tranquility), once owned by Paul Poiret. Oil on canvas, 1918
PAUL POIRET
**Preface: The Prophet of Simplicity**

Harold Koda and Andrew Bolton

Every decade has its seer or sibyl of style, a designer who, above all others, is able to divine and define the desires of women. In the 1910s, this oracle of the mode was Paul Poiret, known in America as "The King of Fashion." In Paris, he was simply *Le Magnifique*, after Suleyman the Magnificent, a suitable sobriquet for a couturier who, alongside the all-pervasive influence of Sergei Diaghilev's Ballets Russes, employed the language of orientalism to develop the romantic and theatrical possibilities of clothing. Like those of his artistic confrère Léon Bakst, Poiret's exoticized tendencies were expressed through his use of vivid color coordinations and enigmatic silhouettes such as his iconic "lampshade" tunic and his "harem" trousers or pantaloons. However, these orientalist fantasies (or, rather, fantasies of the Orient) have served to detract from Poiret's more enduring innovations, namely his technical and marketing achievements. Poiret effectively established the canon of modern dress and developed the blueprint of the modern fashion industry. Such was his vision that Poiret not only changed the course of costume history, but also steered it in the direction of modern design history.

Poiret's route into the couture followed the common practice of shopping around one's drawings of original fashion designs. His efforts were rewarded in 1898, when the couturière Madeleine Chérut bought twelve of his designs. In the same year, he began working for Jacques Doucet, one of the most prominent couturiers in Paris. According to Poiret's memoirs, *My First Fifty Years* (1931), the first design he created for the house was a red wool cloak with gray crépe de chine lining and revers, which sold 400 copies. But it was a mantle he made for the actress Régine in a play called *Zaza* that was to secure his fame. (Using the stage as a runway was to become a typical strategy of Poiret's marketing practices, enabling him to present his most avant-garde creations.) The mantle was of black tulle over a black taffeta that had been painted by Billotey, then a famous fan painter, with large white and mauve irises. In Poiret's words, "All the sadness of a romantic dénouement, all the bitterness of a fourth act, were in this expressive cloak, and when they saw it appear, the audience foresaw the end of the play. . . . Thenceforth, I was established, chez Doucet and in all of Paris." By the time he left Doucet in 1900 to fulfill his military service, Poiret had risen to become head of the tailoring department.

In 1901, Poiret joined the House of Worth, where he was asked to create what Gaston Worth (the son of Charles Frederick Worth, the eponymous founder) called "fried potatoes," simple, practical garments that were side dishes to Worth's main course of "truffles," opulent evening and reception gowns. One of his "fried potatoes," a cloak made from black wool and cut along straight lines like the kimono, proved too simple for one of Worth's royal clients, the Russian princess Bariatinsky, who on seeing it cried, "What horror!; with us, when there are low fellows who run after our sledges and annoy us, we have their heads cut off, and we put them in sacks just like that. . . ." Her reaction, however, prompted Poiret to found his own *maison de couture* in 1903 at 5, rue Auber. Later, in 1906, he moved his atelier to 37, rue Pasquier, and then in 1909, to 9, avenue d'Antin. Two years later he established a perfume and cosmetics company named after his eldest daughter, Rosine, and a decorative arts company named after his second daughter, Martine, both located at 107, rue du faubourg Saint-Honoré. In so doing, he was the first couturier to align fashion with interior design and promote the concept of a "total lifestyle."

While Poiret learned his craft at two of the oldest and most revered couture houses, he spent his first decade as an independent couturier not only breaking with established conventions of dressmaking, but also subverting and eventually destroying their underlying presumptions. He began with the body, liberating it first from the petticoat in 1903 and then from the corset in 1906. Although constantly shifting in its placement, the corseted waistline, which had persisted almost without interruption since the Renaissance, divided the female form into two distinct masses. By 1900, it promoted an S-curve silhouette with large, forward-projecting breasts and equally large backward-protruding bottom. In promoting an uncorseted silhouette, Poiret presented an integrated and intelligible corporeality. He was not alone in this vision of dress reform. Lucile (also known as Lady Duff Gordon) and Madeleine Vionnet also advanced an uncorseted silhouette, but it was Poiret, largely owing to his publicity acumen, who became most widely associated with the new look.

In freeing women from corsets and dissolving the fortified grandeur of the obdurate, hyperbolic
silhouette, Poiret effected a concomitant revolution in dressmaking, one that shifted the emphasis away from the skills of tailoring to those based on the skills of draping. It was a radical departure from the couture traditions of the nineteenth century, which, like menswear (to which they were indebted), relied on pattern pieces, or more specifically the precision of pattern making, for their efficacy. Looking to both antique and regional dress types, most notably to the Greek chiton, the Japanese kimono, and the North African and Middle Eastern caftan, Poiret advocated fashions cut along straight lines and constructed of rectangles. Such an emphasis on flatness and planarity required a complete reversal of the optical effects of fashion. The cylindrical wardrobe replaced the statuesque, turning three-dimensional representation into two-dimensional abstraction. It was a strategy that dethroned the primacy and destabilized the paradigm of Western fashion.

Poiret’s process of design through draping is the source of fashion’s modern forms. It introduced clothing that hung from the shoulders and facilitated a multiplicity of possibilities. Poiret exploited its fullest potential by launching, in quick succession, a series of designs that were startling in their simplicity and originality. From 1906 to 1911, he presented garments that promoted an attenuated, high-waisted Directoire Revival silhouette. Different versions appeared in two limited-edition albums, Paul Iribe’s Les robes de Paul Poiret (1908) and Georges Lepape’s Les choses de Paul Poiret (1911), early examples of Poiret’s attempts to cement the relationship between art and fashion (which later expressed themselves in collaborations with Erte and Raoul Dufy, among others). Both albums relied on the stenciling technique known as pochoir, resulting in brilliantly saturated areas of color. It was an approach that reflected not only the novelty of Poiret’s designs but also his unique palette. Indeed, although the columnar garments depicted in the pochoirs referenced Neoclassicism, their acidic colors and exotic accessorization, most notably turbans wrapped à la Madame de Staël, were more an expression of orientalism (as were several cocoon or kimono coats for which Poiret was known throughout his career).

Spurred on by the success of the Ballets Russes production of Schéhérazade in 1910, Poiret gave full vent to his orientalist sensibilities, launching a sequence of fantastic confections, including “harem” pantaloons in 1911 and “lampshade” tunics in 1913 (earlier, in 1910, Poiret had introduced hobble skirts, which also can be interpreted as an expression of his orientalism). As well as hosting a lavish fancy-dress party in 1911 called “The Thousand and Second Night,” where the fashions and the scenography reflected a pantomimic, phantasmagoric mythical East, he also designed costumes for several theatrical productions with orientalist themes, most notably Jacques Richepin’s Le minaret, which premiered in Paris in 1913 and presented the couturier with a platform on which to promote his “lampshade” silhouette. Even when Poiret reopened his fashion business after World War I, during which he served as a military tailor, orientalism continued to exercise a powerful influence over his creativity. By this time, however, its fashionability had been overshadowed by modernism. Utility, function, and rationality supplanted luxury, ornament, and sensuality. Poiret could not reconcile the ideals and aesthetics of modernism with those of his own artistic vision, a fact that contributed not only to his diminished popularity and preeminence in the 1920s but also, ultimately, to the closure of his business in 1929.

It is ironic that Poiret rejected modernism, given that his technical and commercial innovations were fundamental to its emergence and development. But, while Poiret’s orientalism was at odds with modernism, both ideologically and aesthetically, it served as the principal expression of his modernity, enabling him to radically transform the couture traditions of the Belle Époque. Poiret’s modernity is the thread that weaves through the exhibition “Poiret: King of Fashion,” which was precipitated by an auction of clothes owned by Poiret’s wife, Denise, organized by the fashion specialist Françoise Auguet at PIASA Paris, Drouot-Richelieu, on May 10 and 11, 2005. Since many of the pieces in the auction were unique models that Poiret had made for his wife, who was also his muse and model, they represented an undiluted expression of the couturier’s creativity. Not only did they provide new, revelatory insights into Poiret’s oeuvre, such as the range of his design output and the breadth of his influences, they compelled a reappraisal of his visionary approach to the body and to dressmaking. Some of the most radical clothes in the auction were bought by The Metropolitan Museum of Art and are represented in this exhibition and publication. They testify to the fact that while Poiret may have been fashion’s last great orientalist, he was also its first great modernist.
**Introduction: Poiret’s Modernism and the Logic of Fashion**

Nancy J. Troy

Paul Poiret dominated the world of fashion in the early twentieth century. Not only did he introduce a radically simplified female silhouette, but he also pioneered the sale of women’s clothes together with lifestyle accessories such as perfume and decorative objects for the home. His meteoric rise to prominence as a couturier in the years just before the outbreak of World War I depended not simply on the distinctive character of his clothing and other designs but also, and perhaps more crucially, on his ability to project an aura of originality in the face of mass production. In the 1920s, when that balancing act could no longer be sustained, Poiret’s star status went into a gradual but inexorable decline.

Alongside his striking innovations in costume style and construction, Poiret developed a sharply honed marketing strategy that called for promoting his dresses and other fashionable products as works of art, while presenting himself as an inspired artist and patron of the arts. Although he embraced modernism in the range of contemporary artists whose work he supported, his attitude was marked by elitist individualism tinged with nostalgia for a vanishing era of authenticity and integrity, a time when artists could effortlessly sustain a myth of purity and independence from the constraints of commodity culture. Paradoxically, Poiret’s modernity and his notoriety were achieved through his inspired deployment of art discourse, which distanced him from the vulgar crowd and appealed to a wealthy, discreet clientele; at the same time, however, by marshaling the visual and performing arts, architecture, interior decoration, and graphic design, he attracted constant attention from the press, became visible to a vast public audience, and created a seemingly unquenchable demand for his dresses.

Just as his deployment of the arts as promotional vehicles to advance his signature style enabled Poiret to position his clothes (and himself along with them) at the pinnacle of fashion, so, too, the popularity he achieved by this means assured the vulnerability of his dresses to copying and pastiche. The very strategies he used to portray his clothes as unique, even avant-garde creations—indeed, as works of modern art—encouraged the production of a profusion of copies destined for mass consumption. The resulting widespread availability of his designs amounted to a popularization that simultaneously validated his singular preeminence in fashion and destroyed his aspirations to status as an artist among the cultural elite.

Given the nature of haute couture as an artisan-based enterprise, Poiret’s business was capable of creating only a limited quantity of high-quality, work-intensive products; once demand exceeded that limit, standardized methods of quantity production, to which his couture house was ill-adapted, were inevitably set into motion. When manufacturers better equipped to satisfy a mass market began to exploit the enormous consumer demand Poiret’s own designs elicited, he found himself in an impossible bind. Faced with uncontrolled and often illegal or unauthorized copying of his own unique models, he tried to restrain such mass production in order to protect his elite business; at the same time, he was compelled to enter the mass market not only to support his high-end trade but also to protect his financial interest in the exploitation of his designs. Both of these options were likely to be losing propositions because, in the first instance, it was impossible to prevent illegal or unauthorized copying; and, in the second, once he offered less expensive garments to a mass market, exclusive, high-end clients would refuse to pay the top prices required for him to break even on his made-to-order merchandise. This conundrum highlights the inherently contradictory nature of what might be described as the logic of fashion—the insurmountable problem faced by the couturier when unique creations saturated with artistic aura are subjected to the conditions of mass production for widespread consumption in an industrialized economy.

Poiret’s desire to resolve this predicament, which is characteristic of modernist art as well as fashion, led him in 1916–17 to adopt a different but no less contradictory marketing strategy, offering his own reduced-price copies of his dresses, models that in 1916 he would advertise in *Vogue*, oxymoronically, as “genuine reproductions.” In doing so, Poiret effectively erased the distinction between originality and reproduction, much as Marcel Duchamp did in choosing his readymades during these same years. Where Duchamp embraced the commodity as part of his effort to expose the precarious status of high art in a rapidly changing economic and social environment, Poiret tried to make mass-produced clothing palatable in the couture context by introducing clothes that were described in the *Vogue* advertisement...
as giving women “the opportunity to own a PAUL POIRET creation without paying the usual excessive price.” Like the readymade, the “genuine reproduction” dress was a hybrid devised to reconcile the contradiction between art and industry. It also exposed the inherent instability of the logic of fashion, poised on the point where distinctions between the high-art original and the supposedly debased reproduction collide and dissolve.

Poiret was not the first dressmaker to grapple with the relationship between originality and reproduction, or to use the arts to facilitate his access to high culture and the elite society of those with enough money to purchase couture clothing. Both Charles Frederick Worth and Jacques Doucet, the two couturiers for whom Poiret worked before establishing his own business in 1903, had formed significant collections. Yet Poiret proved to be especially adept at exploiting modern art for the benefit of his many commercial enterprises. Soon after embarking on his independent career, he recalled in his memoirs, “I began to receive artists, and to create around me a movement.” Among the many contemporary artists with whom he associated and whose work he collected were Jean-Paul Boussingault, Constantin Brancusi, Robert Delaunay, André Derain, Kees van Dongen, Raoul Dufy, André Dunoyer de Segonzac, Paul Iribe, Roger de La Fresnaye, Marie Laurencin, Georges Lepape, Henri Matisse, Jean Metzinger, Amedeo Modigliani, Luc-Albert Moreau, Francis Picabia, and Pablo Picasso. Today, this would doubtless be regarded as an eclectic assemblage and mixed in value, but before World War I, when Poiret purchased the great majority of works of art he owned, these figures could be counted among the most advanced painters, sculptors, and graphic artists of the period. Yet Poiret was careful not to transgress the bounds of good taste as he assembled his collection, which was composed, he recalled in 1934 in Art et phynance, “of sure values, because I was always a prudent pioneer.” This approach mirrored his understanding of the need for restraint in fashionable dress, where, as Poiret noted in Harper’s Bazar in 1913, he was “never so far ahead as to be out of reach.” Dresses, he believed, should be characterized by simple lines and architectural construction rather than fancy drapery or added ornament; the woman should draw attention, not her gown. In order to emphasize this point, he told a story, quoted in Women’s Wear Daily in 1912, about a famous actor who appeared in public with a small boutonniere in his lapel: “Someone asked him why he did not wear a larger one and he replied: ‘Were I to wear a large ribbon everyone would see it. As it is now, some will notice it.’” Poiret’s attitude as a couturier, like his approach to art collecting, seems to capture perfectly the dialectical workings of the logic of fashion, which requires a carefully calibrated oscillation not only between novelty and tradition but also between distinction and conformity, correlating the quest for visibility with the determination not to be seen.

As a young man, Poiret had dabbled in painting, a pastime he continued to pursue with varying intensity throughout his life, and early on he seems to have sought the company of artists. Francis Picabia was a childhood friend, and Poiret met the Fauve painters André Derain and Maurice de Vlaminck before his marriage in the autumn of 1905. A devotee of the illustrated and satirical press, he encountered there the work of several of his closest artist friends and colleagues, including Paul Iribe, a graphic artist and designer of jewelry and furniture. In 1908, Poiret invited Iribe to create a deluxe album illustrating his couture clothing and to design the label that Poiret would use for the next twenty years. In 1909, Poiret commissioned Dufy to create vignettes for his new couture-house stationery (a different image for each day of the week), and later the vignette for his design outlet, as well as the invitations and decorations for one of Poiret’s most notorious parties. After seeing Dufy’s woodcuts inspired by images d’épinal (popular prints, often of military subjects), produced between 1909 and 1911 to illustrate a book of poems by Guillaume Apollinaire, Poiret launched Dufy’s career as a textile designer, commissioning him to make woodcuts for fabrics in a similarly powerful graphic style that exploited the stark contrast between black and white, or light and dark colors. While Poiret’s contacts with these and other artists resulted in commissions related to his professional activities, he was also building his art collection during these years, and the two spheres overlapped and enriched one another. Virtually all of the graphic artists who worked for Poiret’s businesses were represented in his collection, but the connections between Poiret’s professional life and his art patronage were more complex than this relatively familiar relationship would suggest. For example, in 1909, after Boussingault was introduced to Poiret as the artist chosen to illustrate an article he was writing for La grande revue, Poiret became Boussingault’s most supportive patron by inviting him to create a large decorative painting for his new maison de couture. Boussingault, in turn, was closely
associated with two other young painters, Luc-Albert Moreau and André Dunoyer de Segonzac, whom Poirot also supported, not only by purchasing works of art but also, more importantly, by arranging for all three to exhibit together in 1910 at the Galerie Barbazanges, a commercial gallery on the premises of his couture house. (Poirot rented it to a dealer but retained the right to organize one or two shows each year.) In March 1911, the gallery held an exhibition featuring graphic designers in Poirot’s orbit, including Georges Lepape, who created a second deluxe album of Poirot couture clothing that year. Then, in late February and early March 1912, Poirot invited Robert Delaunay and Marie Laurencin to share the gallery in a two-person exhibition, the first significant showing by either artist. At this point, Poirot could legitimately claim to be an important patron and promoter of advanced tendencies in contemporary art. He owned an early landscape, View of Collioure, by Matisse as well as at least two works by Picasso. In 1912, not only did Poirot purchase Brancusi’s Maiastră (a polished-bronze sculpture acquired from the artist), but he also bought La Fresnaye’s The Card Players and four smaller decorative paintings by Laurencin from the Maison Cubiste, a controversial ensemble of furnishings that was prominently displayed at the Salon d’Automne that year.

In addition to his principal business as a dress designer, beginning in 1911, Poirot manufactured a luxuriously packaged line of perfumes named after his eldest daughter, Rosine, and he ran a small, loosely organized arts school that furnished designs for his decorative arts atelier and marketing outlets, named after his second daughter, Martine. The interlocking and mutually reinforcing character of his collecting and other artistic pursuits, on one hand, and his various entrepreneurial activities, on the other, struck contemporary observers as a brilliant marketing strategy that would benefit all of his products. In a 1912 article describing the interior of the newly inaugurated Martine boutique, a correspondent for Vogue remarked that, while it was common practice to combine the sale of hats, caps, bags, belts, and other apparel accessories, “certainly couturiers have never before insisted that chairs, curtains, rugs and wall-coversings should be considered in the choosing of a dress, or rather that the style of a dress should influence the interior decorations of a home.” Like Josef Hoffmann and other members of the Wiener Werkstätte, Poirot embraced the notion of the total work of art that encouraged him to position his clothing within a larger (interior) design context. But while Hoffmann and other vanguard architects tended to regard design as a means of social engineering and often imposed their own aesthetic preferences on their clients, for Poirot the total work of art was less a utopian ideal than the physical expression of a personal business empire applied to the feminine spheres of haute couture, perfumes, and the decorative arts. His mutually reinforcing activities functioned as elements of an overarching entrepreneurial strategy that effectively obfuscated its own commercial nature.

In order to sell clothes, perfume, and furnishings to his aristocratic and wealthy bourgeois clients, Poirot had to avoid practices associated with establishments appealing to lower and middle-class markets. If European and American dry-goods and department stores initially created their mass audiences by extensive advertising of cut-rate merchandise on billboards and in cheap magazines and newspapers, and by displaying their wares in enormous quantities, Poirot protected the allure of his products by not advertising, at least not to large audiences, and by appropriating the fine arts to promote the originality, uniqueness, and aesthetic quality of his designs. “I am not commercial,” Poirot told the New York Times in 1913. “Ladies come to me for a gown as they go to a distinguished painter to get their portraits put on canvas. I am an artist, not a dressmaker.”

Poirot maintained this rhetorical posture even in advertisements for Rosine perfumes, which were described in the introduction to an illustrated brochure, Les parfums de Rosine, by the writer Fernand Nozière as “the knowing, meticulous, refined creations of an artist.” For the same brochure, Poirot commissioned Roger Bouquet de Monvel to write evocative texts that accompanied the color photographs of each of the bottled perfumes. The scents were presented in carefully crafted boxes designed by Martine to hold the hand-painted bottles, individual works of art that were specially created to harmonize with the perfumes they contained. Excerpts from poems by Baudelaire and Verlaine, as well as endorsements by famous contemporary actresses, reinforced the message that Rosine perfumes were unusual, aestheticized, and glamorous commodities, “the most expensive because [they were] THE BEST,” as the text proclaimed of Rosine’s True Eau de Cologne.

If it was Poirot’s goal in all his diverse enterprises to blur the distinction between fashion, decorative
arts, and fine art, he set about doing so by self-consciously staging his performances as couturier, designer, art collector, party giver, and entrepreneur. Poiret has been described as a highly theatrical figure, and the theater, in turn, featured prominently in many of his activities, encompassing not only the costumes he created for public performances but also the fashion shows and the parties he staged in his couture house, a stately eighteenth-century hôtel renovated for him in 1909 by Louis Sée, a young painter turned architect and decorator. There, in addition to installing a small proscenium and stage for the presentation of fashion shows indoors, Poiret also used the garden as a backdrop, where on occasion he would film his mannequins in motion, which allowed him to take his fashion show on the road. The garden also functioned as a venue for at least one of several highly theatrical and wildly extravagant costume parties that Poiret staged, and in which he performed the starring role. These fêtes, widely reported in the Parisian press and enthusiastically copied in the highest social circles, provided yet another, extremely effective kind of unconventional publicity for Poiret’s businesses. Although he repeatedly denied that his parties had anything to do with advertising or self-promotion, he was forced to acknowledge that widely circulating critique: “Naturally there have been people who have said that I gave these fêtes as an item of advertisement,” he acknowledged in his memoirs, “but I want to destroy this insinuation, which can only have originated in stupidity.” Whatever their creator’s intention, these affairs contributed significantly to Poiret’s renown. Upon closer scrutiny, their many links to his commercial interests become readily apparent.

The most extravagant of Poiret’s parties, which he called “The Thousand and Second Night,” was a fantasy, based on the tales of One Thousand and One Nights, that came to life on the evening of June 24, 1911. For this occasion, Poiret and his wife required their 300 guests (mostly artists and patrons of the arts) to dress up in “oriental” costumes. Those who failed to do so were refused entry, unless they were willing to outfit themselves on the spot in Persian-style clothes that Poiret said in his memoirs he had designed “according to authentic documents.” He thus used the occasion of a sumptuous party to demand that everyone in his circle accept the controversial features of his latest creations, including the so-called jupe culotte and “harem” trousers, which dominated his spring 1911 collection. These innovations were introduced early that year, probably in response to the impact of Léon Bakst’s designs for the Ballets Russes’ Scheherazade, which Poiret had seen when it premiered in Paris in June 1910.

The “Thousand and Second Night” enabled Poiret and his art-world guests to act out a fantastic evocation of the Orient, staged as a cross between an extravagant fashion show and an elaborate theatrical performance on the grounds of his maison de couture. When in 1913 he was invited by several department-store magnates to tour major cities in North America, Poiret leaped at the opportunity to capitalize on the notoriety of his oriental styles in elite Parisian circles by introducing them directly to much broader audiences in the United States. During the three weeks of his American visit, he addressed thousands of women in public lectures, closed several significant business deals, including one with Harper’s Bazar to supply that magazine with a series of exclusive, illustrated articles, and he made numerous appearances at major department stores, including, in New York alone, J.M. Gidding, Gimbel’s, Macy’s, and Wanamaker’s. Along the way he developed a spectacular marketing strategy that proved to be enormously effective, although it differed markedly from his customary practice, which was characterized by the privacy and elitism of his couture house in Paris. The high visibility of Poiret’s tour was a result of the particular conditions governing the merchandising of French fashions in America, which took place in the public arena dominated by leading department stores, rather than the carefully controlled environment of Poiret’s hôtel, the site of his business headquarters as well as his private home.

In order to lure ever more customers, by the end of the nineteenth century American department stores, like their French counterparts, had developed what the Dry Goods Economist described in 1903 as “spectacular methods of bringing people within their doors;” including such entertainments as “cooking lessons, automobile shows, stereopticon displays, moving pictures, or the presentation of some novel and interesting exhibit... . Very often these openings are held in the evening and partake of the nature of a reception, no goods being sold and visitors being treated as the guests of the concern.” It was, the author noted, a very effective, though also very expensive, form of advertising. William Leach (1984) has described the theatrical dimension of these practices, which he dates to the 1890s, “when merchants started to build their own auditoriums, [and] department stores literally became theaters, putting on
plays, musicals, concerts, and, in some instances, spectacular extravaganzas.” Thus the department stores shared with Poiré some of the same strategies of covering their marketing with a veneer of culture. In general, department stores sought the largest possible client base, using art and theater to make prosaic goods appeal to a wide spectrum of potential buyers. Poiré, on the other hand, stressed the high-end, luxury aspects of art and spectacle in order to build a relatively small, elite clientele through individual sales in his couture house in Paris. By coming to America, however, he entered the domain of the department store, where art and especially theater operated more explicitly and with much wider appeal. Here, as Leach has pointed out (1993), “[t]he upper-class French trade . . . became an American mass market.”

The effectiveness of American merchandising methods had a direct impact on sales of Poiré’s so-called lampshade tunics and harem trousers, two especially popular orientalizing designs that clothed fashionable women in trousers and appeared to challenge traditional gender identities. Notwithstanding their controversial implications, in April, within six months of Poiré’s visit, Vogue declared it “a safe wager that every woman in the land possessed at least one of [his lampshade] tunics during the past season.” This claim may be dubious, but it is nevertheless instructive insofar as it illuminates the context in which Poiré discovered that his exclusive dress designs were being copied for mass production and sale at cut-rate prices in the United States. Not only was Poiré confronted with pirated garments, but he also recognized “the labels which were sewed in them as nothing but counterfeits of his original label.” According to Vogue in 1915: “He immediately placed the matter in the hands of his attorney, who started an investigation which revealed the fact that not only were Poiré labels being imitated and sold throughout the country by a number of manufacturers, but the labels of other prominent couturiers were also being duplicated. In fact, it was discovered that quite a flourishing trade in these false labels had become well established in America.” Just as Poiré’s entrepreneurial dream became reality, at the moment when, as Vogue put it, “every woman in the land possessed at least one of his tunics,” the dream was turning into a nightmare of uncontrollable proliferation. Poiré was neither effectively overseeing the new developments in manufacturing and marketing, nor was he benefiting financially from them.

Of course Poiré was not alone in facing this dilemma. All the major French couturiers of the period recognized the double-edged sword of the American marketplace, where traditionally they made their most lucrative sales but where they were now also losing increasingly high sums to largely unregulated imitators. As the tension between the original and the industrially produced copy was emerging as a principal concern for Poiré and other purveyors of high-end fashion, it was no less a growing concern for avant-garde artists during the teens and twenties. No figure of the period explored this terrain more compellingly than Marcel Duchamp, for whom the marriage of the object of industrial production with the original work of art was consummated by affixing the signature of the artist to an indifferently chosen, machine-made article, resulting in what Duchamp called the “readymade,” a term he appropriated from the realm of mass-produced, ready-to-wear clothing.

Duchamp’s first readymade took the form of a bottle rack purchased in 1914 at a Parisian department store, the Bazar de l’Hôtel de Ville. By having this common, mass-produced object inscribed with a word or phrase (exactly what this was is not known) and with his name, Duchamp stripped it of functional purpose, treating it instead like a work of art. In an interview with Pierre Cabanne that was published in 1987, Duchamp recalled: “It was in 1915, especially, in the United States, that I did other objects with inscriptions, like the snow shovel, on which I wrote something in English. The word ‘readymade’ thrust itself on me then. It seemed perfect for these things that weren't works of art, that weren't sketches, and to which no art terms applied. That's why I was tempted to make them.” Characteristically, he sought to dispel any possible misconception that the readymades might be singular or unique. As he told Cabanne: “Another aspect of the ‘readymade’ is its lack of uniqueness . . . the replica of a ‘readymade’ delivering the same message; in fact nearly every one of the ‘readymades’ existing today is not an original in the conventional sense.” Duchamp did not simply alienate objects from their functional contexts in order to move them to the sphere of fine art, he placed them in an ambiguous, seemingly contradictory conceptual zone that corresponded neither to conventional expectations for art nor to commonly held notions of the industrially produced commodity. Belonging equally yet nevertheless problematically to both or neither realms, the readymades testified to what Duchamp regarded as the crisis of traditional art making brought on by industrialization.
Duchamp’s notion of the readymade as limited in production yet neither original nor unique corresponds surprisingly closely to the inherently contradictory terms in which Poiret described the “genuine reproduction” dresses he designed for the American market in 1916–17, at the same time that Duchamp, a Frenchman in America, was designating his readymades. As physical objects the readymades retained the form of the multiple, yet their titles, signatures, and inscriptions functioned like Poiret’s often-forged label or the titles he assigned to his own “genuine reproductions” to charge with aura things that would otherwise be unexceptional, widely available, industrially produced commodities. The result in each case was an object that articulated a contradiction, an oxymoron, an instability, a constant oscillation between opposite poles. Like the readymade, the “genuine reproduction” occupied an alternative position that both exposed and reconciled (but never denied) the dualities of art and industry, original and reproduction.

Poiret introduced his “genuine reproductions” to American patrons in early 1917, when he circulated a sober brochure printed on ordinary, semigloss paper, the cheapness of which was only partially disguised by an upscale wrapper designed by Eduardo Garcia Benito. Fourteen costumes on mannequins were presented in straightforward, black-and-white photographs accompanied by descriptions and prices of the outfits, as well as by illustrations of Poiret labels specially designed to identify the garments as authorized reproductions. A caption noted, “Every genuine reproduction must have one of these labels.” As a whole, the brochure represented a telling departure from the deluxe, limited edition albums by Irisè and Lepape that had helped to establish Poiret’s artistic identity before the war. That compound of elitist self-representations had undoubtedly been undermined by wartime conditions, and it would in any case have been at odds with the character of the merchandise Poiret was now seeking to promote: clothing aimed at “the American woman at large” and offered in 1917 in Vanity Fair at prices comparable to those of “ordinary garments manufactured in the ordinary way.” Unfortunately for Poiret, who was still in the army in 1917, the French War Ministry refused him permission to pursue his grandiose scheme for expansion in the United States, which in addition to dresses also envisioned the sale of perfumes, furniture, fabrics, and glassware. A planned New York office was short-lived at best, and the dreams of Poiret’s American backers of a substantial return on their investment were presumably dashed when the United States entered the war on April 6, 1917.

Poiret appears to have been devastated by this turn of events; although his career in the world of fashion was far from over, he never recovered the dominant position he occupied in the industry before the war, nor did he develop the potential benefits of the readymade that he had explored in the form of his “genuine reproductions.” The reasons were financial as well as organizational, but they also involved Poiret’s vision of fashion, which veered away from the moderate pricing, licensed mass production, and sporty styles that he had designed for American women during the war. Having been frustrated in that experiment, he reverted to the ways in which he had always privileged originality, individuality, and art—as he had done even in grappling with the challenges posed by American models of marketing in an environment increasingly characterized by large capital investments that underwrote mass production and encouraged consumption on an unprecedented scale.

In order to support himself and his family during the war, Poiret had been forced to give up such markers of elite status as his chauffeur-driven limousine, as well as a property near Paris where he had staged several costume parties. When he returned to Paris after the armistice, he reassembled his employees and reopened his couture house but found that most of his assets were still tied up in real estate, while his couture, interior decoration, and perfume businesses desperately needed infusions of fresh capital. In 1918, he sold the building he owned on the rue du Colisée, adjoining his other couture-house properties, and the following year he parted with one of his most treasured sculptures, a Tang Dynasty bodhisattva, which was supposedly acquired by The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.

Poiret obviously knew that the fashion business was being transformed by new production and marketing paradigms, some of which—the licensing of models for reproduction by wholesale manufacturers, for example—he had pioneered himself, but after the war he lacked the financial resources and apparently also the will to make the changes required to profit from that knowledge. Anyone who lived through the war would have been aware that the lives of European and American women had been changed by the necessity of assuming responsibilities and positions outside the home that had previously been reserved for
men. Nevertheless, Poiret resisted the practicality, stylistic simplification, and rationalization to which other couturiers—most notably Coco Chanel—more readily adapted their styles and, eventually, also their own methods of production and distribution. In 1917, the marketing brochure for his own line of "genuine reproductions" had emphasized the supposedly typical American qualities of comfort and adaptability by stressing the youthful character of his clothes and their appropriateness either for "the business girl" or "the athletic girl." But in the early 1920s Poiret rejected this same rhetorical and stylistic discourse when it came to dominate the couture profile of his increasingly successful rival, Chanel.

While Chanel embraced the trend toward youthful, simple, and functional clothes, Poiret rejected the sporty style he himself had pioneered in 1916–17, and railed against the boyish fashion silhouette, nicknamed "la garçonne," inspired by the heroine of a 1922 novel by Victor Margueritte who personified the so-called New Woman by challenging traditional norms of female comportment. In remarks published in Forum that same year, Poiret declared his disdain for such "cardboard women, with hollow silhouettes, angular shoulders and flat breasts. Cages lacking birds. Hives lacking bees." Instead of the modern, impersonal simplicity of what would become Chanel's signature "little black dress," in the early 1920s Poiret often turned for inspiration to historical, regional, and folkloric styles. Although some of his designs were relatively simple and straightforward, too many others were eccentric or richly spectacular. Thus, although Chanel had not actually gone to America or appealed directly to American women, she succeeded where Poiret failed in creating a style that responded to the desires of these women for practical, comfortable clothes.

The simplicity of a Chanel dress assured not only that it could be adapted to suit virtually any woman—in 1926 Vogue described it as a uniform for all women of taste—but also that it would be easy to copy and distribute in the burgeoning postwar ready-to-wear market. In fact, unlike Poiret, Chanel apparently did nothing to resist the wholesale copying of her couture clothes, the style of which gave aesthetic expression to the industrial character of the readymade. In 1926, Vogue described the little black dress as "The Chanel 'Ford,'" and suggested that the quality of Chanel's clothing was assured by its brand name, just as the Ford name guaranteed the quality of the company's cars. This conjunction exposes a contradiction imbedded not only in the little black dress but also in Poiret's "genuine reproductions" (as well as in Duchamp's readymades) between the mass-produced object and the signed work of an individual artist. There, in the play between originality and reproduction, the logic of fashion emerges as a mechanism for understanding the cultural impact of the transformation from an artisanal to an industrial economy. Caught in the grip of that logic, Poiret's artful self-construction as a couturier and as a modernist ultimately succumbed to the pressures of commodity culture.
DENISE POIRET: MUSE OR MANNEQUIN?

Caroline Evans

In 1905, Denise Boulet, the nineteen-year-old daughter of a provincial textile retailer from Elbeuf in Normandy, married Paul Poiret, six years her senior. She bore him five children and remained married to him for twenty-three years. When they divorced in 1928, Poiret told the governess, “Make sure to tell Madame to take anything she wishes.” She took all sorts of mementos including her own extensive wardrobe, the children’s outgrown clothes, and some of her husband’s: the gold lamé fancy-dress costume he had worn at the “Thousand and Second Night” party in 1911, his colored waistcoats, and his 1920s dressing gown in eighteenth-century style.

Poiret died in 1944 at sixty-five, but his wife lived to a great age. At seventy-nine, she opened her trunks to Palmer White, author of Poiret (1973). Out came “the original coats and gowns Poiret had created for her. Out, too, came packets of letters, personal diaries, photos and newspaper clippings.” Her hoard was all the more precious because very little was left after Poiret closed his atelier in 1929. A notorious spendthrift, Poiret threw it all away in the end—arguably his marriage as much as his business, since the two were intertwined. But where he spent, Denise Poiret saved; like a prudent housewife, she kept the family heirlooms intact. Her treasure trove suggests that her role in the Maison Paul Poiret was more than either muse or mannequin, and when the marriage ended she became her husband’s posthumous (and unwitting) curator and collection manager.

In 2005, the family archive went on sale. Suddenly, in a Paris auction house, Denise Poiret’s ghost was raised in the objects that carried a trace of her physical presence across the decades—the dresses with silk linings that had once registered the imprint of her body like a mold; the photographs that, at the click of a shutter, fixed forever a moment in her life. There is little other evidence to determine her precise role in the Maison Paul Poiret, and in many ways she remains a mystery. The photographs and dresses provide a unique link because they are indexical objects that connect directly to that time, that body, and those places. They are the hieroglyphs through which to read her.

Poiret started designing for her during their engagement. Pygmalion-like, he claimed that he alone saw her early potential. Be that as it may, the photographs of their subsequent life together reveal that his wife, too, was a stylist, in the way she put her clothes together, in her grace in front of the camera, and her ease in the salons and formal gardens of her home. In the eighteenth-century hôtel on the avenue d’Antin, where they lived from 1909 to 1924, the Poirets achieved a synthesis of work and life. Their apartments abutted the couture house, and their aesthetic extended into their daily lives, an early example of what today is called “lifestyle marketing.” Denise Poiret was artistic director of the Maison Paul Poiret, and, like Marie Worth, wife of the nineteenth-century couturier Charles Frederick Worth, her husband’s best advertisement. Paul Poiret used her slim figure as the prototype body shape for his sheath gowns that hung from the shoulder, starting with the Empire-line silhouette that he developed from about 1906. In 1913, he told Vogue, with typical hyperbole, “My wife is the inspiration for all my creations, she is the expression of all my ideals.”

We can only speculate how active a role Denise Poiret played in the construction of her image. She was featured as the favorite of Poiret the Sultan, locked in a golden cage with her ladies, in his orientalist phantasmasoria at the “Thousand and Second Night” party. Poiret’s autobiography describes how, when all 300 guests had arrived, he approached the cage “followed by all my women” and released her. “She flew out like a bird, and I precipitated myself in pursuit of her, cracking my useless whip. She was lost in the crowd. Did we know, on that evening, that we were rehearsing the drama of our lives?”

Denise Poiret accompanied her husband on his first formal mannequin tour of Europe in October and November 1911. The couple drove across Europe for weeks in a beige Renault Torpedo. The nine mannequins wore navy-and-beige plaid uniforms, while their modeling clothes went by train. Denise and Paul traveled in matching beige overcoats, color coordinated to the car and the chauffeur’s livery: literally, a matching couple.

In 1913, they sailed for the United States on a promotional tour with one hundred dresses, each meticulously inventoried by her in an accounts ledger. As her personal wardrobe these escaped import duty, something that had plagued the 1911 tour, when the Polish customs had demanded duty
on the mannequins’ clothes. She was photographed in her outfits at the Plaza Hotel in New York and featured in Vogue. The New York Times described her as "a lance in repose—slim, dark, young, uncorseted, untouched by paint or powder, untrammelled by high heels, pointed toes or tight gloves."

Denise Poiret was, in effect, her husband’s mannequin on this tour. Yet in a number of respects she differed from the professional mannequins who were so important to Poiret’s marketing strategies. She was one, and they were many. They appeared at race meets and on tour, while she, generally, was photographed at home. Although Poiret recounted that she caused a sensation wherever she went, his wife rarely appeared in the press, whereas the presence of Poiret accompanied by a troupe of mannequins attracted publicity from 1908 onward. In 1921–22 his appearance was noted at several fancy-dress balls, costumed as an Algerian slave trader with a troupe of mannequins as his slaves—his “court,” as one newspaper put it—by which time Denise Poiret had ceased to travel with him.

Poiret’s claim that he set his wife free only to lose her at the “Thousand and Second Night” party is little help in deciding how much agency to attribute to her. She stayed, after all, for another seventeen years. In One Thousand and One Nights, Schéhérazade resists her own death through storytelling; Denise Poiret resisted the death of her husband’s memory by escaping seventeen years later with the Poiret archive. The family photographs from 1910 to 1925 show her at ease both with herself and her environs, and it is clear that she participated in the staging of the photographs, even if it was Poiret who actually pressed the shutter. In the formal gardens and the interiors of the avenue d’Antin, she is flanked by children, textiles, and mirrors. It looks like a charmed life: there is luxury, pleasure, and taste. She had grace and originality and was photographed so much and so often one might assume that she was adored. In reality, her life cannot have been as charmed as it appears; her eldest child, Rosine, died during the war; her youngest, Gaspard, of flu in 1918. Poiret was often tyrannical, and from 1923 the business was in increasing financial difficulty. In 1924, it became a limited company controlled by its directors and moved to new premises in the rondeau point des Champs-Élysées. Poiret traveled more frequently for business and embarked on several hopeless missions, including touring with Colette on a stage in La vagabonde. In 1928, he and his wife separated.

Throughout her life Denise Poiret gave few interviews, unlike her loquacious husband, whose grandiloquent self-promotion kept him in the public eye. Poiret’s gift for publicity was noisy, and it sometimes obscured the subtler voices that surrounded him. In 1920, he dined with the London Daily Mirror writer Alison Settle and four mannequins. When she attempted to question them, Poiret warned her: “No, Mademoiselle, do not speak to the girls, they are not there.” But of course they were, eloquent icons of modernity no less than Denise Poiret, whose legacy lay not in words but in dresses and photographs. Like archaeological fragments, these lead us back to a marriage, a business, and a whole way of life. The Paris sale brought to light more than 500 items, including her custom-made Perugia shoes. The Empire-line dresses, Grecian tunics, and orientalized gowns she wore in different combinations over the decades also appear in the family photographs and in her diaries, in which she meticulously recorded each wearing, so that the garments themselves became a form of diary. They are at once inventory, index, and autobiography. Words in pictures, they are a rebus for Denise Poiret, like the motif she had embroidered in her silk underwear, a D, two peas, and a ray. More than just an elegante, Denise Poiret became the custodian of the family archive. A diarist in cloth, she gave historical weight and value to the traditionally feminine sphere of household management. Her legacy testifies to the poetics of the object, with its power to tell many stories, ranging from the prosaic to the magical.
High Priestesses of Fashion

Caroline Rennolds Milbank

At the turn of the twentieth century, Parisian women of the upper crust who cared about elegance and decorum patronized such top couture houses as Worth or Doucet and also Paquin, Redfern, Rouff, Lanvin, Boulé Soeurs, Callot Soeurs. These were places where one could be assured of being addressed properly: of having one’s clothes delivered in a timely manner; and, above all, of beautiful clothes, perfectly made and fitted, clearly grand but never too ostentatious. One couturier’s creation differed from another’s mainly in terms of how it was adorned. Worth’s boldly scaled silk damasks or Doucet’s gossamer laces were applied to rigid constructions that featured such unseen structural elements as pliable metal or plastic whalebone bands, thread-wrapped wire, canvas tapes, and horsehair or other padding. Thus, contained in the silhouette of the day, a couture client could be assured of impeccably representing her husband’s position in society.

At Maison Poiret, decorum did not prevail. Notably lacking in opulence (and corsets), his earliest designs were aggressively, even radically, simple. When he opened his first maison de couture (in 1903 on the rue Aubert), he arranged the windows to attract attention, rather than display objects discreetly. Appreciating the kitsch value of the previous tenant’s carpet (woven with roses as large as “beefsteaks”), he kept it. Whereas Worth or Doucet might mail a client an invoice printed in feathered copperplate inviting one “kindly to remit,” Poiret commissioned emerging artists to design invoices decorated with bold woodcuts. As part of his artistic persona, Poiret did not suffer fools gladly. If he disliked a famous client’s performance in a play, or the way a lady of title treated his sales staff, he made his disapproval clear and then delighted in spreading the tale. Appropriately, there was a cardboard sign at the entrance to his office: “Danger!! Before knocking ask yourself three times—Is it absolutely necessary to disturb HIM?”

For Poiret the simplest act of riding in a motorcar, attending a rehearsal of a new play, or going to the races was an excuse to make a visual statement every bit as dramatic and stylized as the pochoir fashion plates he helped popularize. Accordingly, this king of fashion was often seen surrounded by his court: at his fêtes, it was his guests, whose costumes were carefully vetted for accuracy to the chosen theme; out and about in Paris (or touring America or the Continent) his court consisted of his group of house models. In one arresting photograph, Poiret, wearing a cheetah-lined coat and spats is flanked by models dressed in striped coats, checked skirts, and spats. In his autobiography, Poiret credited Worth with inventing the “living mannequin,” or live-as-opposed-to wooden model: “The living mannequin is a woman who must be more feminine than all other women. . . . by her gestures and pose, by the entire expression of her body, she must aid the laborious genesis of the new creation.” When Man Ray arrived at Poiret’s atelier to take some photographs, he was struck by the “beautiful girls with every shade of hair from blond to black, moving about nonchalantly in their scanty chemises, stockings and high-heeled shoes.” According to Jean Cocteau, Poiret taught his models not to comport themselves like ladies but to assume the stylized stance of a praying mantis.

The quintessential Poiret client was a woman who recognized in the couturier a fellow artistic soul; she was likely to be known for her own achievements as opposed to those of a spouse. Naturally, it took a rare individual to see herself as an enchantress or siren in a Poiret cocoon, minaret tunic, jupe culotte, hobble skirt, or robe de style. Although Poiret’s designs were dramatic in and of themselves, the drama surrounding the designer made him appealing to women involved in the (both serious and popular) performing arts. Among his first fans were the top two actresses of his time: Régine and Sarah Bernhardt. Lillie Langtry and Eve Laëtitia were clients. The actress usually described as “the great Spinnely” wore Poiret on and off the stage and lived in a Poiret (Martine)—designed house. She posed, in a Poiret costume of bra top and full long skirt, pretending to eat the apple off a painted tree for one of Poiret’s perfumes ‘Le Fruit Défendu’ (Forbidden Fruit). Ida Rubinstein, Russian-born dancer who started her own dance company and produced plays (when not posing nude as Venus for Romaine Brooks), dressed in Poiret. He made clothes for Isadora Duncan, decorated her house to look like “Circe’s kingdom,” and also invested in her career. He designed costumes for the stage and the cinema, notably dressing Georgette Leblanc in the visually striking modernist film L’Inhumaine (1924). Two entertainers known more for
their lack of clothes also wore Poiret: Josephine Baker and Mistinguett.

The celebrated Liane de Pougy, one of the last of the grandes horizontales, wrote movingly of Poiret's designs in her memoir. Among his French upper-crust clients there were the Comtesse Greffulhe (muse of Marcel Proust), who came to Poiret for a dress of gold, trimmed with sable, to wear to her daughter's wedding, and the Duchesse de Gramont, for whom he designed Winterhalter-era robes de style for her "Bal en Crinolines." Margot Asquith, wife of the English prime minister, showed Poiret her violet undergarments before inviting him to show his styles at their residence in London, creating a political furor for her (and her husband's) disloyalty to British designers. Nancy Cunard, ivory-bracelet-clad icon of early-twentieth-century style, recalled that she had been wearing a gold-panniered Poiret dress in 1922 at a ball where she was bored dancing with the Prince of Wales but thrilled to meet and chat with T. S. Eliot.

International cosmetics entrepreneur Helena Rubinstein met him while he was a young design assistant at Worth and followed him as he struck out on his own. As a businesswoman building a cosmetics empire, she crafted a public image of herself as a connoisseur of outstanding fashion and jewels and was photographed numerous times, for publicity purposes, wearing Poiret clothes. The quintessentially French author Colette was a client and appeared with him in one of her plays. The Marchesa Casati, whose exotic presentation of herself was an art form, was painted by Giovanni Boldini in a swirl of Poiret and greyhounds. (Although it is not known whether Sarah Bernhardt wore any of her Poiret clothes when lying in her coffin in her living room, the Marchesa Casati was infamous for sitting at a party next to an exact likeness of herself in wax dressed in a matching Poiret ensemble; guests were expected to be mystified as to who was who.) In his autobiography, the artist Erte described making a dramatic entrance at a dress rehearsal of a play in Paris, in a borrowed Poiret evening gown and turban, accompanied by four male friends in white tie and tails. After making such a glamorous splash that he was written up in the newspaper, he was called into Poiret's office, expecting censure. Instead, Poiret offered to design specifically for him and to have him model dresses in his next collection.

The American art patrons Peggy Guggenheim and Gertrude Whitney dressed in high-bohemian Poiret. (Guggenheim must have appreciated Poiret's affinity for contemporary art: she ended up owning the Brancusi sculpture of a bird seen in many of the photographs taken of Denise Poiret and others in Poiret's own quarters.) Whitney, sculptor and founder of the Whitney Museum of American Art, was intentionally presenting an avant-garde artistic self to the world when she wore a Poiret 'Robe Sorciere'. Natacha Hudnut Rambova, a designer and the wife of matinee idol Rudolph Valentino, went to Poiret for her trousseau. As a struggling young designer in the early 1920s, Elsa Schiaparelli attracted Poiret's attention and received free clothes to wear.

By the mid-1920s, however, a circle of clients photographed at Maison Poiret watching a défilé hardly seem exotic or unusual. Instead, they are elegant to a fault—all with the same dark painted mouth, cloche hat, sheer stockings, and Louis-heeled pumps. Poiret had become merely interesting, a must-see in a guidebook of Paris highlights. As the Depression drew near, the days of high priestesses wearing sorcerer's robes to "1,001 nights" balls gave way to women tackling solo flights around the world, running for Parliament, and defining radioactivity. Poiret's global exoticism would not seem modern again until the beginning of the twenty-first century, when the haute couture had found new resonance as one of the most dramatic of arts.
Refashioning the Fashion Plate: Poiret's Clothing in Context

Mary E. Davis

Writing in February 1935, the New Yorker correspondent Janet Flanner observed that “in the area of the ultramodern in dress and decoration” Paul Poiret had created a “genre Poiret, as definite to the connoisseur as the costumes that give the date of any period drawing or print.” In fact, Poiret had done more: he had been a catalyst for dramatic change in fashion and fashion imagery, stimulating new modes of illustration and ultimately bringing dress closer to the status of fine art. The “genre Poiret” found its best expression in fashion plates and photographs that captured the look of his designs and conveyed their fresh spirit; in these images the sartorial and the visual intersected to create a fashionable brand of modernism.

Poiret’s involvement with modernist art led him to explore its possibilities not only for his designs, but also for their marketing. A first step was the publication of an extraordinary catalogue depicting gowns, coats, and hairstyles from the “Directoire” collection in 1908, which was illustrated by the young artist Paul Iribe. Printed on fine paper in a limited edition and distributed without charge to an elite clientele, Les robes de Paul Poiret racontées par Paul Iribe gave the fashion plate a wholesale makeover. Inspired by the abstract qualities and bold colors of Poiret’s designs, Iribe employed the intricate stenciling technique known as pochoir, which involved hand coloring and had long been considered impractical for fashion illustration. Eschewing the stiff poses that were standard fashion-plate fare, Iribe grouped his models in expressive combinations suggesting action, conversation, or introspection, thus promoting Poiret’s clothing while defining stylish contexts for its wearers and advocating a more relaxed and natural attitude for the new century. Playing on the high waists and straight skirts of Poiret’s gowns, he elongated and streamlined the figures; and, as if to make the disjunction between old and new even more pronounced, he depicted the models sporting Poiret’s fashions in vivid color, while rendering the background interiors as black-and-white line drawings.

A second catalogue followed three years later, this time illustrated by Georges Lepape. Documenting Poiret’s orientalizing style sultane, Lepape’s Les choses de Paul Poiret featured twelve brilliantly colored pochoir plates that captured the new look’s emphatic exotic sensibility. Lepape’s walrus models—sinuously elongated and wearing masklike makeup—lounge in sumptuous settings; turbaned and bejeweled, they inhabit cushioned salons and chic theater loges and attend to tiny gardens in audacious “harem” pants. Like Iribe’s earlier plates, these illustrations were exhibited and treated as artworks, thus solidifying the connection between Poiret’s couture creations and the fine arts. The link was reinforced in a feature article on the couturier published in April 1911 in Art et décoration, a journal devoted to architecture and interior design. Written by Paul Cornu, “The Art of the Dress” posited Poiret as the avatar of a new era in which dress would be considered a decorative art and asserted that his clothes were best seen “against a modern décor, where the design of the furniture and the coloring of the fabrics all reflect the same aesthetic tendencies.” The article’s lavish illustrations, including highly stylized drawings by Lepape and thirteen photographs of Poiret-clad mannequins posed in his salon—the first fashion photographs taken by Edward Steichen—made the case for Cornu’s claim.

Just as this article appeared, Poiret met magazine editor Lucien Vogel, and from their encounter emerged the concept for a luxurious journal, in which art, culture, and haute couture would meet on new terms; thus was born Gazette du bon ton. The inaugural issue appeared in November 1912, and from this date until its demise in 1925 the magazine set the standard for elegance in the fashion press. Devoted to “arts, fashions, and frivolities,” the Gazette quickly became required reading for sophisticated Parisiennes. Modeled on Poiret’s catalogues, it was produced on fine paper and illustrated with boldly colored pochoir plates, and its cachet was enhanced by the fact that the fashions depicted on its pages could not be seen elsewhere, thanks to exclusive contracts Vogel signed with seven of the city’s top couture houses—including, of course, the Maison Poiret.

The Gazette viewed itself as a journal of taste and style, in which visual art was featured and fashion was a centerpiece. Ten full-page illustrations ran in each issue; seven depicted couture ensembles, while the remainder presented imaginative designs inspired by the clothes but, as noted by writer Henri Bidou, were “invented by the artists themselves.” A team of illustrators, nicknamed the “Beau Brummels of the Brush,” did the work; the group included Charles Martin, Pierre Brissaud, Bernard Boutet
de Monvel, Georges Barbier, and André-Edouard Marty. Their theatrical plates suggested witty scenarios or small brief narratives, and each included a caption that cleverly communicated the essence of the moment depicted. As Vogue reported in the June 15, 1914, issue, these "young men of birth and Beaux Arts training" had "made fashion the art of the day instead of art being the fashion."

For these illustrators, artistic modernism provided a crucial link between haute couture and high culture, and Cubism was the style that proved most influential; they adapted its multiple perspectives and geometric shapes and adopted its irreverent stance and cheeky everyday culture. Poiret’s designs were especially well suited to this treatment; indeed, by March 15, 1913, Vogue had linked the couturier to the Cubists in an article on “Dress Plagiarisms from the Art World,” citing his “cubist-crêpe” fabric and the “broken silhouettes” of his designs. No wonder then that Poiret’s garments were featured in the Gazette from the outset and key to the publication’s au courant sophistication. The mutually reinforcing modernisms of his clothing and the Gazette’s illustrations were further enhanced by the artists’ focus on chic contemporary pleasures; prime among these in the prewar years was the Ballets Russes, which took Paris by storm in 1909. Poiret’s affinity with the troupe’s exotizing aesthetic made the connection of his designs and the ballet’s productions a natural fit, and the Gazette’s artists often depicted his ensembles in Ballets Russes-related settings. The connection is clear in Lepape’s plate Serais-je en avance? published in the second issue, in which a woman outfitted in an oversized Poiret kimono-style coat and a jeweled turban topped with an extravagant plume takes her seat in an elegantly appointed theater, perhaps even the site of a Ballets Russes production. The mustard, emerald, and fuschia tones of her ensemble vibrate on the page and are matched in the fantastic depiction of the theater itself. The scene situates Poiret’s clothing and clients at the center of the smart set that frequented Ballets Russes productions, linking his outré fashions with similarly adventurous arts.

Multiple contexts are typically signaled in the Gazette’s illustrations of Poiret’s fashions. Many plates evoke contemporary Parisian pleasures including, as well as ballet, theater, social dancing, and restaurant dinners. Outdoor settings range from well-manicured city parks to elegant château gardens, and several plates highlight modern marvels such as airplanes and automobiles. A few images allude to mythology; Lepape’s 1920 illustration of a Poiret evening coat calls to mind the notorious queen of Atlantis via its caption—Antinéa—while others, like Lepape’s 1920 illustration of a coat captioned Tanger ou Les Charmes de L’Exil, suggest exotic locales. Even the sparsest illustrations imply context through artistic style; Lepape’s 1914 depiction of Le manteau de pourpre, while completely devoid of background imagery, conveys a sense of drama through its blocks of color and through the model’s pose—we see her from behind, head turned, arm extended, as she seemingly holds someone at bay.

These artworks evoke the sense and mood of Poiret’s costumes in ways that even the most extraordinary photographs cannot. Consider the various representations of the couturier’s coat ‘Chauve Souris,’ from his 1923 collection. A dramatic ankle-length garment with oversize sleeves, realized in a fabric printed with large pineapples and trimmed with monkey fur, the coat commands attention as it all but subsumes its wearer. A daytime photograph taken in what is probably Poiret’s garden captures some of these qualities: shot from behind in stark black and white, the image conveys an unconventional sensibility and hints at a modernist edge. These characteristics emerge much more fully, however, in André-Edouard Marty’s plate for the Gazette, captioned Bon appétit, Madame, in which a woman wearing the same coat stands in front of a plain curtain, opening it just slightly to reveal the restaurant and dance club that await her. Her turbaned head and knowing gaze tell part of the story, but the viewer glimpses Poiret’s world via the crack in the curtain, transported—like the Poiret client—to the hub of sophisticated Parisian nightlife. Marty’s scenario intensifies and animates the rich fantasy the coat itself suggests, transforming the garment from an abstract icon of high style into a believable component of contemporary life. Poiret’s clothing meets Parisian pleasure on the ground of artistic modernism, and the “genre Poiret”—an alchemy of fashion and imagery—emerges as a powerful expression of a moment of change in these dual domains.
THE LURE OF VIENNA: POIRET AND THE WIENER WERKSTÄTTE

Heather Hess

In November 1911, Vienna succumbed to “Poiret fever.” Vienna was the penultimate stop on the designer’s tour through Central and Eastern Europe, which had started in October and included Berlin, Warsaw, St. Petersburg, Moscow, Bucharest, Budapest, and Munich. For three days all Vienna feted the French king of fashion and his entourage, which included his wife, nine mannequins, and numerous trunks of what the Viennese termed his “fashion-art.” The Hagenbund, a modernist artists’ society, exhibited Georges Lepape’s portfolio Les choses de Paul Poiret. Viennese newspapers parsed the smallest nuance of Poiret’s visit, commenting upon everything from his arrival by motorcar to the presence of various noblemen and socialites at his lectures. Although the décolleté of Poiret’s gowns did not meet court etiquette, even Franz Josef, the aged Austrian emperor, would have known that the French king of fashion was in town. The Fremdenblatt, the venerable organ of the Habsburg foreign ministry and the one newspaper the emperor read without fail each day, devoted four long articles to Poiret over the course of his three-day visit. Finally in January 1912, the local fashion magazine, Wiener Mode, noted with some relief that one could write about something other than Poiret.

Poiret’s enthusiastic reception in Vienna was, in part, a measure of his overwhelming celebrity in the Belle Époque. The Russian-born Erté remembered a similar frenzy during Poiret’s visit to St. Petersburg prior to arriving in Vienna. The memory of the jupe culotte scandal of March 1911 was still fresh, and many Viennese turned out to see the designer, who they (erroneously) believed wanted to put women on the streets in pants. (In Vienna, the first woman to wear a jupe culotte in public was mobbed and had to be whisked away in a car by the police.) Viennese critics found a special kinship between Poiret’s fashions and Viennese attempts at reforming and rejuvenating contemporary decorative art. Moreover, through his Ecole and Maison Martine, a decorative arts school and workshop, Poiret was developing a style remarkably similar to that of the Wiener Werkstätte, Vienna’s leading decorative arts company, which had been at the vanguard of Austria’s art revival since Josef Hoffmann and Kolomon Moser established it in 1903.

Poiret knew the Wiener Werkstätte from previous travels. On his way to Berlin in December 1910, he visited the Palais Stoclet outside of Brussels, which was the Werkstätte’s most spectacular achievement of a total work of art. In spring 1911, Poiret attended the Esposizione Internazionale in Rome, an exhibition showcasing the latest international design. Hoffmann designed the Austrian pavilion, in which numerous Werkstätte artists exhibited the brightly patterned, hand-printed fabrics that later appeared in Poiret’s designs. With its bold colors and wild prints, Viennese design appeared to contemporary critics as another manifestation of the orientalist craze.

Poiret did not hide his debt to the Viennese decorators; American magazines would not let him. In March 1913, Vogue credited the Wiener Werkstätte as the developer of the new style of decorative art currently emerging in Paris, and writers for other publications such as Arts and Decoration and the New York Times emphasized the Austrian origin of Poiret’s ideas. In the press, the Wiener Werkstätte’s influence overshadowed Raoul Dufy’s collaborations with Poiret. In the realm of design, Poiret’s achievement lay in popularizing German and Austrian style in Paris. In fact, Poiret in his autobiography agreed that rather than inventing a style, his greatest contribution to his age had been in recognizing, absorbing, and disseminating these new ideas.

In return, Poiret’s imprimatur legitimized Viennese design for a fashionable international audience. American Vogue published three main features on the Werkstätte, focusing on the firm’s decorative arts, its dresses, and its fabrics, as well as including objects in the Viennese style in numerous picture spreads. No other German- or Austrian-based company could claim such lavish coverage from Vogue before World War I. Yet the Wiener Werkstätte never stood on its own; every article in Vogue reinforced the Werkstätte’s connection with Poiret, stressing the similarity of Viennese design to Parisian models.

The Wiener Werkstätte had built its reputation by producing exquisite luxury goods and furnishings in a highly original, refined, and challenging aesthetic. In fashion, however, the Werkstätte responded to the style set in Paris. After its first collection, presented in spring 1911, the Werkstätte quickly turned away from reform dress, which had dominated the early-twentieth-century German attempts at
transforming women’s fashion, prioritizing ethics over style. The fashion department’s head, the architect Eduard Josef Wimmer-Wisgrill, became known as the “Poirot of Vienna.”

Vogue’s juxtapositions of images further blurred the distinction between Poirot and the Wiener Werkstätte. In the October 1, 1913, issue the magazine reproduced a fabric that, as the caption pointed out, “is known at once as a creation of Poirot.” Only a few months later, in March 1914, the magazine showed a perfume box covered with exactly the same design of an abstract rose within a medallion scattered across a black-and-white striped ground. In this case, Vogue noted that the design exemplified the “Viennese style of decoration.” The confusion of Viennese and Parisian design on this particular object is remarkable: the Werkstätte never entered into the perfume market, while Poirot had been the first couturier to create his own perfume line, Rosine. Although the design was Poirot’s, the basic decorative scheme of the pattern looked to the Werkstätte’s best-known and most frequently reproduced textile of the era, Wimmer-Wisgrill’s ‘Ants’ (Ameise), which also featured abstract flowers and stems strewn over a black-and-white striped ground. Wimmer-Wisgrill exhibited the fabric at the 1911 Esposizione Internazionale in Rome, which Poirot had attended, and several stores in New York—including Lord & Taylor, Stern Brothers, and Joseph P. McHugh’s Popular Shop—stocked the fabric from spring of 1913 until at least 1915. The ‘Ants’ print, covering a pillow sandwiched between two pillows in Poirot’s Martine fabrics, appeared in an article in the May 15, 1913, issue of Vogue, and the fabric reappeared in various advertisements in Vogue, Arts and Decoration, Country Life, Good Furnishing, and Vanity Fair in 1913 and 1914. In April 1914, Vogue presented Poirot’s variation of the print, which departed from the Wiener Werkstätte model only in its more abstract, convoluted flowers. Poirot also adopted other Wiener Werkstätte designs for production by the Maison Martine. Americans continued to confuse Poirot with the Wiener Werkstätte into the 1920s. The Washington Post, for example, attempted to reattribute to the Werkstätte primacy in creating the jupe culotte.

Despite the formal similarity of the Martine designs to the highly refined products of the Wiener Werkstätte, Poirot envisioned the Maison Martine as a counterpart to the rigorous academic training he had encountered in Germany. Poirot likened the German design schools to “iron corsets,” while in his own school he allowed young girls, plucked from the Parisian working class, to follow their own imaginations in order to produce fresh, unstudied designs.

In his autobiography, Poirot complained that the Viennese “dissected flowers and bouquets into lozenges. . . , whose monotonous repetition did in the long run create a style not really very different from the Biedermeier.” In highlighting these characteristics of Viennese design, Poirot censured precisely the elements he had borrowed in order to distance his work from the Viennese models he copied. Typical for Biedermeier prints are flowers scattered across a striped ground, as in Wimmer-Wisgrill’s ‘Ants.’ For his ‘Maroc’ coat, Poirot took for the lining Dagobert Peche’s lozenge-patterned silk ‘Diomedes,’ designed for the Wiener Werkstätte in 1919. Poirot acquired the fabric when he was in Vienna in November 1923 to give a second lecture. His reappearance in the Austrian capital again provoked an outpouring of excitement, and for local critics and representatives of Vienna’s dressmaking industry, it affirmed Vienna’s importance as a fashion capital.

Poirot’s return to Vienna in 1923 signaled the rapprochement between the Austrian and French fashion worlds. His close relationship with Austrian and German artists and cultural institutions had unfortunate consequences for him in World War I. In the event Kenneth E. Silver (1989) describes as the “Poirot Affair” in 1915, Poirot was attacked precisely because of his enduring popularity with the German public during the war. On the other hand, the Wiener Werkstätte suffered no negative consequences owing to its associations with Poirot. Instead, critics hailed the firm as the “pillar of our boldest hopes” in the German and Austrian efforts to build an independent fashion industry, citing the Wiener Werkstätte’s prewar success abroad.

The Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes of 1925 marked the triumph of the decorative style Poirot and the Wiener Werkstätte had jointly developed in the 1910s. Yet, Poirot and the Wiener Werkstätte no longer propelled each other forward, and their designs instead represented an extension of prewar concerns with small-scale, luxury production. Purist and functionalist challenges left Poirot and the Wiener Werkstätte as beautiful, elaborate vestiges of another world.
PAUL POIRET AND THE DECORATIVE ARTS
Jared Goss

Though surprisingly little has been written on the subject of Paul Poiret and the decorative arts, his contributions to the evolution of modern taste making were nonetheless considerable and lasting. Through his ability to synthesize art, design, and publicity, thereby creating a specific and readily identifiable brand image, he all but invented the concept of “lifestyle design.” He achieved this through a variety of means: as a designer and a patron and by surrounding himself with others who understood and realized his vision.

Poiret’s autobiography is vague and frequently indulges in an exaggerated pride in his accomplishments. Nevertheless, enough facts are known to compile a basic understanding and to recognize the consistent presence of decorative arts in his life. Poiret was the son of a textile merchant. One sister, Jeanne, married René Boivin, a noted jeweler, while another, Marie (later known as Nicole), married the renowned furniture and interior designer André Groult. Poiret’s wife, Denise Boulet, was the daughter of a Norman textile manufacturer.

His professional awareness of interior design became evident in 1908, when he selected Paul Iribe to illustrate a catalogue of his clothing, entitled Les robes de Paul Poiret. Iribe’s drawings, which incorporated his own furniture, presented Poiret’s models in graceful, pared-down modern settings that evoke the elegant décor of the Directoire and Empire periods in much the same manner as Poiret’s gowns—indeed, it is hard to imagine Poiret’s dresses in any other environment. Poiret’s patronage of Iribe indicated his growing understanding of the important relationship between couture and interior design.

In 1908, the Groult’s opened an antiques shop in Paris. Perhaps it was there that Poiret befriended their client the architect-painter Louis Sée. In 1909, when Poiret acquired the Hôtel du Gouverneur des Pages, an eighteenth-century town house on the avenue d’Antin, he asked Sée to convert the building into a new headquarters for his business.

Stylistically, Sée’s proposed renovations drew heavily on recent designs from Vienna, namely those of the Wiener Werkstätte. A designers’ cooperative founded in 1903 on the principles of the Arts and Crafts movement, it was dedicated to the creation of the “total work of art,” wherein every element of the domestic environment was designed by the same hand. In fact, so concerned was the Werkstätte with visual unity that it conceived clothing and fashion accessories to specifically harmonize with their surroundings (a fact not lost on Poiret). It is likely that Sée had been impressed by the Werkstätte’s newly completed Palais Stoclet. Though Sée’s proposal was not carried out, it represented one of Poiret’s earliest introductions to avant-garde Viennese design. Clearly fascinated, Poiret arranged in 1910 to visit the Werkstätte with Sée, stopping near Brussels to visit the Palais Stoclet en route back to France. After further travels to Austria and Germany, Poiret founded his design business, Martine, based largely on the Viennese model.

Martine, which opened on April 1, 1911, consisted of École Martine, Atelier Martine, and La Maison Martine. École Martine (housed in Poiret’s premises on the avenue d’Antin) was an experimental art school for young working-class girls. Under the direction of the noted design educator Marguerite Gabriel-Claude Sérusier, these untrained girls were sent to sketch plants and animals in local parks and zoos. Poiret bought the best of their drawings, which were adapted for use by Atelier Martine, the design studio. At first, Atelier Martine produced only textiles and wallpapers, but it soon expanded to create carpets, lighting, hand-painted glassware and ceramics, and other items for interiors (including dolls outfitted by Poiret). Furniture and interior-decorating services were introduced under the direction of Guy-Pierre Fauconnet. Little is known about the manufacturers of their products, but it is unlikely that the Atelier Martine was able to realize most of their designs in-house, turning instead (like the Wiener Werkstätte) to outside specialists, including Paul Dumas or Defossé & Karth for wallpapers, Adolphe Chanaux for furniture, and Murano for glassware. One notable exception was the deep-pile carpets, hand-knotted by the students. The output of the atelier was sold through the retail and interior design service of the business, La Maison Martine. The shop was located at 107, rue du faubourg Saint-Honoré, where it remained until 1924, when it moved to 1, rond-point des Champs-Élysées. By the early 1920s, branches had been opened in Marseilles, Cannes, Biarritz, Deauville, La Baule, as well as in London and Vienna. Martine products were actively promoted and sold in department stores in America (Wanamaker’s and
Gimbels) and in Germany (Hermann Gerson's).

In a related venture, Poiret briefly collaborated with Raoul Dufy, whom he met in 1910. With Poiret's encouragement and financial backing, Dufy created a series of bold monochromatic textiles, hand-blockprinted by a dye-master named Zifferlin in a manner suggestive of eighteenth-century toile de Jouy. Poiret used these textiles principally, but not exclusively, for clothing. They soon attracted the attention of a commercial manufacturer, Atuyer, Bianchini et Férrier, who, much to Poiret's chagrin, subsequently co-opted their production.

Martine executed a wide range of luxurious domestic and commercial interior-decorating projects. Its prominent clients were sometimes as theatrical as the interiors they commissioned. Many were also patrons of Poiret's fashions. "If you are the sort of person who would like to be dressed by Poiret, you might expect to consult him in this other field," extolled M. Thérèse Bonney and Louise Bonney in their 1929 Buying Antique and Modern Furniture in Paris. Private clients included the American dancer Isadora Duncan, the French author Maurice Dekobra, the French aviator Baron de Précourt, the French actress Mademoiselle Andrée Spinelly, the American movie star Valeska Surratt, and the Dutch painter Kees van Dongen. Well-publicized commercial projects included the Paris beauty salon of Helena Rubinstein, the first-class Chantilly suite on the ocean liner Ile-de-France, set designs for the theater and film, and the décor of Poiret's night club, L'Oasis.

Martine actively participated in the many public exhibitions that played an important role in the social and artistic life of Paris. At both the Salon d'Automne and the Salon des Artistes Décorateurs, visitors could see ensembles and room settings promoting the latest styles by the best-known French decorators. Though these popular exhibitions required a great deal of professional attention, Poiret fully understood their commercial value in bringing Martine's (and thereby his own) name before the public. Martine's most notable display came at the Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes (which later lent its name to the term "Art Deco"), a vast state-sponsored trade fair held in Paris in 1925. Martine decorated three barges moored on the banks of the Seine: Amour showcased designs by Martine, Délice presented Poiret's Rosine perfumes, and Orgue housed a luminous pipe organ for entertainments. Poiret also designed a merry-go-round with figures representing popular types from Parisian life that recalled Martine dolls.

A costly enterprise, Martine was sold in 1925 to a businessman by the name of Monsieur Kuhl. During the late 1920s, however, Poiret recognized a new design opportunity in America. While not fond of American consumerist culture, he acknowledged the importance of its vast commercial market. He agreed to create a line of furniture for Contempora, a company dedicated to "International Service of Art to Industry," and to the introduction of modern design to the American public. Contempora was directed by Paul Lester Wiener, and the principal designers were the German Bruno Paul, the German Lucian Bernhard, the American Rockwell Kent, and Poiret. Contempora's designs were sold by American department stores such as Lord & Taylor in New York and Hal Smith in Los Angeles.

For the company's inaugural exhibition in New York in 1929, Poiret designed a brilliantly colored suite of lacquered bedroom furniture in keeping with Contempora's philosophy of "harmonized rooms," in which the unity of the whole was more important than the beauty of any one element. Unlike Martine, Contempora was committed to mass-produced objects, marketed to consumers of average means and reflecting the new economic climate. By affordably selling their rooms as units, Contempora obviated "the arduous task of shopping for harmonious ingredients." Their catalogue further asserted that "easy accessibility of good design, through quantity production, is no more destructive of individuality than is the growing tendency to standardize dress," and it specifically recommended Poiret's contributions to those who wish to carry their feeling for fashion into the furnishings of their homes." Contempora marked Poiret's last venture in the decorative arts.

Through his various enterprises, whether lavish or modest, Poiret acknowledged that fashion involved more than just clothing. He recognized the potential in addressing desires and aspirations through the branding of the domestic environment, which he regarded as an important component of stylish living. In so doing, Poiret proved to be ahead of his time, for his methods continue to set standards today.
Forbidden Fruits: The Perfumes of Rosine

Kenneth E. Silver

When Parisian actress Andrée Spinelly was photographed in her new Champs-de-Mars apartment in 1916, art, fashion, and interior design were all united under the sign of primal woman *chez-elle*. With just the strap of her halter top crossing her voluptuous back and wearing a voluminous, splendidly patterned skirt by Paul Poiret, Spinelly leans against a wall of her atrium in a kind of ecstatic surrender. This superchic modern Eve stretches her arms wide as she simulates taking a bite of an apple hanging from a painted tree, part of an elaborate Edenic décor created for her by illustrator Paul Iribe in collaboration with Atelier Martine. Although the photograph attests to the stylishness of this recent architectural ensemble, it evoked something invisible in the deluxe promotional album, *Les parfums de Rosine*, where we learn that “Mademoiselle Spinelly préfère 'Le Fruit Défendu,' un parfum Poiret” (Mademoiselle Spinelly prefers "The Forbidden Fruit," a Poiret perfume).

If we take it for granted that fashion design and perfume go hand in hand—would we still know the name Chanel without "No. 5"?—such was not the case before 1911. That is when Poiret established Les Parfums de Rosine, the first perfume and cosmetics firm founded by a couturier. Christie Mayer Lefkowith (1994) is surely right to say that in choosing to name his company after his oldest daughter, Poiret forfeited the opportunity to impress his own name and style internationally. But if he failed to brand himself with the success of a Lanvin, or a Patou, or a Saint Laurent, it was nonetheless with Paul Poiret that designer perfumes began. Indeed, no couturier has even come close to equaling the beauty and innovation of the Poiret perfumes. A veritable oeuvre unto themselves within the larger creative universe of Poiret, these included florals ("Toute la Forêt" and ‘Le Matin au Bois’), signature scents (‘Chez Poiret’ and ‘La Rose de Rosine’), and exotics (‘Maharadjah’ and ‘Nuit de Chine’). With his friend, Dr. Midy, and with Henri Alméras—who would later be crucial in the development of Patou’s Joy”—Poiret worked on the scents in a laboratory at 39, rue du Colisée.

Poiret had high artistic ambitions for his perfumes. He endeavored to find new sources for his scents and the finest craftsmanship for their presentation: “I wanted to draw from the leaves of certain plants perfumes that till then had only been sought from the flowers and roots,” he explained in his autobiography. “I amused myself by working upon the leaf of the geranium, from which I made the perfume I called ‘Borgia,’ then upon mastic and the balsamic plants of the Provençal heaths. I went to the glass-blowers, to execute my models for the flasks and flagons to enclose these essences. I had my glassware decorated by pupils of my School of Decorative Art, who illumined them with charming flowers and arabesques.” Apart from the contributions of Poiret’s own Martine subsidiaries, Iribe seems to have a hand in the design, packaging, and promotion of the Rosine perfumes, as did, among others, Georges Lepape, Bernard Naudin, Mario Simon, Jean-Emile Laboureur, Raoul Dufy, Guy-Pierre Fauconnet, and Jean-Louis Boussingault.

Poiret promoted his perfumes as significant objets d’art: “Excerpts from poems by Baudelaire and Verlaine as well as endorsements by famous actresses reinforced the message that Rosine perfumes were unusual, aesthetized, and glamorous commodities,” as Nancy J. Troy (2003) has said. In fact, French Symbolist aesthetics and Poiret’s perfumes shared a late-nineteenth-century taste for synesthesia, or “correspondence” of the senses, most famously exemplified by Arthur Rimbaud’s poem, "Voyelles" ("Vowels"): “A noir, E blanc, I rouge, U vert, O bleu: voyelles, Je dirai quelque jour vos naissances latentes. . . .” (A black, E white, I red, U green, O blue: vowels, I shall tell one day of your mysterious origins . . .). In Poiret’s fashioning, Rimbaud’s sounding of simultaneous multiple sensations became ‘Le Mouchoir de Rosine,’ (Rosine’s Handkerchief), a set of six bottled scents wrapped in six colored handkerchiefs signifying six moods—green/mystery, orange/jealousy, red/treachery, yellow/desire, blue/anticipation, pink/consent. Literature and theater were continuing sources of inspiration for Poiret’s perfumes: the craze for comedia dell’arte, so important to the painting of Picasso and the music of Stravinsky, achieved olfactory expression in Rosine’s ‘Pierron’ (1919) and in ‘Arlequinade’ (1923). Poiret’s ‘Antinéa, ou au fond de la mer’ (Antinéa, or at the bottom of the sea), inspired by Pierre Benoit’s popular 1919 novel about Atlantis, is contained in what appears to be a relic from the subaqueous court of the vanished kingdom. The scent’s exquisite, ancient-looking metal container with simulated bone stopper and cord carrying strap is
probable a reference to “orichalcum,” the legendary metal of the Atlanteans, with which their queen, Antinéa, had her hapless male victims embalmed for eternity.

Closer to home, Poiret helped revive a powerful idea of French beauty and taste, one that drew especially on the Directoire, Consulate, and Empire periods following the Revolution. Fresh, straightforward, franc—Poiret’s classical simplicity was to be seen not only in his high-waisted, loosely fitting dresses and multicolored turbans but in his perfumes. ‘Symbol of France,’ the rose, provided both the scent and the imagery of ‘La Rose de Rosine’ (1912), whose clear-glass bottle with a bicorne-shaped stopper was hand-painted in gold with a repeating pattern of roses and vertical stripes. Also in 1912—not incidentally a moment of extreme, pre–World War I French nationalism—appeared Rosine’s ‘Fan Fan La Tulipe,’ its name taken from a folkloric French character, its bottle and box rendered en tricolore, with the Revolutionary Phrygian bonnet drawn on its label in the image d’Épinal style of popular patriotic prints, and surmounted by a tricolor cockade. During the subsequent Great War, Poiret produced even more rousingly patriotic perfumes, including ‘Mam’zelle Victoire’ and ‘Parfum de ma Marraine’ (My Godmother’s Perfume). ‘Le Sang Français’ (French Blood), a Rosine scent patented in 1915, seems to have struck a bit too close to the bone—it never left the drawing board.

Both before and after the war, Poiret’s name was most closely allied to the orientalist aesthetic. Whether one was referring to the Far East, as in eighteenth-century chinoiserie, or to the post-Napoleonic interest in things Islamic, or to late-nineteenth-century japonisme, the French idea of the “Orient” was almost infinitely expandable. A heady brew of superficial impressions, sexual excitation, and connotations of decadent power, the Orient functioned as a kind of collective unconscious into which artists—and the public—dipped at regular intervals. This usually resulted in crass fantasies of “otherness.” But Poiret was different. Not only were his orientalist creations never vulgar, but they celebrated their sources with immense respect. It seems certain that the couturier was familiar with the Parisian dealers in the arts of Middle and Far East and also with the formidable Asian collections of the Louvre and the Musée Guimet (founded in 1889). Of course, all of Paris was wild for Arabian nights after the Ballets Russes first performed Scheherazade in 1910. Rosine’s perfume ‘Le Minaret,’ of 1913, was related to the costumes—the sexy, body-liberating culottes, trousers, and tunics, with their bold colors, transparent fabrics, braiding, tassels, and embroidery—which Poiret himself designed for Jacques Richepin’s contemporaneous play of the same name. The tower-shaped bottle of ‘Le Minaret’ was covered in hand-embroidered tulle of gold thread, alluding to the filigree patterns of Islamic architecture. ‘Aladin,’” of 1919, was even more elaborate: it consisted of a bottle with fighting monsters carved in relief in imitation of ancient Persian metalwork (also available in a frosted-crystal version), stoppers of Bakelite simulating either ivory or amber, and with a chain affixed “magic lantern” style; its box was covered in both what appears to be an authentic, intensely colored West Indian textile and—in perfect simulation of Mughal miniature painting—the image of a copulent bejeweled potentate, looking suspiciously like Poiret himself, seated cross-legged on a rug.

Poiret’s faux China was as impressive as his make-believe Middle East. In Les parfums de Rosine, Roger Boulet de Monvel said of ‘Nuit de Chine’ (1913), that it “celebrates the balmy softness of Oriental nights,” and did so in an impeccable modernized version of an old clear-glass snuff bottle, with gold-leaf neck, bright blue stopper, and dark blue Bakelite rings suspended from its shoulders. ‘Sakya Mouni,’ designed in 1922 for Poiret by Julien Viard, featured an amethyst-tinted glass Chinese Fu dog as its stopper, mounted atop a tall, square, clear-glass column. At once convincingly Chinese and distinctly modern, ‘Sakya Mouni’ is reminiscent of the designs that Matisse created just two years earlier for Le chant du Rossignol, the Diaghilev ballet based on a Chinese fable. But this should not surprise us: Poiret’s formidable art collection included works by the Fauves, including Matisse, and he was a personal friend of both Vlaminck and Derain. Indeed, in their coloristic exuberance, stark simplicity of forms, marvelous craftsmanship, sincere appreciation of folkloric and foreign artistic sources, and close affiliation with the sister arts of literature, music, dance, and theater, Les Parfums de Rosine were perfect little masterpieces of early-twentieth-century avant-garde artistic production. But perhaps it was all too precious to last: first, the real Rosine died during the war; then Poiret’s investors clamored for economies in his perfume production—“What is the good of all this useless caprice? . . . Your flasks and your new ideas, we don’t want them, they cost too much,” as the couturier himself recounted. By 1929, Paul Poiret’s great aromatic experiment was over.
Dress, ca. 1910

Paul Poiret once ruefully admitted that he could not sew and was thus unable to fully control all aspects of his art, but it was this very absence of conventional training in tailoring and dressmaking that facilitated the designer’s audacious technical advances. His dress of brown satin with its trompe l’oeil festoons does not depart from prevailing fashions of the period and appears retardé in comparison to the Directoire Revival styles that Poiret had been advancing since 1906. But even in this less radical design, certain defining elements of the couturier’s signature novelties are readily apparent.

Constructed of three pieces of silk, the body of the gown violates established patternmaking traditions of the couture even as its form appears conventional. The bodice is one piece draped into a half-cinched effect with tulle sleeves attached, and the skirt is a second piece seamed into a long cylinder joined to the waist of the bodice with a third panel that forms a train. While not boned, the interior of the bodice has a shaped lining that would have given the lightest of support and a grosgrain waist tape that holds the waist seam in alignment. (Although Poiret abandoned the corset in 1906, he replaced it with an interior grosgrain girdle that served to support the breasts.)

The primary decorative motif of the gown, two bands of trompe l’oeil ribbon, is ingeniously crafted. A strip of loosely appliquéd pink silk has been worked into subtle relief to suggest a soft bowknot. Two tones of silk-floss embroidery are then added to create the shadowed folds of the ribbon. This effect announces Poiret’s continued interest in the witty application of trompe l’oeil throughout his career, as can be seen in his ‘Bouclier’ day dress of 1925.
‘Homage à Rousseau’ Evening Gown, ca. 1910

A skirt depicting a Rousseanian jungle in pearls, seed beads, rhinestones, and silk-floss embroidery distinguishes a gown from about 1910. (Later, in the 1920s, Poiret reprises the design as a calf-length model, identical in all other respects save for the addition of crystal ornaments at the waist.) Like his mentor Jacques Doucet, Poiret was a collector of the art of his contemporaries. Certainly, he was attuned to the unconventional use of color in the work of the Fauvists and, in the instance of this design, the work of the naïf painter, Henri “Le Douanier” Rousseau. The artist’s *The Hungry Lion Throws Itself on the Antelope* (1905) or *The Snake Charmer* (1907) would have been familiar to Poiret and his cultivated circle of artist friends. A celebrated tongue-in-cheek fête for “Le Douanier,” given in 1908 by Pablo Picasso, would have only enhanced the avant-gardist currency of Rousseau’s work for Poiret.

The dress reflects a style introduced by the designer as early as 1908, with its small surplice front bodice and narrow columnar skirt. Tiers of pleated silk function both as a modesty to the front corsage and to the deep open back and fix in place what would otherwise be a scandalous neckline. Nevertheless, from a distance, the gown appears to have an audacious openness and seeming nudity. Throughout his career, Poiret played with color mixes made possible by overlaying a sheer fabric of one hue over an underdress of another. Here, he reverses the Directoire practice of lining a white muslin gown with a colored silk liner. The transparency and negligé quality of Poiret’s black chiffon dress is exaggerated by the provocative sense of the chemiselle-like liner beneath.
**Opera Coat, ca. 1910**

Rather than a mere stylist of prevailing modes, Poiret used color audaciously but with a sensitivity that contributed to his reputation as an artist. In addition, his innovative, sometimes eccentric, silhouettes secured him a place beyond fashion in a category of his own as an original. The vivid violet silk damask evening coat is lined with an equally brilliant rose pink crêpe de chine. Poiret has taken the lining fabric and overembroidered it with cording for the wide collar and sleeves. The impression is of two colors, violet and rose mediated by a third, the optical mix of the textured embroidery.

The coat is of his signature kimono cut, a reductive T-shape. Similarly, the cylindrical sleeves attached to the body of the coat are simple rectangular pattern pieces in the fashion of regional garments, where components are rarely shaped and a preference for an economy of cut prevails. Although fashion drawings suggest a voluminous fullness to Poiret's evening coats from this period, they appear to be exaggerations of a cocoon-shaped effect rendered by the wide horizontal line of the collar across the back shoulders and the unshaped expanse of the full sleeves merging with the body of the coat. This effect was further enhanced by throwing back the coat to expose the nape of the neck in the dégagé stance that prevailed. As with many of his creations, design elements introduced in one collection emerge in later collections. The large embroidered tab closure at the waist anticipates the placket closure of Denise Poiret's velvet evening coat, 'Paris,' from 1919.
Fancy-Dress Costume probably worn to
“The Thousand and Second Night” party, 1911

Described by Paul Bettesvoeld as a “milestone” in The Costume Institute’s collection of twentieth-century costume, this pantaloons ensemble “represents a style as revolutionary as the New Look of Christian Dior or the minidresses of Mary Quant.” A fancy-dress costume, believed to have been worn to Poiret’s grand fête, “The Thousand and Second Night,” it reveals the strong influence of Serge Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes on the designer’s imagination. In his memoirs, My First Fifty Years (1931), Poiret dismissed any relationship between his work and the artistry of Diaghilev’s talented designer, Léon Bakst. But the spectacular success of Scheherazade from One Thousand and One Nights a year before Poiret’s extravagant party makes clear that the designer was willing to parlay the excitement generated by the Russians to his own advantage.

This ensemble, like that worn by Denise Poiret at the event, has the effect of a skirted tunic over pantaloons. As was the case with Madame Poiret’s version, the tunic’s double-tiered overskirt is wired, anticipating the crinoline-hooped silhouette of Poiret’s costumes for the 1913 historical drama, Le minaret. A fancy-dress costume worn in the private precincts of an exclusive party became the prototype for a “lampshade” or “minaret” tunic worn in a theatrical production. Thus publicized, the silhouette was then modified for the fashion public.
'La Perse' Coat worn by Denise Poiret, 1911

Often, the styles presented in fashion publications were taken from the stage wardrobes of leading theatrical actresses of the day. This practice encouraged the acceptance of many of Poiret's more radical creations. On the one hand, costumes intended purely for the stage allowed the designer to present hyperbolized and exaggerated silhouettes in the name of historical evocation. On the other, designs from his collection selected by a famed beauty for a drama situated in the present day validated his more artistic and theatrical efforts.

The French correspondent for Women's Wear Daily reported with regularity on the costuming of the stage both as an influence on the direction of fashion and, where fashionable dress was displayed, as a barometer of the most current taste. This coat, 'La Perse,' with its bold, woodblock-printed design by Raoul Dufy, is an example of the latter and appears in a Women's Wear sketch of Eve Lavallière, an actress and celebrated courtesan. She wore it in Albert Capus' comedy Les favorites at the Theatre des Variétés in 1911. The simple T-shape of the evening coat, described in Women's Wear as "cut on kimono lines," allows for the effective deployment of the overscaled pattern. Poiret's interest in the intersection of all the arts is illustrated by the fact that this pattern was also utilized in the wall treatment of his avenue d'Antin salon.

While Lavallière's coat was black on white with black fox-fur trim, this coat, which belonged to Denise Poiret and which she wore on Poiret's first formal mannequin tour of Europe in October–November 1911, as well as on his first trip to America in September–October 1913, is printed in an inky, midnight blue with rabbit-fur trimmings. Given that it was owned by Madame Poiret, it is likely to have been the prototype for others that were made for clients. (Another version was made for Olga de Meyer, the wife of photographer Baron de Meyer and allegedly the illegitimate daughter of the Prince of Wales and Blanche, duchess of Caracolla.) Poiret inserted a pungency of color through the coat's silk lining, the sharp blue green of Persian tiles. Worn tightly wrapped, this signature element would not have been seen, but worn thrust back à la mode, the lining would have underscored the orientalist allusions of 'La Perse.'
'Rosière' Day Dress worn by Denise Poiret, 1911, and
'Butard' Day Dress worn by Denise Poiret, 1912

Two related dresses, 'La Rosière' (virtuous young girl) and 'Le Butard' (after Poiret's retreat, the Pavillon de Butard in La Celle-Saint-Cloud), are from the spring collections of 1911 and 1912, respectively. Inspired by Directoire gowns, they also relate to the Romantic styles of the 1810s-20s. Rather than the deliberate classicizing details of the Directoire and Empire, however, the dresses allude to the Arcadian rusticity of the period. As in many of Poiret's designs, a color or motif, here a binding of pink bias tape, introduced in one season is elaborated on in a later collection.

'Rosière' is shown with a reproduction underskirt. Originally, its long overtunic would have been paired with a similar underdress, perhaps in the same pink linen mull as its trim. In the case of 'Butard,' a photograph of Denise Poiret (perhaps on the grounds of the Pavillon de Butard) establishes the lank silhouette of the design. Apparently worn without a petticoat, the gathered skirt falls into a body-skimming line that obliterates the natural waist. Although they are both in the Directoire Revival style, the dresses are not fitted over the bust in the fashion promoted by Poiret in his earlier collections. Instead, the gently gathered handkerchief linen introduces a greater naturalism to the shape of the bust, while retaining the high waistline and stemlike silhouette preferred by the designer.

Unlike some of Poiret's evening gowns and outerwear, these day dresses conformed to prevailing traditions of dressmaking. With their unfitted appearance, the structural detailing of the dresses is confined to the bodice and sleeves. In a sense, they are shirtwaists, with all the simplicity, prim functionality, and naive romanticism that form suggests.
Evening Gown worn by Isadora Duncan, ca. 1912, and Fancy-Dress Costume probably worn to “Les Festes de Bacchus” party, 1912

It is especially apt that the revolutionary dancer Isadora Duncan, who espoused an earthbound, free-form choreography, would find a suitable couturier in Poiret. The designer’s discarding of the S-shape corset and his classicizing Directoire silhouettes mirrored Duncan’s own promotion of the liberated body associated with the naturalism of Greco-Roman dress.

The radicalism of Duncan’s dance was inseparable from her ideas of the body. “The real American type can never be a ballet dancer,” she wrote. “The legs are too long, the body too supple and the spirit too free for this school of affected grace and toe walking.” For this paradigm of the American type, Poiret designed an Empire-waisted gown with an explicit classical reference, namely a crisscross “girdle” of Greek-key embroidery. The yellow chiffon gown is layered over a pale pink lining rather than the more typical ivory, perhaps in an allusion to the flesh-toned tights prescribed for Duncan’s scandalous performances. An integral overtunic embellished with the designer’s signature rose motif picks up the mustard yellow of the gown. As with many of his dresses, Poiret has draped the bodice into place rather than constructed it from shaped pattern pieces. There are no shoulder seams, as the two sides of the bodice are simply wrapped over the shoulders from front to back. Likewise, the skirts of both the overtunic and gown are single pieces of fabric gathered at the waist into the columnar silhouette of the classical style.

Although Duncan’s gown alludes to Hellenic models, it is hardly authentic in its construction. However, for costumes to be worn at his “Les Festes de Bacchus” party held on June 20, 1912, Poiret adhered more closely to historic models. The short tunic, painted with neophranonic motifs, is based on the ancient Greek man’s chiton. Comprising a rectangle of cloth, the chiton was wrapped around the body, girdled at the waist, pinned or buttoned at the shoulders, and left open at one side. Poiret alludes to the shoulder closures, but stitches the side seam, places a drawstring channel at the waist, and introduces a laced opening at the neckline. Duncan, a guest at the fête, performed with Poiret (who was dressed as Jupiter) before the final toast to Bacchus ended the all-night revelry.
’Manteau d’Auto’ Coat worn by Denise Poiret, 1912

Since the open cabs of automobiles once made driving on unpaved roads a dusty experience, the car coats designed as protective coveralls were often referred to as “duster coats.” Dusters were typically, although not exclusively, of neutral color—tan, ocher, gray—to better obscure the grime. In Poiret’s stylish interpretation, the designer reconfigured a North African abaya to new purpose.

Worn by men in the Near and Middle East, the abaya is an open mantle constructed of a length of fabric that is folded into a squarish rectangle and stitched along the fabric’s selvage to form the shoulder line. It is worn draped across the front of the body without a closure and held in place by hand. More formal abayas are woven in striped geometric patterns along one edge of the fabric and are disposed in the folded construction of the robe to appear as a decorative yoke.

Poiret, using a textile by Rodier, took the form of an abaya, opened it up, and cut a narrow strip off the length of the striped edge. He then inserted blue silk raglan-style sleeves and added a band in the same blue silk along the neckline to form a kimono-style collar with an asymmetrical button closing. The excised strip taken from the striped length of the abaya is used to form cuffs for the new sleeves.

This conflation of Western elements and non-Western dress is a strategy that Poiret applied throughout his career. In this instance, the barely diluted form of the abaya with its allusion to the arid desert expanses traversed by caravans is a particularly apt “orientalizing” of a garment intended to shield its wearer from the dust of the open road.
Poirot's jacket merges his interest in Neoclassicism and orientalism by alluding to the early-nineteenth-century vogue for women of fashion to cover their sheer Grecian-style gowns with paisley shawls imported from the East. Additionally, he shaped the jacket with a flaring peplum in the style of Ottoman tunics. The wide sleeve cuffs, in a more subtle allusion, also reference exotic dress.

Unlike many of his designs from 1912, which have a high-waisted silhouette, this jacket has a waistline that is only slightly raised. While Poirot's advocacy of the uncorseted form is reflected in the minimal shaping of the piece, the jacket still conforms, if barely, to the torso. The side seams and the slightly canted shoulder line accomplish its primary shaping. A graphic and hieratic silhouette seen in Persian and Mughal miniatures is created by restricting the fullness of the peplum to the sides of the hips with a double box pleat. This makes for the effect of planarity conveyed by some nontailored garment traditions associated with the "exotic."
Evening Coat, ca. 1912, and Evening Gown, ca. 1912

In the period immediately before World War I, Poirot's strongest narrative thread was his fantasy of the seraglio and his orientalizing evocations of the Near, Middle, and Far East. For Poirot and other modernists, the imagery of Eastern cultures offered a freedom from the traditions and conventions of the West. An evening cloak with the charged color, loose shape, and eccentric details of Poirot's more exotic designs is an imaginative conflation of the caftan worn by men in the Levant and the over-kimono of the Japanese geisha. With its balloon fringe, cabled embroidery, cutaway wrap front, and squared train, the designer has synthesized paradigmatic forms of traditional dress into a suggestion of an exotic "other." It is pastiche, but one that carries distinctive signifiers of the Near and Far East.

Similarly, Poirot's Directoire silhouette undergoes a transformation in an evening dress of layered, richly colored, and heavily ornamented textiles. While the gown's raised waist and columnar form are consistent with the proportions of Poirot's earlier styles, the designer's imagination has been fired by the imagery of Schéhérazade and the work of Léon Bakst. In his memoirs, Poirot records that his bold use of color was among his greatest innovations: "The taste for the refinements of the eighteenth century had led all the women into a sort of deliquescence, and on the pretext that it was 'distinguished,' all vitality had been suppressed. Nuances of nymph's thig, lilacs, swooning mauves, tender blue hortensias, niles, maizes, straws, all that was soft, washed-out, and insipid, was held in honour. I threw into this sheepcote a few rough wolves; reds, greens, violets, royal blues, that made all the rest sing aloud." While bold colors were, in fact, popular from the mid-nineteenth century onward, through the introduction of aniline dyes, Poirot's originality was asserted in his combining of vivid chromatic effects, a novelty that preceded the Ballets Russes' performances in Paris.
A slight variation of this opera coat was rendered by Georges Lepape in his pochoir *Serais-je en avance?* in *Gazette du bon ton* in 1912. Two further renderings of the coat by Lepape in the collection of Karl Lagerfeld suggest that the contours of the actual coat were sacrificed for dramatic intention. Compared to photographs of similar Poiret models, Lepape's versions, while of compelling glamour, are clearly exaggerations. The actual opera coat, for all the freedom of its kimono cut, falls into a slender line over the body. However, when thrust back off the shoulders, in a fashion seen in Japanese prints, the coat's wide-cut back and full sleeves create the dolmanlike drape emphasized by Lepape.

The revolutionary nature of Poiret's designs was conveyed through the fashion plates of the period. Not only were the illustrations an effective mode of transmission of the newest styles, lending the imprimatur of the publications in which they appeared, they are also imbued, through the subtle stylistic elisions and exaggerations of the artists, with a beauty less seductively conveyed by the harsher documentary evidence of photography. The numerous appearances of Poiret's models in the pochoirs and engravings of *Art-Goût-Beauté* or *Gazette du bon ton* were not only representative of the aptness of his styles for this medium, but were also a manifestation of the designer's friendship and collaboration with many of the notable artists and illustrators of his day.

It is through Georges Lepape's images that many costume historians document the most avant-garde fashions of the period. It is not surprising that in the first decade of his career, the charming renderings of Lepape conveyed a contextual reality to Poiret's more extraordinary innovations. When the sophisticated suavity of a turban was promoted on a *Vogue* cover in 1911, it was a gouache rendered by Lepape.
Perhaps the most radical achievement in Poiret's career, underestimated by the designer himself, was his development of the chemise silhouette. Although other couturiers might arguably share credit with him for advocating the abolition of the corset, including Lucile and Madeleine Vionnet, it is Poiret who, aided by the free-spirited confidence of his wife, Denise, created gowns that anticipated those of a decade later. It is likely that Poiret devised the style in response to his wife's second pregnancy in 1910. With these T-shaped gowns in silk damask, the liberation of the body was complete. Nowhere is the freedom of movement of the style more evident than in the photographs of Denise Poiret en repose, like an odalisque, taken at the Plaza Hotel in New York during Poiret's first trip to America in September–October 1913 (when Denise Poiret, who packed a wardrobe of one hundred pieces, acted as his mannequin). The sinuous line of her body and the suppleness of her posture preclude the presence of any structural underpinnings.

Poiret's chemise dresses were even simpler in cut than the undergarments from which they were derived. Although the nineteenth-century chemise had a similar cut, in Poiret's version the shaping of shoulder seams, the insertion of shoulder yokes, or the accommodation of the bust through darts and gussets, were eliminated. Poiret's chemise was completely reductive, with front cut like the back, except for the shaping of the neckline (so simple was its construction that the dress came to be known as the robe de minute, as it took but half an hour to make). Any fit or transformation of the sacklike form was accomplished by the knotting of decorative sashes. At their introduction, Denise Poiret, when she sashed her gowns, preferred a high waist placement. Later, in the 1920s, when she continued to wear the same gowns, she placed the waist fashionably low at the upper hipline.

Poiret advocated this style primarily for the intimacy of the home, but like the jupe culotte, which was also introduced as a dressier form of dishabille, it was a type of garment that was to migrate to the street, if only on women with the confidence or audacity of the couturier's wife. This eggplant-colored chemise was paired with a tunic-length gilet, perhaps as public discretion by Denise Poiret. The tonal coordination of the blue violet chemise and the red violet velvet gilet represents the chromatic subtleties for which Poiret was celebrated throughout his career.
'LA ROSE D'IRIBE' DRESS WORN BY DENISE POIRET, 1913

This dress is an elaboration of the simpler construction of Poiret’s chemises. Like the earlier versions, it was designed to be worn with a sash that cinched the dress to the body under the bust in an Empire silhouette. To the basic T-shape of the rose-patterned silk, Poiret added blue black velvet rectangles to form wide sleeves and the hem of the dress. The result is an illusion of a silk overtunic and velvet underdress. The proportion established by this strategy of trompe l’oeil is consistent with those of actual tunic dresses advocated by the designer during this period.

Paul Iribe designed Poiret’s rose motif. Of all his collaborations with artists and illustrators, Poiret was proudest of his introduction of Iribe to a wider audience. Iribe was responsible for a publication early in the designer’s career, Les robes de Paul Poiret (1908), that not only promoted the increasingly influential couturier, but also established Iribe as a major talent. In 1908 or 1909, when Poiret moved his business to the avenue d’Antin, the rose, as delineated by Iribe, was placed on the couturier’s label, a restatement of Poiret’s esteem for the artist.
'Sorbet' Evening Ensemble, 1913

The hoop-skirted tunic made its debut at the 1911 fête “The Thousand and Second Night,” where it was worn by Denise Poirat. In 1913, it recurred as a silhouette in Jacques Richepin’s *Le minaret*, to be quickly followed in Poirat’s fashion collections of the same year. The ‘Sorbet’ ensemble was among the most popular of its fashionable interpretations, and it is depicted in an illustration by Georges Lepape in the *Gazette du bon ton* in September 1913. It survives in three variations in the collections of the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, the Museum at the Fashion Institute of Technology, New York, and the Chicago Historical Society (seen here). The example at the Victoria and Albert Museum, which belonged to Denise Poirat, is in black and ivory satin, as is the version at the Chicago Historical Society—although in a photograph in *Harper’s Bazar* in November 1913, the latter was described as of black meteor and white crêpe de chine. The version at the Museum at the Fashion Institute of Technology is in ivory and violet satin.

In all three examples, the rose motifs of “caviar” seed beads have been applied as silk-backed appliqués rather than being embroidered directly on to the satin ground. This technique would have meant a shorter construction time and allowed for the disposition of the decorations over the tunic at the last minute, with the possibility of their placement contingent on the overall proportion of the garment. The bodice with its kimono neckline is daring in its décolleté and represents a stylistic feature typical of Poirat. An attached sash establishes a slightly raised waistline, and the underskirt, with its petal form, is an advancement upon Poirat’s hobble skirt. With the creation of the split or wrap skirt, the designer sustained the illusion of a narrow hem, but one that opens without impeding the wearer’s mobility.

In his memoirs, Poirat dismisses the suggestion that his collaborations with artists implied that they were anything more than interpreters of his fully formed expressions. In his description of his relationship with Paul Iribe and Georges Lepape, the artists emerge as disseminators of his designs, representing his works through their talents as illustrators, but never as creators of the designs themselves. The reality is likely to be much more complicated. With ‘Sorbet,’ the illustrator Erte (Romain de Tirtoff), claimed authorship of the design (as did Lepape of the *jupe culotte*). He recalled, in his eighties, that it was among the first designs he drew after Poirat hired him. Clearly, the argument could be made that the idea of the dress was Poirat’s and the specific detailing of the gown was by Erte.
‘Théâtre des Champs-Élysées’ Evening Gown and ‘Espérance’ Headdress worn by Denise Poiret, 1913

This model was worn by Denise Poiret to the premiere of Igor Stravinsky’s Sacre du Printemps, which marked the opening of the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées on April 1, 1913. The theater, after which the dress is named, featured several of Poiret’s most celebrated actress-clients, including Andrée Spinelly and Eve Lavallièrè. Theater played an important role in Poiret’s creativity. Not only did it inspire many of his most imaginative flights of fancy, but it also provided an opportunity for Poiret to introduce his more avant-garde styles into society through his designs for the great actresses of the day on stage and for his more adventurous clients of artistic and bohemian sensibility in the audience. Opening night at the theater, with its formal dress codes, provided a venue where extravagant display was not only appropriate but expected.

‘Champs-Élysées’ is, in its ivory tonalities, an exquisite allusion to Neoclassical dress. However, Poiret, in his typically sybaritic manner, has reinterpreted the simple white mull gown of the Directoire and Empire periods. A richly patterned silk damask is overlaid with fragile silk tulle. Double bands of lead-crystal rhinestones articulate the high waist and give the hem of the tulle overskirt a subtle hooplike support. Unlike the “lampshade” tunics Poiret introduced with his Minaret style in 1913, which were high in front and low in back, here he gave an asymmetrical cant to the hem of the tunic, reasserting the angled drape of the gown’s surplice neckline.
'Feuille d’Automne’ Day Ensemble worn by Denise Poiret, 1916

The day ensemble ‘Feuille d’automne’ (Autumn Leaves), introduces the new, slightly raised hemline of the season. While Denise Poiret had worn boots à la Russe for years, they were especially apt when coordinated with ankle-exposing skirts. As with many of Poiret’s designs, this ensemble acknowledges the prevailing mode while modifying it to the idiosyncratic sensibility of the designer. In the early 1920s, Poiret was to advocate panniered (wide-hipped) and crinolined silhouettes, but in this period—when many design houses endorsed a full, umbrella-shaped skirt—Poiret insisted on a line that cleaved reasonably to the body. There is fullness in the paisley-patterned skirt, but because it is not supported by petticoats, it collapses into the slender and natural line advocated by the designer and preferred by his wife.

The surplice blouse wraps at the waist, anticipating the body-conforming styles of the 1930s by more than a decade. Vogue noted in the early 1920s that among Poiret’s greatest innovations was the “kimono neckline.” By adding a white collar to the surplice, Poiret co-opts the Asian origins of the garment’s construction and situates it in the tradition of Western fashion. In this ensemble, as in others, Denise Poiret’s sylphlike form encouraged innovation. The wrap front of the blouse would not have been adequate for the fuller form of the Belle Époque ideal, but for the slender build of Poiret’s wife, the adjustability of the wrap provided the minimum of support for the suggestion of a natural bustline.
Day Coat worn by Denise Poiret, 1918, and Day Coat, 1921

A series of coats and jackets incorporating wool jacquards with novelty striped patterns in the style of the wools used in Bedouin burnoosees recurs in a number of Poiret’s collections. As with many of his designs, the introduction of new silhouettes and the retention of details from earlier collections can complicate a precise dating of his works. However, in the case of the short coat from the personal wardrobe of his wife, a photograph of a family vacation in Gstaad together with a note secreted in the coat’s pocket (identifying the source of the textile) establishes the date, as does a photograph of the related coat in the Sééberger Collection at the Bibliothèque nationale de France, in Paris.

In 1918, Poiret had recently returned from a trip to Morocco. Working with the noted textile house of Rodier, he was able to evoke the rusticity of the palette and the pattern of hand-loomed textiles of the region with the luxurious finishing possible in his replication in fine wool. Denise Poiret wore the funnel collar of the coat open and splayed like a capelet collar. Photographs of her in Poiret’s tailored designs invariably depict her in an attitude of relaxed informality. Coats are worn open, and cloaks are allowed to slip off the shoulders.

Three years later, in 1921, the designer constructed the related coat with the closure shifted from center front, and thus less adaptable to being worn unbuttoned. (In 1922, however, Poiret was to redesign the coat with a center-front fastening, and, as another photograph in the Sééberger Collection testifies, clients wore it splayed open à la Denise Poiret.) The black satin bodice and sleeves of the piece are trimmed with striped wool at the collar and cuffs. The same wool, used in the skirt of the coat, is gathered into cartridge pleats at the hips in the fashion seen in European folkloric dress.

In the early 1920s, the incorporation of details and silhouettes of regional dress, which began in the 1910s, reached new heights. Poiret, who always favored the picturesque, was among the greatest advocates of artisanal traditions. Of course, his citations of the homespun and the hand embroidered were subject to the extraordinary techniques of his own couture atelier. In the case of Denise Poiret’s coat, the matching up of the striping at seams might be accomplished by any careful seamstress, but the excision of the bands of triangles and hand stitching necessary to finish the collar are evidence of the couturier’s hand.
'Pré Catelan' Evening Coat worn by Denise Poiret, 1918

'Pré Catelan' refers to the restaurant in the Bois de Boulogne famous for its lavish Belle Époque interiors. Its attractive gardens made it a favored meeting place on summer evenings. This unlined coat of chiffon-weight lamé would have contributed to a spectacular entrance. As worn by Denise Poiret, the coat’s unstructured form would have been draped with a casual insouciance.

For all its shawl-like formlessness, however, the coat is of ingenious construction. Poiret finesses the challenge of the bold striping by cutting the body and stole collar in one. While the sleeves are separate rectangular pieces, the body and draped neckline of the design are constructed, origami-like, in one continuous section. The slight cocooning arch of the back is created by the shirring of the pattern piece as it meets its own edge, forming a seam. It is not until the work of Alix Grès in the 1930s and Issey Miyake in the 1970s that similar sculptural effects based on such deliberately and radically reductive cuts executed on the straight grain reappear.
‘Paris’ Evening Coat worn by Denise Poiret, 1919

This evening coat was among the great couture masterworks in Denise Poiret’s personal collection. She was photographed wearing the coat like a great wrap with a short evening dress called ‘Faune.’ While the dress does not appear to have survived—it was an astonishing combination of gold lamé and black monkey fur interspersed with gilt military fringe—Denise Poiret’s coordination suggests that ‘Paris’ was among the more exotic evening coats in her wardrobe.

Constructed of one unbroken length of silk velvet, the coat has been twisted into shape without resorting to any cutting to form the apertures for the sleeves or open front. As the design could only have been conceived in the round and draped on the figure, it is the best example of Poiret’s conception of dress as a three-dimensional form that maintains the integrity of its two-dimensional cloth.

Poiret’s love of unexpected color combinations appears in his juxtaposition of deep brown velvet with a vivid red violet silk. A richly embroidered placket at the hipline anchors the loop and button closure. With its couched silver-gilt cording, it appears to be half of a neckline bib, or quabbeh, typical of costumes from the Middle East. Poiret seems to have been inspired by an authentic embroidery panel, if only by half, and has reinvented it as a complete motif by finishing all of its edges visually and structurally. In a final flourish, he has introduced colored tassels to further embellish and “orientalize” the closure.
'Bois de Boulogne' Dinner Dress worn by Denise Poiret, 1919

Among Poiret's many collaborations with artists, the most enduring was with Raoul Dufy. The artist's boldly graphic approach reflected Poiret's personal preference for the kinds of simplified forms with intense coloring produced by his decorative arts company, Atelier Martine. The naive and artisanal effects sought by the designer, which at Atelier Martine were based on designs that were done by young female students, were in the case of Dufy related largely to his use of woodblock printing.

After working with Poiret on a number of textile designs that achieved quick success, Dufy was hired away by the luxury silk manufacturer Bianchini-Férier. While there was a brief rift following this decampment, Poiret eventually incorporated Dufy prints in what were to become some of his most signature creations. In this dress, the "conversational" print by the artist depicts a series of alfresco vignettes, recalling scenes from the Bois de Boulogne, against a lush millefleur background. Dufy's earliest prints appear to be based on the tradition of eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century toiles de Jouy. Here, however, with the rich colors and congested patterning in which figure and ground elements have been given equal emphasis, the textile seems closer to Persian miniatures and Mughal lacquer ware.

Poiret has treated the printed silk as if he were constructing a tabard, by having a planar bodice with front and back skirt panels open at the sides. Because black silk tulle forms the sleeves of the dress, and an underskirt of silk tulle and silk broadcloth is visible below the dropped waist, the ensemble conveys the effect of a full black tulle and silk underdress with an apron or pinafore-like overpiece. All of these details, the tapestry-like print, the faux-tabard construction, and the low waistline, contribute to the ensemble's vaguely medieval appearance.
Although Poiret is best known for styles that reference the simplicity of regional apparel, he was equally capable of tailoring intricacies. A black wool coat with a filigree appliqué of white kid is shaped in a body-skimming, cylindrical silhouette. While there is no real shaping to the whole of the coat, except for a very slight flare to the skirt, the body is disclosed because the designer has inserted only a light China-silk half-lining. The surprisingly lightweight wool faille is supple enough to fall into a slight drape below the upper arms. Poiret kept the armhole high for a personalized fit but introduced fullness to the sleeves above the elbows. The resulting effect is of a dolman without the associated bagginess.

In the promenade ensemble from the collection of the Museum of the City of New York, small constructed embellishments contribute to the vivacity of the ensemble. Deep conical sleeve cuffs are fixed, but a scarf neckline encouraged the wearer to explore a variety of options depending on whether the matching tabs were worn open, looped, half-knotted, or bowed. The waistline is characteristically high. Even when the fashion for the natural and dropped waistline was preferred, Poiret continued to offer a slightly Empire proportion. Unlike his peers, he insisted that the truly stylish woman should wear what suited her most, even if in contradiction to prevailing trends.
Coat, 1923

A complicated piecing of two different but related textiles emphasizes the straight lines of this coat. Poiret’s signature rose is woven into two broad, faintly ombré running lengths bracketed by narrow unmatched stripes. The actual design of this textile is evidenced only by the incorporation of the outer boundaries of the pattern to form the garment’s sleeves. Another fabric, of confronting scalloped stripes, is inserted at either side of the coat. The narrow band cuffs are in the same plain, loosely woven wool that comprises the lining. The yarn of the lining is identical in color to the ivory ground of the floral and striped patterned textiles that make up the body of the coat. The design reveals none of the virtuosity of its construction, with the coat’s apparent simplicity obscuring its technical complexity.
DAY DRESS WORN BY DENISE POIRET, 1921

A dress worn by Denise Poiret to the wedding of Germaine Boivin, a niece of her husband's, conforms to the theme of the event, the Italian Renaissance. Not only was the velvet evocative of textile patterns of the period, but the shape of the dress was intended to allude to styles associated with the fifteenth century. In fact, Poiret, as a designer of evocative associations, took liberties with his sources. The loose-fitting chemise has a closer relationship to some medieval styles than to those in the Renaissance courts of Italy.

Even though the structure of the garment is modernist in the simplicity of its conception, its design reveals Poiret’s love of exotic, historic, and romantic narratives. Whereas early modernists exploited the past as well as other cultures to free themselves from the conventions of the Belle Époque, a sartorial modernism that shed its dependence on any allusions or citations of the past to rationalize its originality was, by the 1920s, fully formed. Poiret never relinquished his belief that freedom in dress was to be found in styles that either predate or are outside of the fashion system. Therefore, the radical innovations of his approach to the construction of dress and his essential modernity are obscured, and even obliterated, by his historicism and orientalism.
Day Dress, ca. 1921

This dress, one of a series of knitted chemises, harks back to the shifts of embroidered linen that Poiret introduced in 1911–12 as a response to his first formal mannequin tour of Europe in October–November 1911, which included stops in Vienna and St. Petersburg. At first glance, not surprisingly, the chemise's pattern appears to be related to folkloric embroideries. On closer inspection, however, the patterns have a more direct connection to knitted Renaissance sweater/bodices that survive in museum collections.

Like the dress Poiret made for his wife to wear to the wedding of his niece, this gown is less a reverential citation than an artistic interpretation. Although Poiret's consistent and continuing reliance on ornate patterning and rich colorings was, eventually, to isolate him from fashion's evolving trends, in the early 1920s the lush romanticism of his designs continued to answer the aesthetic and high-bohemian aspirations of a rarified group of clients. A frequently published photograph of Peggy Guggenheim in a gown with a Renaissance-patterned bodice conveys the individuality of the free-thinking women who gravitated to Poiret's attention-grabbing styles.
**Dress, 1922, and Ensemble, ca. 1922**

In these ensembles, Poiret melded elements of Mughal and Ottoman dress to create garments of a fictive East. For the couturier, the rich textiles and decorative flourishes of Islamic dress were compatible with his love of vivid palettes and luxurious effects. However, it is in the construction of Islamic costumes that the most enduring and fundamental influence resides.

As with many regional costume traditions, Muslim dress prioritized an economy of cut and a minimization of waste in the construction of a garment. Pattern pieces are, therefore, of a surprising geometric simplicity. The arcing excisions of the Western tailor's approach are only minimally present. Instead, textiles are laid out on straight or crosswise grain that is oriented to the length or width of the fabric, giving an almost two-dimensional quality to garments when laid flat. While alluding to the effects of such constructions, Poiret's ensembles, in fact, introduce the shaping of Western dressmaking approaches, apparent in the fitted waistline of one dress (an evocation of the medieval girdle) and in the shaping of a sleeve cap in the other.

For Poiret, citations of other folkloric traditions, especially of regional France and Central Europe, coincided in the 1920s with a trend for the artisanal. But unlike his designs of orientalist flavor, with their bulkier silhouettes and full skirts, they were not in alignment with the lithe, willowy line in universal favor. Poiret's referencing of the East, like his Neoclassicism, was able to move from the designer's fantastical theatrics before World War I to an appealing exoticism in the last decade of his career. With their simple cuts, supple fabrics, and body-skimming silhouettes, his designs sustained the liberation of the female form that defined his initial success.
‘Irudrée’ Evening Gown, 1922

In the late teens and early twenties, Poiret promoted the use of lamés and metallic brocades that recalled his creations for Denise Poiret before World War I. One dress, with a triangular top and open back, called ‘Linzeeler,’ which his wife wore to the opening of Poiret’s nightclub L’Oasis in July 1919, was a permutation of the scandalously bare ‘Reine de Saba’ (Queen of Sheba) costume worn by Denise Poiret to his “Fête des Rois” of January 10, 1914. ‘Irudrée’ shares with these earlier examples a reliance on the mercurial drape of lamé and the use of simple rectangles disposed over the body to give a “second-skin” fit.

The style of ‘Irudrée,’ with its cylindrical silhouette and tubular rouleau low-slung on the hip, appears in more sedate variations beginning in 1921. A May issue of L’Illustration des modes of that year describes a Mlle Rafael in a Poiret gown of “metallic fabric” and “large rolls of the same fabric around the hips” attending one of the parties of the Marquise de Polignac held at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées, a regular venue for Poiret’s fashion parades.

Like many of Poiret’s garments, the construction of ‘Irudrée’ is notable for its simplicity. The bodice is one piece shirred at the right side seam for fit. The skirt is of two pieces sewn selvage to selvage to form side seams gathered in at the dropped waist of the bodice. It is finished at the hem with fine picot edging, usually reserved for the finishing of lingerie. A thick rouleau of spiraling fabric, reminiscent of the Renaissance hip roll, or farthingale, is loosely basted to the waist seam.
Coat, ca. 1922

Poiret's allusions to foreign cultures tended to focus on the Near, Middle, and Far East. In this instance, the coat is cut with a straight silhouette typical of the 1920s, but the wide, flaring cuffed sleeves are a detail that relates to the designer's continuing preference for Middle Eastern elements.

In 1922, however, Poiret designed a remarkable, if idiosyncratic, ensemble of fringed leather inspired by the American West, now part of the collection of the Galleria, Paris. Perhaps the silk and leather appliqué pattern of this coat, executed by Maison Ar dor, which worked exclusively for Poiret, is a reference to the work of the Pacific Coast Tlingit and Kwakiutl peoples. However, given the ultimately indeterminate iconography of the pattern, it might also be inspired by the textiles of the Ainu from the northern Japanese island of Hokkaido, or even the woodwork and tattoo patterns of the southwest Pacific Islanders. Certainly, with the Musée de l'Homme and the Musée Guimet repositories in Paris, all of these traditions would have been of interest and accessible to the avant-garde artists, especially those with primitivist sensibilities whom Poiret befriended.

Poiret appears less interested in the documentary fidelity of his designs than in the dramatic power his sources introduced into his creations. In his subjective, highly interpretive citing of regional and ethnic imagery, Poiret was not far removed from the strategies of early modernist painters and sculptors with whom he socialized. Where he varied from them, at least in the 1920s, was in his application of those ideas in a way that reified rather than confronted the status quo. Although he had exploited the narratives of an exotic “other” to precipitate radical changes of cut and silhouette, Poiret, after World War I, appears to have relied on that imagery as a means to retain artisanal notions of beauty. Meanwhile, his contemporaries were moving away from such referencing and addressing notions of the commodity, the industrialized product, as well as upending the conventions of beauty as aligned with the rare, the luxurious, and the sensual.
**Evening Gown, ca. 1922–23**

Among the great conceptual masterworks of Poiret's oeuvre, this dress stands as an example of his most reductive approach to dressmaking. Two pieces of silk faille have been identically printed in meter-and-a-half squares, with a border of navy blue surrounding a wine red square. The top is one square with an opening for a bateau neckline. An underdress consists of a chemise-style bodice, completely obscured when the top is worn, with gilt-braid buttonlike elements at either shoulder. These function as anchors to the top by holding the neckline in place. The skirt is the second square of faille, attached along the top edge to the waist of the chemise bodice and wrapped in a cylinder until both sides of the square meet to form a center back seam.

Poiret's conceit, to create a dress out of two uncompromised squares of fabric, anticipates the work of designers like Halston and Issey Miyake fifty years later, when a similar platonic geometry emerged in the pattern pieces of their designs. The simple, tubular line of the dress harks back to a narrow silhouette first proposed by Poiret in his spring 1918 collection and dubbed the 'Siflet,' or whistle. Nothing in his oeuvre, however, anticipated the Minimalist conception of this particular example.
‘Mademoiselle’ Day Dress worn by Denise Poiret, 1923

Two distinctive styles emerged in the early 1920s. One, with a panniered skirt and exaggerated hips, was called the “robe de style.” The other, which was the style that prevailed, was the straight-lined shift called the “chemise.” In another instance of the couturier’s insistence on the independent creative vision of the artist, Poiret, for much of the last decade of his career, proffered styles that had a rounded silhouette with full dirndl skirts à la Bretonne. Despite his deliberate intransigence in the face of the overwhelming trend to the planar silhouette, even Poiret, at least in some of his collections, conceded to the fashionable taste of the day.

‘Mademoiselle’ is a compromise between his advocacy of fullness in the skirt and the willowy silhouette in vogue. From the wardrobe of Denise Poiret, the dress would have been enhanced by her lithe form and feline grace, attributes commented on by her contemporaries. Poiret dismissed the more androgynous fashion à la garçonne promoted by Jean Patou and Coco Chanel, which minimized the contours of the chest and hips. “Cardboard women,” he called them, with “with hollow silhouettes, angular shoulders and flat breasts . . . birds.” In his rendering of the suppressed fit, the shoulder line is sloped, the natural waist is articulated by a slight curvature in the side seam, and the skirt consists of a tightly pleated striped wool, introducing a fullness that retracts on itself. The linearity of the dress is augmented by an insertion of a red wool stripe that extends down the center front of the dress, beginning at just above the natural waistline and extending down into the hem of the skirt. Arbitrary and purely decorative, the stripe suggests the formal interplay of geometries in a Constructivist painting.
Evening Gown, ca. 1923

For a designer best remembered for advocating the uncorseted silhouette, Poiret's use of bias, the shifting of the weave of a fabric to its most elastic, is surprisingly rare. When the bias is incorporated into his designs, it is not the elaborately angled piecing that is the signature of his contemporary Madeleine Vionnet, but rather it is the seemingly fortuitous occurrence of bias that results from his technique of continuous draping.

This remarkable gown incorporates several approaches characteristic of the designer. Like the evening coat 'Paris,' the gown is cut in one long length of fabric. And like other evening dresses, an angled embroidered lozenge at the hip functions as its closure. Perhaps most significantly, like the surplice neckline that appears in his evening dresses, coats, and tailored jackets, it is based on the wrap construction of the kimono. This feature was such a Poiret signature that Vogue described it as among his defining contributions to the history of twentieth-century fashion.

The color, a seashell pink, the fabric, a lustrous silk satin, and the loosely draped form of the gown convey the effect less of the formal decorousness of a trained evening dress than the luxurious comfort of a peignoir. With its soft drift over the body and its bias collapse at the sides, the gown has a faintly classicizing flavor. However, like the theatrical, orientalizing styles seen in his "harem" pantaloons and "lampshade" tunic ensembles, Poiret's gown must have assumed, in its day, a provocative, destabilizing sense of the intimate emerging into the public. Like his earlier costumes of the seraglio, this gown appears plucked from the most private precincts of the boudoir.
'Persane' Evening Gown worn by Denise Poiret, 1923

By the mid-1920s, other couturiers, governed by an aesthetic of sportif modernism, were promoting wool jersey for day and unfigured velvets and chiffons, depending on the season, for evening. Poiret was as dumbfounded by the reverse chic of seemingly plain garments, in which the cachet resided in discreet, even hidden, costume finishes, as he was by the angular androgyny of the fashionable beauty of the postwar period. But even Poiret, still regarded at this point in his career as an artist, was influenced by the trend toward an elegant simplicity.

In the collections of the "Pasha of Paris," as the designer was sometimes called, simplicity did not imply plainness. (Indeed, Poiret's work of the 1920s points to the problematics of the decorative in debates concerning modernism.) This model, called 'Persane,' establishes a direct association with Middle Eastern dress and was worn by Denise Poiret to the last dinner held in Poiret's home-cum-atelier on the avenue d'Antin. The green silk is brocaded with a motif of roses and has been embellished by hand in a silver-gilt pattern modeled after the embroidered caftan necklines of the region. The attached skirt, of a rich novelty fabric of corded-silver lamé, is a simple rectangle attached at the waist, but completely open at the right side. The overlap of this open side is minimal, and like Denise Poiret's audacious costume as the Queen of Sheba, it would, in certain positions, have exposed her leg completely. As with many of Poiret's more adventurous creations, it was his wife, his favorite model and muse, who not only had the sylphlike physique to set off a design to best advantage but also the free-spirited confidence to don such a revealing and potentially scandalous gown.
Evening Dress, 1924

Poiret made several trips to the Near and Middle East throughout his career, and the influence of the decorative and structural elements of Eastern costumes informed his designs. An interesting phenomenon in Poiret’s work from 1910 onward is his manipulation and modification of authentic Middle Eastern garments. In many instances, Poiret inserted gussets of soft fabrics into the two-dimensionally conceived garments of the region to create a more supple drape to the otherwise stiffly planar garments.

In this short evening dress, Poiret retained defining elements of Middle Eastern dress and also referred to Mughal attire by inserting rigid, heavily embroidered triangular godets at either side of the skirt. The crisp outline characteristic of Mughal and Ottoman styles is subverted, however, by his use of a supple silk satin that drapes softly over the torso. Typical of Poiret’s inventiveness is his reconstruction of the basic shaping of an Indian man’s angarkha, or fitted coat, by substituting for its tight sleeves the sheer sleeves and flaring cuffs that are more commonly seen in Middle Eastern and Ottoman sources.

By placing the angled closure of the dress at the hipline, the designer conforms to the prevailing taste for a dropped waist. However, Poiret’s collections invariably contained a variety of styles referencing disparate cultures and periods and represented radically differing silhouettes. His constant admonition to women to dress to their own body type, coloring, and preference, appears to be reflected in his presentation of diverse choices. But in the judgment of time, it is with his persistent theme of orientalism that the designer was able to best merge his structural modernity with his taste for sumptuous visual effects.
'Bataille' Evening Dress, 1925

The delicacy of detailing in this luxurious evening dress combines the efforts of several métiers of the haute couture. The main components of the dress are a gold metallic-and-black-silk lace bodice and gold-lamé skirt and sleeves.

Lace-making houses, like textile manufacturers, are specialists known for their particular design vocabulary, their structural patternings, and, in some instances, their adeptness in the manipulation of certain materials. In this dress, the gilt lace, with its orientalized Art Deco patterning, has been further embellished by the addition of black sequins in a zigzag geometric repeat. Lamé was, unlike other textiles, often sold by weight, and its value established by the amount of gold incorporated in its creation. Here, this precious textile has been used with a spendthrift’s abandon, since the fine pleating to which it has been subjected doubles the quantity required. Pleaters are yet another specialization, and the complexities of scale and variation seen in the sleeves suggest the virtuosity required. Close examination of the upper sleeve reveals the pleaters’ referencing of the interlinked patterning of the sequin-embellished lace.

As with other designs from this period, Poiret favored a narrow sleeve flaring at the cuff and a skirt that is straight in repose but with a modicum of fullness. Another signature element is the designer’s preference for the subtly articulated waist. Though other couture houses obliterated the waist with a plumb line that dropped from underarm to hem, Poiret suggested a slightly raised waist, one that hovers an inch or so above the actual waistline, establishing a proportion that attenuates the legs.
Evening Dress, 1925

The influence of the 1925 Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes on fashion was especially pronounced in textile designs of the period. The green silk chiffon of the gown is brocaded with a gilt-thread fletching motif in overall repeat on the torso of the dress and on the hem. Renowned as a colorist, Poiret is unusual among couturiers in his advocacy of vivid green as a fashionable hue. In various tonalities, green is represented in almost all of the designer’s collections. Here, Poiret has complemented the color with a hip girdle of pink and gold that brings to the surface of the dress the colors of its richly brocaded pink silk underdress in the kind of sophisticated juxtaposition for which the designer was celebrated.

Poiret has created a tunic proportion, favored in the period, by extending the bodice to the lower hipline, where the skirt is then shirred in a dagged line conforming to the fletching motif. The sashlike girdle is positioned along the upper hipline, which not only introduces a more personalized proportion but also mediates Poiret’s concession to prevailing modes. An almost intransigent, deliberately individualistic approach to design therefore appears in even his most conventional works. Poiret’s lifelong assertion of his identity as an artist subordinated his pursuit of commercial success. Thus, although arguably with increasing subtlety, idiosyncracy infused his designs until the close of his couture house in 1929.
'Bouclier' Day Dress, 1925

Because of their bold coloring, rich detailing, dramatic (if simple) silhouettes, and immediately recognizable references, designs by Poiret in the orientalist mode came to represent the strongest identity of his house. In fact, Poiret's collections were an amalgamation of all his interests. Rather than one unified theme, his presentations offered clients a range of silhouettes and stylistic effects. Many designs cited menswear, sportswear (something Poiret would eventually repudiate as an inappropriate style for the haute couture), and historical styles, especially those from antiquity, the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, and the Second Empire, in a heady eclectic mix.

Although 'Bouclier' appears to preclude another period or culture that might have been its inspiration, Poiret's informed historicism reveals itself in the trompe l'oeil detail of narrow placket printed with a button motif, which references the button-down pinafore dresses of the 1880s. The effect is of an illusion of a sheer cotton blouse or chemise under a red dress with a navy overdress. While its design features are primarily frontal, Poiret added a decorative bow to the back neckline, reinforcing its playful spirit.

Through its color palette and its association with the chic style of young Parisiennes, the dress alludes to French national identity. It was represented in Art-Goût-Beauté with another model called 'École,' also rendered in blue, white, and red. Both dresses were paired with matching accessories to underscore their nationalistic overtones. Poiret was a fierce patriot despite having been criticized during World War I for his boche taste because of a cartoon in the German comic paper Simplicissimus that featured a German housewife being assured by her soldier husband that she would soon get a new Poiret dress. Indeed, for Poiret, orientalism and classicism, often seen as rival aesthetic models in the discourse of modernism, were mutually reinforcing expressions of his patriotism, so deep-rooted were they in the cultural politics of France.
Evening Dress, ca. 1925

The casual execution of some of Poiret's designs suggests the couturier's prioritization of the impact of a dress over the less apparent refinements and details of finish characteristic of the work of other couture houses. This haphazard, even careless, cutting and stitching of a garment is one manifestation of the spontaneity inherent in the couturier's breathless production of a never-ending stream of ideas. Often, a Poiret gown discloses interior seam allowances that have not been overcast, or darts that have not been cut and pressed open but simply pinched and tacked, as if it has been rushed through the workrooms for an impatient client.

Poiret's designs from the mid-1920s, however, are invariably refined in their execution. Perhaps by that point in his career Poiret controlled his more theatrical and artisanal impulses and sought to conform to the standards of the métiers of les petits mains, the workshops that provide all the decorative details of the haute couture. Perhaps, also, he was amenable to his backers, the Auber Group, which from 1924, provided financial support to Poiret's flagging business. In any case, in this period his designs both reflected the polished finish typically associated with couture techniques and were also aligned overall with the styles of his contemporaries.

Although the designer continued to advocate a flaring skirt at a time when a stricter chemise shape was the standard, the fullness in this example is mediated by the weight of the embroidered pearl motifs—lotuslike with possible Egyptian Revival or archaic Chinese sources—which cause the paisley-patterned gold lace to collapse in irregular flutes. The lace, the "lotus" pearl embroidery, and the flaring Poiret sleeve (described by one journalist as a "mandarin sleeve," although it is equally Ottoman in style) are subsumed in the effect of prevailing fashion. Poiret's exoticism has not disappeared, but is merely muted by the influence of aesthetic trends that found full expression in the 1925 Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes.
Evening Dress, ca. 1925

The influence of Sergei Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes and specifically of Léon Bakst, its renowned costume and production designer, on the work of Poiret was elided and, on occasion, dismissed categorically by the couturier. However, the exuberant imagery of Diaghilev’s theatrical productions was in perfect concordance with Poiret’s love of vivid colors, dramatic effects, and fantastic exotism.

This short evening dress with a zigzag pattern appears to conflate Near and Middle Eastern costume in its details but cites with astonishing closeness a costume designed by Bakst for Nijinsky. A sketch for Nijinsky’s role as the Hindu prince in Diaghilev’s Le festin (1909) shows a fitted tunic with cap sleeves worn over tight trousers. Poiret’s design with a gold-lamé plastron-shaped insert at center front, which disrupts an angled decorative waistband, is a direct reference to Bakst’s drawing. The designer, however, has modified Bakst’s costume in other details. The sleeves in the original costume are excised, and the whole garment is elongated to calf length. Poiret has relaxed the line of Bakst’s tunic and introduced a body-skimming ease. By pleating fullness along the bottom edge of the insert, he created movement in the skirt. Poiret underscored his evocation of royal India through his selection of a richly rainbow-patterned lamé that recalls the gold-shot silks of maharajahs.
'Steppe' Jacket worn by Denise Poiret, 1912

The design of this model with its clear reference to Chinese, specifically Manchu, prototypes, is given a context for its deviation from authentic examples. By titling the model 'Steppe,' Poiret alluded to the geographic perimeters of China, where the conventions of dress began to mutate through the contact with other cultures. As with his citations of Near and Middle Eastern costumes, Poiret combined a series of small, evocative details to suggest the foreign. While his 'Révérend' coat of 1905 (now in the collection of the Galleria, Paris) was cut like a Taoist robe and had shou-like pictograms embroidered on its revers, references to the Far East appeared with less regularity in his collections than Islamic and Hindu citations.

Here, the specific signs of Chinese dress are the asymmetric closure, the high collar, the blue and white morning glory embroidered motifs, and the decoratively stitched band edging. Documentary black-and-white photographs of the jacket imply that it was reproduced in 1924 and again in 1926. In the latter, it was worn with a lighter colored dress, possibly in the blue of the embroidery or in the gray of the jacket's fox trim. While it is likely that the ensemble was coordinated in color in Poiret's earlier prototype, he secreted a brilliant flash of turquoise silk as the lining. In 1911, Poiret employed almost the exact same color to line his blue black and white Dufy printed coat, 'La Perse.' Although it is likely that such an unexpected introduction of color should be ascribed to the designer, this jacket, as in the case of the Dufy coat, belonged to his wife, Denise. There is the possibility, therefore, that the lining is a manifestation of Denise Poiret's equally exuberant sensibility.
**Evening Dress, 1928**

In Poiret’s oeuvre, leitmotifs distinguish his designs that, otherwise, conform to prevailing fashions. This dress, from the year before his couture house closed, reflects the period of transition from the recto-verso planarity characteristic of the 1920s chemise dress to a period when the cubistic fracturing of a garment made a design’s construction comprehensible only in rotation. This spiraling of the fabric and the resulting asymmetry appeared with greater frequency in the work of Poiret’s contemporaries, but the designer’s preference for draping on the body, seen in works such as his 1919 ‘Paris’ evening coat, suggests an early predisposition for this approach to dressmaking. Where Poiret differs from other designers, most notably the great innovator of the bias cut, Madeleine Vionnet, is in his preference for working on the straight grain.

The innovative cut of this dress is masked by the arcing silk-satin appliqués. The dress is made of four pieces of fabric but not disposed in conventions of front panel, back panel, and sleeves. Instead, it comprises two sleeves, a large continuous pattern piece forming the front and back bodice of the dress and most of the skirt, and a gathered skirt panel at the right side that forms the asymmetrically pointed hem. If the fabric had been wide enough, Poiret would have been able to cut the dress in one piece, with only the sleeves as an addition. Rather, he has extended the crosswise length of the fabric by attaching the gore with its seam on grain. While it is signature Poiret, the structuring of the dress is not explicit. More readily identifiable are the decorative embroidery, an abstracted feather motif that is applied like a closure at the waist of the dress, and the scrolling satin appliqués alluding to the designer’s orientalist interests.
Nightdress worn by Denise Poiret, ca. 1920

Denise Poiret’s modernity was conveyed not only by her sometimes audacious self-presentation but also by her lithe, small-boned figure. Unlike the odalisques of the Belle Époque, her svelte gamine beauty conformed to a more active body type (one that did not require the assist of a corset), which was increasingly in evidence in the early twentieth century. In a personal photograph taken by Poiret, his wife, wearing this negligé, poses playfully swinging from a bedpost. Her body is slender but not angular. This characteristic is significant, for Poiret, during the 1920s and 1930s, was to reject his disdain for the fashionable thinness advocated by such designers as Jean Patou and, especially, Coco Chanel. The Poiret ideal was slight but not bony, irrefutably feminine and never androgynous.

A freedom of spirit and a prioritization of comfort are equally expressed in this classical “tunic,” one of two that the Metropolitan Museum bought from the auction of Denise Poiret's clothes at PIASA in Paris. With its one-shouldered neckline, it cites the bareness of the Amazon, who would allow one shoulder of her chiton to fall open, generally baring her breast. Poiret’s more modest interpretation of this style is constructed of two panels of cotton gauze edged with fine picot stitching. A channel of shirring angled at the front neckline creates an asymmetrical self-ruffle. The shirring introduces enough fullness to accommodate the bust. Denise Poiret wore this baby-doll-length tunic with a variety of colored sashes.
Nightdress Ensemble worn by Denise Poiret, ca. 1920

A nightshirt and shorts from the wardrobe of Denise Poiret reintroduce one of Poiret’s earliest interests, the simple forms of classical dress. The first manifestations of a Neoclassical sensibility appeared in his designs of 1906 and reflected the proportions and cylindrical silhouette of the Directoire. It was classicism through the lens of the eighteenth century. When he held his “Les Festes de Bacchus” party in 1912, however, a more historical approach informed his designs. Although Poiret’s classicism was allusive rather than academic, it still functioned as an implicit advocacy of the free, unfettered body.

While this nightdress ensemble is similar to his design of the chiton for his “Les Festes de Bacchus,” Poiret constructed it like a poncho, from a rectangle folded at the shoulder line. Poiret then stitched it at either side seam. The matching shorts are made of two pieces of pleated crêpe seamed together at center front and center back with a supporting hip yoke. The yoke is attached to the legs of the shorts by thread brides that create the effect of pulled work, or fagotting, a feature suggestive of deluxe lingerie.

The vivid red orange of the ensemble might evoke the red terracotta ground associated with Greek vase painting, but a tiny detail, the bead-weighted, tassel-trimmed waist cord, suggests Chinese lacquer and cinnabar as likely sources. The modernity of the ensemble is conveyed by Poiret’s blending of orientalism and classicism.
'Flonflon' Headdress worn by Denise Poiret, ca. 1920

Although Poiret's atelier was capable of producing millinery that encompassed a wide range of materials and silhouettes, including cloches, turbans, small straws, jeweled headbands, and asymmetrically brimmed felts, he also worked with a number of milliners. In Denise Poiret's collection, many coifs were made by Madeleine Panizon (and survived with notes associating them to specific ensembles).

This example, however, was probably created in Poiret's own maison de couture. The coif is an improvisation in wire, strips of silk, and feathers and is little more than a headband. As with many of the hats and headdresses intended for pairing with evening ensembles, the 'Flonflon' is theatrical in spirit. In concept, it is similar to a more widely known example of gold lamé and black monkey fur, worn by Denise Poiret with her 'Paris' evening coat. Both recall eighteenth-century depictions of the headdresses of the allegories of the Continents, notably of Africa and the Americas. For Poiret, evening dress, even in the details of its accessorization, offered an opportunity to evoke exotic referents.
'Le Bal' Shoes worn by Denise Poiret, 1924

This magnificent pair of evening slippers is completely overembroidered in colored seed beads in a pattern that depicts Paul Poiret on one foot and Denise Poiret on the other. They are shown creating a sensation as they enter a crowded ball. Unlike these slippers, which can be best appreciated by close examination, many of Poiret's ensembles were conceived with the graphic boldness of stage costumes. His preference for high color and dramatic, if simple, shapes was appropriate for the world of the paparazzi and the red carpet. This performative role of his fashions is captured in the images of the social couple gliding through the glittering precincts of elite society.

The shoes, by the great cobbler André Perugia, are, except for one exaggerated detail, in the style of a simple pump. An attenuated tongue evokes historical prototypes from the court of Louis XIV. While Perugia appears to have collaborated with Poiret on occasion, the couturier's most famous innovation in footwear was his endorsement, and Denise Poiret's practice, of wearing boots. Constantly asked to make pronouncements on fashion, the designer, when he spoke of footwear, at one point famously advocated hose colored to match the skirt, with the shoe an accent to the ensemble. But while that was only a phase, his preference for pairing boots with tailored ensembles, particularly of shorter lengths, continued from the early teens until the close of his couture house in 1929. The bottier Favereau created a pair of white calf-height boots for Denise Poiret in 1913, which she continued to wear for decades, generally crushed down around her ankles.

Photographs of Poiret's house mannequins sporting his designs from 1919 to 1929 show them wearing shoes of generic simplicity. Even in footwear, it appears that Denise Poiret, once more, was the one who inspired some of Paul Poiret's greater flights of fancy.
'La Rose de Rosine' Flacon, 1912

The notion that fragrances carry the conceptual essence of a couture house originates with Paul Poiret. Not only was he the first designer to create his own perfumerie to counter the hegemony of specialized fragrance houses like Coty and Guerlain, but he also conceived of associating differing lines of narrative with a scent to reflect the visual conceits of his collections. Thus, he was able to generate a number of scents based on his orientalist fantasies, alluding to both the Near and Far East. He also created a series of scents predicated on his patriotic conviction that France, and specifically Paris, was the center of fashionability.

His fragrance enterprise was named after his first child, Rosine, who seems to have been named after Poiret's beloved emblem. As Suzy Menkes of the International Herald Tribune has noted, Poiret had plucked the rose as his signature bloom long before Chanel chose the camellia. Certainly its immediate associations with beauty and love, and its origins in the gardens of China and the Middle East, blended an iconography perfectly suited to the designer's interests.

In the design of the flacon for the scent ‘La Rose de Rosine,’ as with all the packaging of his fragrances, Poiret reinforces the olfactory associations with visual cues. The alternating stripes and rose motifs recall the Directoire taste and would have evoked, especially for the French, Empress Joséphine's rosarian interests and her gardens at Malmaison. In fact, the rose appears on a 1907 gown called 'Joséphine,' which was depicted by Paul Iribe in his Les robes de Paul Poiret and is now in the collection of the Musée de la Mode et du Textile, Les Arts Décoratifs, Paris. Later, the schematic, spriglike rendering of the rose was embroidered in seed beads on his ‘Sorbet’ gown.
'Mea Culpa' Fan, 1911

Poiret's marketing acumen was manifested in a number of entrepreneurial strategies. Perhaps his most important efforts in this regard related to his travels with his cabine of mannequins promoting his collections. Although he was not the first designer to embark on what amounted to trunk shows (Jeanne Paquin had done it earlier), Poiret was especially ambitious in his scheduling of trips to other countries and major capital cities. Often, he prefaced his tours with the disavowal that they were predicated on commerce. Instead, he announced that they were a component of his speaking engagements in which he, the preeminent Parisian couturier, would dispense his ideas on feminine elegance and individual style.

His establishment of the Atelier Martine of decorative arts extended his franchise into the world of interiors. The young girls and women schooled at Martine produced designs that embellished everything from plates to furniture, carpets, and textiles. His interest in l'art de vivre was manifested in a Paul Poiret wine label a half a century before Pierre Cardin's own initiatives in that direction. His private costume fêtes, which celebrated themes simultaneously or subsequently reflected in his collections, provided the opportunity for his clients to wear his most fantastic designs. Later, Poiret was to establish L'Oasis, a nightclub set up in the garden of his couture house. Less successfully, he floated three barges on the Seine to promote the different facets of his design empire. In these ways, Poiret created the paradigm of the successful fashion house of today.

This fan, one of a series, is among the more ephemeral examples of the designer's merging of artistry and merchandising. The fans promoted different fragrances. In this example, the fan endorses, with an image that Georges Lepape painted in 1911, the fragrance 'Mea Culpa,' which was introduced in the same year. In showing the tunic gown and the multipatterned pillows, Poiret conveyed the full range and imagery of his maison de couture, including fashion, fragrance, and the fashionable interior.
PARASOL, CA. 1913

The ubiquitous reach of Poiret’s designs extended to every detail of a woman’s wardrobe, save her underclothes, which, it might be argued, the designer had jettisoned from his collections. This parasol, with its Raoul Dufy print, implies the privileged life of the mondaine, who has time to stroll but who cannot afford to endanger her pallor. It was only after World War I that Coco Chanel endorsed the tan as sportif and emblematic of the very same life of leisure alluded to by the parasol before the war.

This paradigm shift is also seen in the beauty of Poiret’s parasol design. It is romantic and pictur-esque. The designer’s love of the flat, graphic patterning of woodblock prints, expressed so vividly by Dufy, emphasized the hand of the artisan. The postwar embrace of an industrial and mechanical modernity is antithetical to Poiret. The repudiation of explicit narratives, decorative strategies, and historical references by such designers as Chanel, Vionnet, Patou, and others would supersede Poiret’s increasingly démodé endorsement of the artist and of handcrafted effects. But in the years immediately preceding the war, the art of the self-schooled, such as Rousseau, or of the workmanlike, such as Dufy, was appreciated as modern in the repudiation of the hypersophistication, even decadence, of the Belle Époque.

With its long handle, the parasol’s design is a direct reference to the walking sticks and parasols carried by the Incroyables and the Merveilleuses, Directoire dandies and their female counterparts. Poiret’s Neoclassical revival was marked by a pastoral quality and innocence. With the naturalism inspired by his dismissal of the corset as the basis of his designs, his work appears to have been infused with an Arcadian optimism. It was to characterize his collections until the more lurid attractions of the Ballets Russes supplanted the classical with an opulent orientalism.
CHECKLIST AND CREDITS
**Checklist**

This checklist includes garments that are featured in the catalogue and the exhibition and are noted as such. For the most part, the pieces are listed in chronological order, and, for those in the catalogue, with their relevant page numbers.

* Not in catalogue
† Not in exhibition

'Revêrend' Coat worn by Jeanne Boivin-Poirot, 1905†
Red wool and ivory silk damask with red silk-floss embroidery
Courtesy of Galliera, Musée de la Mode de la Ville de Paris

'1811' Evening Gown worn by Denise Poirot, 1907†
Pink and purple striped silk and purple chiffon with gold lace trim
Courtesy of Musée de la Mode et du Textile [UF 64-46.1]

Pages 52–53
Dress, ca. 1910†
Brown silk satin, brown silk tulle, applied trompe l’oeil pink silk bows with floss embroidery and gilt galloon fringe
Courtesy of Mark Walsh Leslie Chin

Pages 54–57
'Homage à Rousseau' Evening Gown, ca. 1910
Black silk satin, black silk georgette, and black crêpe de chine with pearl, seed-bead, rhinestones, and silk-floss embroidery
Courtesy of The Museum of the City of New York, Gift of Mrs. Henry Clews [52.35.3]

Pages 58–61
Opera Coat, ca. 1910
Purple silk damask and pink silk crêpe with purple silk crocheted overlay
Courtesy of Beverley Birks and Doris Raymond

Pages 62–65
'Lavallière' Evening Gown worn by Denise Poirot, 1911†
Ivory silk satin and purple silk crêpe with silver-plated crystal-bead embroidery
Courtesy of Musée de la Mode et du Textile [UF 63-18-7]

Pages 66–69
Fancy-Dress Costume probably worn to "The Thousand and Second Night" party, 1911
Green silk-gauze and gold lamé with blue foil appliqué, and gold, blue, pink, coral, and turquoise celluloid-bead embroidery
Purchase, Irene Lewisohn Trust, 1983 (1983.8a, b)

Pages 69–70
'La Perse' Coat worn by Denise Poirot, 1911
Textile design by Raoul Dufy (French, 1877–1953)
Ivory and blue black block printed cotton velvet with brown rabbit-fur trim

Pages 70–71
'Rosière' Day Dress worn by Denise Poirot, 1911
White linen with pink linen trim
Catharine Breyer Van Bome Foundation Fund, 2005 (2005.188)

Pages 72–73
'Butard' Day Dress worn by Denise Poirot, 1912
White linen with coral linen trim
Milla Davenport and Zipporah Fleisher Fund, 2005 (2005.190a, b)

Pages 74–75
Evening Gown worn by Isadora Duncan, ca. 1912†
Dress of yellow silk chiffon and over tunic of ivory silk chiffon with yellow voided velvet and seed-bead embroidery
Courtesy of Museum of the City of New York; Bequest of Mary Fenton Robert [62.119.3]

Pages 76–77
Fancy-Dress Costume probably worn to "Les Festes de Bacchus" party, 1912†
Green silk bouclé faille painted with brown neophrasmonic motifs
Courtesy of Mark Walsh Leslie Chin

Pages 78–81
'Manteau d'Auto' Coat worn by Denise Poirot, 1912
Textile by Rodier (French, founded 1848)
Blue and oatmeal striped woven linen and blue silk
Isabel Shults Fund, 2005 (2005.200)

Pages 82–83
Jacket worn by Denise Poirot, 1912†
Predominantly dark red paisley-patterned wool jacquard

Pages 84–87
Evening Coat, ca. 1912†
Fuchsia silk faille with pink, purple, and silver cord embroidery, rhinestones, and gilt galloon fringe
Courtesy of Museum of the City of New York, Gift of Mrs. Henry Clews [52.35.4]

Pages 88–89
Evening Gown, ca. 1912†
Pink tulle, gold lamé, and blue satin with gold filé, seed bead, bugle bead, and chain-stitch embroidery, rabbit-fur trim, and gilt galloon fringe
Courtesy of Mark Walsh Leslie Chin

Pages 90–93
Opera Coat, 1912
Yellow satin, pale blue silk overlaid with gold filé embroidery, and black silk velvet
Purchase, Irene Lewisohn Trust Gift, 1982 (1982.350.2)

Pages 94–95
Dress worn by Denise Poirot, 1912
Blue silk damask
Purchase, Friends of The Costume Institute Gifts, 2005 (2005.386)

Pages 96–97
Dress and gilet worn by Denise Poirot, 1912
Dress of eggplant silk damask; gilet of wine silk velvet with badger-fur trim
Purchase, Friends of The Costume Institute Gifts, 2005 (2005.367a, b)

Pages 98–101
'La Rose d'Iribe' Dress worn by Denise Poirot, 1913
Purple silk printed with white rose motifs, and blue black silk velvet
Milla Davenport and Zipporah Fleisher Fund, 2005 (2005.198a, b)

Pages 102–103
'Sorbet' Evening Ensemble, 1913
Skirt of black satin; hooped tunic of cream and black satin with red, pink, green, and mauve glass-bead embroidery
Courtesy of Chicago Historical Society, Gift of Miss Anita Carolyn Blair [1958.182]
Pages 104–107
‘Théâtre des Champs-Élysées’ Evening Gown and
‘Espérance’ Headdress worn by Denise Poiret, 1913
Gown of ivory silk damask and ivory silk-tulle overskirt
with rhinestone embroidery; headdress of green and black
silk gauze with rhinestone embroidery
Paul D. Schurgot Foundation Fund, 2005 (2005.193a–e)

‘Premier Consul’ Dinner Suit worn by Denise Poiret,
1913*
Jacket of blue silk with gold filé embroidery; skirt of blue silk
Courtesy of Museo de la Moda y Textil, Santiago de Chile

Jupe-Culotte Evening Gown, 1913*
Black satin and green silk mouseline with gilt galloon
fringe
Courtesy of Galliera, Musée de la Mode de la Ville
de Paris

Evening Gown, ca. 1913*
Orange silk chiffon with gold filé and black silk-floss
embroidery
Courtesy of Chicago Historical Society, Gift of Spencer
H. Logan, Stuart Logan and Waldo H. Logan [1945.79]

Fancy-Dress Costume, 1913*
Hooped tunic of black silk gauze with gold filé embroidery;
“harem” pants of gold lamé
Courtesy of Kyoto Costume Institute [AC9330 96–15]

Fancy-Dress Costume, 1914*
Tunic of gold lamé and purple silk satin with faux pearl
embroidery and black fur; hat of gold lamé with faux pearl
embroidery and cigarette plume
Courtesy of Kyoto Costume Institute [AC9330 96–15]

Pages 108–109
‘Feuille d’Automne’ Day Ensemble worn by Denise Poiret,
1916
Blouse of orange silk crêpe with ivory silk crêpe collar; skirt
of printed silk; stole of sable fur
Catharine Breyer Van Bomel Foundation Fund, 2005
(2005.204a–c)

Pages 110–111
Day Coat worn by Denise Poiret, 1918
Textile by Rodier (French, founded 1848)
Ivory and brown striped wool jacquard
Isabel Shults Fund, 2005 (2005.201)

Pages 112–113
Day Coat, 1921
Textile by Rodier (French, founded 1848)
Black silk satin and ivory and brown striped wool
jacquard
Courtesay of Museum of the City of New York, Gift of
Mrs. Henry Clews [56.234.3]

Pages 114–117
‘Pré Catelan’ Evening Coat worn by Denise Poiret, 1918
Black silk and gold striped lamé
Milla Davenport and Zipporah Fleisher Fund, 2005
(2005.205)

Pages 118–121
‘Paris’ Evening Coat worn by Denise Poiret, 1919
Brown silk velvet with placket of red and blue wool and
couched silver gilt cording
Purchase, Friends of The Costume Institute Gifts, 2005
(2005.207)

Pages 122–125
‘Bois de Boulogne’ Dinner Dress worn by Denise
Poiret, 1919
Textile design by Raoul Dufy (French, 1877–1953)
Textile manufacture by Bianchini-Férier (French,
founded 1880)
Printed polychrome silk, black silk tulle, and black
silk broadcloth
Milla Davenport and Zipporah Fleisher Fund, 2005
(2005.197a–c)

Pages 126–129
Coat, ca. 1919
Black wool faille with white kid cutwork appliqué and
white shearing trim
Gift of Mrs. David J. Colton, 1961 (C.1.61.40.4)

Pages 130–131
Promenade Ensemble, ca. 1919
Coat of black and white wool check with black wool
inserts; dress of back and white wool with black wool cuffs
and underskirt
Courtesy of Museum of the City of New York, Gift of
Mrs. Henry Clews [56.234.2A–C]

Evening Dress, ca. 1920*
Silver lamé with overskirt of silk tulle with silver filé
embroidery
Courtesy of Kyoto Costume Institute [Inv. AC1090
78-32-1AB]

Pages 132–135
Coat, 1923
Ivory and brown wool twill with brown rose motifs
Gift of Mrs. David J. Colton, 1964 (C.1.64.7.2)

Pages 136–139
Day Dress worn by Denise Poiret, 1921
Purple silk voided velvet with fox-fur trim
Courtesy of Francesca Galloway Ltd.

Pages 140–141
Day Dress, ca. 1921
Purple silk-wool blend knit with gold filé chain-stitch
embroidery
Courtesy of Mark Walsh Leslie Chin

Pages 142–145
Dress, 1922
Black silk and red silk brocade with gold filé
Gift of Leone B. Moats, in memory of Mrs. Wallace
Payne Moats, 1979 (1979.428)

Pages 146–147
Ensemble, ca. 1922
Blouse of orange silk with black satin and gold lamé trim;
jumper of gold lamé with orange silk and black silk-satin
trim and applied cotton rosettes
Gift of Miriam K. W. Coletti, 1995 (1995.588.3a, b)

Pages 148–149
‘Trudée’ Evening Gown, 1922
Gold lamé
Courtesy of Mark Walsh Leslie Chin

Pages 150–153
Coat, ca. 1922
Ivory wool with blue silk satin and gold leather appliqué,
gold filé embroidery, and ivory fur trim
Courtesy of Mark Walsh Leslie Chin
Pages 154–155  
Evening Gown, ca. 1922–23  
Navy and red blockprinted silk faille  
Gift of Mrs. Muriel Draper, 1943 (C.I.43.85.2a, b)

'Fil de Ciel' Day Dress, 1923*  
Red silk velvet, black silk satin, and gold filé embroidery  
Courtesy of Musée de la Mode et du Textile  
[UF 60-17-1]

Pages 156–157  
'Mademoiselle' Day Dress worn by Denise Poiret, 1923†  
Black wool crêpe, red wool broadcloth, and red, blue, green, and white striped wool twill  

Pages 158–161  
Evening Gown, ca. 1923  
Pink silk satin with applied lozenge of blue rhinestones and coiled metallic-thread embroidery  
Courtesy of Museum of the City of New York; Gift of Mrs. Henry Clews [55.115.3]

Evening Dress, ca. 1923*  
Red brown silk damask with silver filé brocade and silver lamé  
Courtesy of Los Angeles County Museum of Art; Gift of Mrs. Helen Crocker Russell [54.129.2]

Pages 162–165  
'Persane' Evening Gown worn by Denise Poiret, 1923  
Green silk satin with silver filé brocade, silver lamé, and silver braid embroidery  
Courtesy of Francesca Galloway Ltd.

Pages 166–167  
Evening Dress, 1924†  
Ivory silk satin and ivory silk chiffon with gold filé and mirror embroidery  
Gift of Mrs. Robert L. Dodge, 1951 (C.I.51.48.3)

Pages 168–171  
'Bataille' Evening Dress, 1925  
Gold lamé and gold and black lace with black and silver paillette embroidery  
Courtesy of Sandy Schreier

Evening Dress, 1925*  
Black lace with black and silver paillette embroidery  
Gift of Mrs. Georges Gudefin, in memory of Mrs. Clarence Herter, 1965 (C.I.65.47.2a, b)

Pages 172–175  
Evening Dress, 1925  
Green silk chiffon and gold filé brocade  
Gift of Mrs. Robert A. Lovett, 1951 (C.I.51.70.19a–c)

Pages 176–179  
'Bochier' Day Dress, 1925  
Navy blue wool, red wool, and ivory cotton, with applied red ribbon and printed trompe lœil placket with button motif  
Gift of Mrs. Alfred Rheinstein, 1950 (C.I.50.117)

Pages 180–183  
Evening Dress, ca. 1925  
Gold lamé and gold lace with faux pearl and gold bugle-bead embroidery and gold corded appliqué  
Gift of Mrs. Robert L. Dodge, 1951 (C.I.51.48.4a, b)

Pages 184–187  
Evening Dress, ca. 1925†  
Polychrome silk and gold brocade, gold lamé, pink glass-bead and polychrome silk-floss embroidery  
Gift of Mrs. Kenneth Maconi, 1951 (C.I.51.47)

Pages 188–191  
'Steppe' Jacket worn by Denise Poiret, 1912  
Black wool with blue, gray, and white silk-floss embroidery and fox-fur trim  

Pages 192–195  
Evening Dress, 1928†  
Beige wool faille, beige silk satin with pendant of rhinestone, pink and black glass seed, and coiled silver thread embroidery  
Gift of Mary C. Hartshorne, 1989 (1989.165.2)

Pages 196–197  
Nightdress worn by Denise Poiret, ca. 1920  
Pink cotton gauze  

Nightdress worn by Denise Poiret, ca. 1920*  
Pink cotton  

Pages 198–201  
Nightdress Ensemble worn by Denise Poiret, ca. 1920  
Orange silk crêpe  
Catharine Breyer Van Bomen Foundation Fund, 2005 (2005.194a–c)

Pages 202–203  
'Florint' Headdress worn by Denise Poiret, ca. 1920  
Black silk with gold metal trim and dyed, striped, and clipped ostrich feathers  
Purchase, Gerson and Judith Leiber Foundation Gift, 2005 (2005.191)

Pages 204–205  
'Le Bal' Shoes worn by Denise Poiret, 1924  
Made by André Perugia (French, 1893–1977)  
Leather with polychrome seed-bead embroidery  
Purchase, Friends of The Costume Institute Gifts, 2005 (2005.192a, b)

Pages 206–207  
'La Rose de Rosine' Flacon, 1912  
Glass painted with gold stripes and rose motifs  
Courtesy of the Collection of Christie Mayer Lefkowitz

Pages 208–209  
'Mea Culpa' Fan, 1911  
Painted by Georges Lepape (French, 1887–1971), 1911  
Wood and paper  
Courtesy of Sandy Schreier

Pages 210–211  
Parasol, ca. 1913  
Textile design by Raoul Dufy (French, 1877–1953)  
Wood, metal, and silk  
Courtesy of Sandy Schreier
Photograph Credits

Frontispiece
Stiftung Bauhaus Dessau, © 2007 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn
Photo: Kelly Kellerhoff, Uwe Jacobshagen

Page 6
Musée de Grenoble, France
Photograph courtesy of The Bridgeman Art Library,
© 2007 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris

Page 8
Private Collection, © 2007 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris

Page 12
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Irene Lewisohn Costume Reference Library, Special Collections
© 2007 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris

Page 13 (Top)
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Irene Lewisohn Costume Reference Library, Special Collections

Page 13 (Bottom)
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Irene Lewisohn Costume Reference Library, Special Collections

Page 14 (Top)
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Irene Lewisohn Costume Reference Library, Special Collections

Page 14 (Bottom)
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Irene Lewisohn Costume Reference Library, Special Collections

Page 15
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Irene Lewisohn Costume Reference Library, Special Collections
© 2007 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris

Page 16
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Irene Lewisohn Costume Reference Library, Special Collections
© 2007 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris

Page 17 (Top)
Private Collection
Photograph courtesy of Erich Lessing/Art Resource, NY

Page 17 (Bottom)
Collection of Nikita and Nina Lobanov-Rostovsky

Page 18 (Top)
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Irene Lewisohn Costume Reference Library, Special Collections
© 2007 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris

Page 18 (Bottom)
Private collection. All rights reserved
© 2007 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris

Page 19 (Top)
Photograph courtesy of David Coxall, Paris

Page 19 (Bottom)
Photograph courtesy of Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris. All rights reserved
© 2007 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris

Page 20
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Irene Lewisohn Costume Reference Library, Special Collections
© 2007 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris

Page 21 (Top)
Photograph courtesy of Les Arts Décoratifs, Fonds photographique patrimonial UFAC conservé au Musée de la Mode et du Textile, Paris. All rights reserved
© 2007 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris

Page 21 (Bottom)
© 2007 Man Ray Trust/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris
© 2007 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris

Page 22 (Top)
Photograph courtesy of Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris. All rights reserved
© 2007 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris

Page 22 (Bottom)
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Irene Lewisohn Costume Reference Library, Special Collections
© 2007 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris

Page 23 (Top)
Courtesy of Amy Fine Collins
© 2007 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris

Page 23 (Bottom)
Courtesy of Amy Fine Collins
© 2007 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris

Page 24 (Top)
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Irene Lewisohn Costume Reference Library, Special Collections
© 2007 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris

Page 24 (Bottom)
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Irene Lewisohn Costume Reference Library, Special Collections
© 2007 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris

Page 25
© Musée de la Mode et du Costume, Palais Galliera, Paris

Page 26
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Irene Lewisohn Costume Reference Library, Special Collections
© 2007 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris

Page 27 (Top)
Photograph courtesy of Les Arts Décoratifs, Fonds photographique patrimonial UFAC conservé au Musée de la Mode et du Textile, Paris. All rights reserved
© 2007 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris

Page 27 (Bottom)
Photograph courtesy of Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris. All rights reserved
© 2007 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris

Page 28 (Top)
Photograph courtesy of Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris. All rights reserved
© 2007 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris

Page 28 (Bottom)
Photograph courtesy of Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris. All rights reserved
© 2007 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris

Page 29
Photograph courtesy of Snark/Art Resource, NY, © 2007 Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY/ADAGP, Paris
Select Bibliography


Note
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We are grateful to the many people who provided generous support for the exhibition "Poiré: King of Fashion" and this associated publication. In particular we are fortunate to have had the advice and encouragement of Philippe de Montebello, Director of The Metropolitan Museum of Art; Emily K. Rafferty, President of The Metropolitan Museum of Art; Nina McN. Diefenbach, Vice President for Development and Membership; Anna Wintour, Editor-in-Chief of American Vogue, and Balenciaga, who generously underwrote the exhibition and the publication. We also thank Condé Nast for providing additional financial support for both projects.

Our sincerest appreciation goes to Jean-Hughes de Chatillon, creative consultant, and Dan Kershaw of the Design Department, for staging the remarkable vignettes in the exhibition. Special thanks also go to Emil Micha of the Design Department.

The Editorial Department of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, under the guidance of John P. O’Neill, Editor in Chief, provided the expertise to make this book a reality. Special thanks go to Joan Holt for her astute editing skills, and to Margaret Chace, Mary Jo Mace, Gwen Roginsky, and Paula Torres. Thanks also go to Karin L. Willis of the Photograph Studio, who was responsible for the stunning photographs in this publication. Takaaki Matsumoto, assisted by Hisami Aoki, Keith Price, and Amy Wilkins, carried out the book’s design with typical finesse, and are to be applauded for their creative vision.

Our colleagues in The Costume Institute have been invaluable in every aspect. We extend our deepest gratitude to Elizabeth Bryan, Elyssa Da Cruz, Michael Downer, Joyce Fung, Jessica Glasscock, Charles Hansen, Amanda Haskins, Stéphane Houy-Towner, Julie Tran Le, Philis Kreitzman, Rebecca Matheson, Bethany Matia, Marci Morimoto, Tatyana Pakhladzhyan, Christine Paulick, Shannon Price, Jessica Regan, Lita Semerad, Kristen Stewart, and Yer Vang.


For the ongoing support of The Friends of The Costume Institute and The Visiting Committee of The Costume Institute, we are especially grateful.


We are extremely grateful to the lenders to the exhibition not only for their loans but also for allowing us to reproduce their costumes in this catalogue. Our thanks go to Stephen Addiss and
Audrey Seo, Karen Augusta, Beverley Birks and Doris Raymond, Antoine Broccardo, Chicago History Museum (Timothy Long), Amy Fine Collins, De Vos Galery, Anthony De Lorenzo, Diktats (Antoine Bucher and Nicolas Montagne), Barry Friedman, Francesca Galloway (Sue Kerry), Kyoto Costume Institute (Akiko Fukai, Rie Nii, Makoto Ishezuki), Karl Lagerfeld, Ed and Christie Lefkowith, Los Angeles County Museum of Art (Sharon Takeda, Melinda Kerstein), Alan Moss, Musée de la Mode et du Costume, Palais Galliera (Sophie Grossiord, Alexandra Bosc, Sylvie Lécallier), Musée de la Mode et du Textile, Les Arts Décoratifs (Beatrice Salmon, Rachel Brishoual, Pamela Golbin, Caroline Pinon, Marie-Hélène Poix), Museo de la Moda y Textil, Santiago, Chile (Jorge Yurur Bascuñán, Nathalie Hatala), Museum of the City of New York (Phyllis Magidson, Sloane Whidden), Sandy Schreier, Mark Walsh and Leslie Chin, Vallois Friedman, and Mr. and Mrs. William D. Zabel.

Special thanks to Françoise Auguet, Hamish Bowles, Mary E. Davis, Joanne Dolan Ingersoll, Caroline Evans, Jared Goss, Heather Hess, Kate Irvin, Martin Kamer, Titi Halle, Bernice Kwok-Gabel, Didier Ludot, Mitchell Owens, Caroline Rennolds Milbank, Sophie Rang des Adrets, Caroline Poiret de Roujou, Madelyn Shaw, Kenneth E. Silver, Geraldine Sommier, Nancy J. Troy, David Vincent, and Sarah Wolfe.