

John Singer Sargent Painting Fashion

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In February 1924 the recently opened Grand Central Art Galleries in New York hosted a retrospective exhibition of paintings by John Singer Sargent. It was a huge popular success, with 60,000 visitors attending over 44 days. It would be the last before the artist's unexpected death a year later, and although Sargent did not attend the opening, he was involved in selecting which of his works would be included. Among the thirty-eight portraits in the exhibition were three that subsequently entered the collection of The Metropolitan Museum of Art—*Ada Rehan, Lady with the Rose (Charlotte Louise Burckhardt)*, and *Mr. and Mrs. I. N. Phelps Stokes*.

In a review of the exhibition in the *American Magazine of Art*, the magazine's founder and editor, Leila Mechlin, wrote, "Sargent is not one who has disregarded tradition;

fig. 1 John Singer Sargent (American, 1856–1925). *Ada Rehan*, 1894–95. Oil on canvas, 93 × 50½ in. (236.2 × 127.3 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Bequest of Catharine Lasell Whitin, in memory of Ada Rehan, 1940 (40.146)



to the contrary, he has built upon it. He is all familiar with the masters of the past and their ways, but he speaks his own language, the language of his time and ours.”¹ The quotation neatly encapsulates Sargent’s approach to portraiture. He was artistically curious throughout his life, taking in influences from different epochs and geographies, and internalizing them, in the end producing works in which we see echoes of others but which remain distinctively Sargent. The artist’s admiration for Velázquez and Frans Hals has been extensively documented—both developed from his earliest days in the studio of Carolus-Duran (Charles-Auguste-Emile Durant) in Paris and during subsequent visits to Madrid and Haarlem, where he copied works of these old masters, pictures that remained in his studio throughout his life.

Richard Ormond and Elaine Kilmurray have highlighted how the poses and formats of Sargent’s portraiture fit within a British tradition encompassing Hans Holbein, Anthony Van Dyck, Joshua Reynolds, and Thomas Gainsborough. They write, however, “Sargent was not concerned so much with imitating the old masters as with allowing their spirit and atmosphere to breathe in his work. His version of the grand manner portrait is an economical and allusive one.”² The present article aims to demonstrate how this approach, and Mechlin’s description—“the language of his time and ours”—can also be applied to Sargent’s attitude toward painting fashion. It will demonstrate how Sargent was involved in selecting the clothing worn by his sitters and subsequently modifying the representation of actual fashionable dress to suit his preferred aesthetic in paint. At this date many of the great couturiers drew on historical precedents in their designs for elite female dress and Sargent was adept at interpreting and combining these elements of the past to produce something modern, yet eternal.

The article focuses on Sargent’s portraits of female sitters, due to the greater variation in fashion for women during the period—a result of what has been termed the “great masculine renunciation” by John Carl Flügel, who stated that from the end of the eighteenth century man “abandoned his claim to be considered beautiful. He henceforth aimed at being only useful.”³ More than 60% of Sargent’s male sitters wear a conventional dark suit jacket and white shirt, with the majority of the rest portrayed in official dress (academic or religious robes) or military uniforms. These types of normative attire conformed to the standard formula for representing so-called heroic masculinity and alluded to professional or societal prominence through the

inclusion of medals or other overt symbols of achievement.⁴ Distinction in dress for men at this date lay in what Théophile Gautier described as “the fineness of the cloth, the perfection of the cut, the finish of the production, and above all that the person wears it well.”⁵ Such intangible subtleties are particularly difficult for the modern eye to discern in their painted form.

The focus on female portraits means that the approach necessarily overlooks instances of unconventional dress worn by several of Sargent’s most striking male sitters. The dramatic crimson dressing gown and matching embroidered slippers of the French gynecologist Dr. Samuel Jean Pozzi (1881; Hammer Museum, Los Angeles) is an absolute rejection of the accepted attire for a cosmopolitan, professional man of Paris in the 1880s.⁶ The velvet-collared Chesterfield overcoat and jade-topped cane adopted by the theater designer and illustrator W. Graham Robertson (1894; Tate) represent the triumph of aesthetic dandyism over monumental practicality, given that the portrait was painted during the heat of summer and Sargent insisted on the coat being dragged ever more tightly about the figure “until it might have been draping a lamp-post.”⁷ There are complexities to the interpretation of the dress worn by some of Sargent’s male sitters, particularly those painted earlier in his career, and value to such analyses.

The degree to which painted representations of clothing in portraits diverge from the actual ones worn by sitters is a fundamental concern for dress historians, who use extant garments, visual sources (such as paintings, drawings, and tapestries), and documentary accounts to help answer this key question. Such triangulations reveal that while some artists painted an outfit with meticulous exactitude, others simplified their sitter’s dress to a degree. From the mid-seventeenth century onward a form of classicizing drapery was popular, which served to make a sitter look wealthier and to demonstrate their higher social status because such attire would have been considered inappropriate for the bourgeoisie, who could not appear more informally dressed than their social superiors. In some cases the artist may have been working entirely from his or her imagination, producing a garment in paint that the sitter never actually wore or that consisted of lengths of fabric draped around the figure. Painting clothing with less detail was also quicker, and would have suited an artist working to a short time scale.

One explanation for artists choosing to paint clothing in a simplified manner concerns the notion of timelessness, the attempt to create an appealing image that will outlast the vagaries of taste cycles. By the end of the

seventeenth century dress in portraiture had become so divorced from contemporary fashions that in 1711 the social commentator Joseph Addison summarized, “Great masters in painting never care for drawing people in the fashion: as very well knowing that the head-dress, or periwig, that now prevails, and gives a grace to their portraits at present, will make a very odd figure, and perhaps look monstrous in the eyes of posterity.”⁸ Joshua Reynolds famously recommended in his seventh Discourse of 1776 that an artist “will not paint [a sitter] in the modern dress, the familiarity of which alone is sufficient to destroy all dignity” but instead “dresses his figure something with the general air of the antique for the sake of dignity, and preserves something of the modern for the sake of likeness.”⁹

In practice for Reynolds and his contemporaries who followed his advice, this usually involved a form of classicizing drapery paired with the fashionably voluminous hair and bold cosmetics of the late eighteenth century. In *The Painter of Modern Life* (1863) Charles Baudelaire viewed this approach as an abdication of an artist’s responsibility. Instead he should transmit the “mysterious beauty” to be found in the dress of his own day. His aim should be “to extract from fashion the poetry that resides in its historical envelope, to distil the eternal from the transitory.”¹⁰ Théophile Gautier too, in *De la mode* (1858), recommends that portraits represent their subjects in modern clothing—he particularly favored a décolleté evening gown for women: “a painter who depicted this clothing in the historical manner, applying his own individual style but without ceasing to be exact, would achieve astonishing effects of beauty, elegance, and color.”¹¹ Aileen Ribeiro has discussed this artistic dilemma in much detail and neatly summarizes: “Great artists, especially those who painted women’s portraits, knew that the secret was to incorporate aspects of the historical when these were in tune with the current fashionable aesthetic, but not to overdo the detail.”¹² When successful, the result is “the magical synthesis of art and fashion that makes for a great painting as well as a great portrait.”¹³

Entering the Parisian studio of Carolus-Duran in 1874 at the age of eighteen, Sargent surely would have been aware of the topical artistic debate about the role of contemporary fashion in portraiture. His master stressed the importance of retaining only the essential elements in a composition. Carolus-Duran’s own style had shifted from Courbet-inspired realism in the 1860s to a richer, more commercially successful form of society portraiture by the early 1870s, heavily influenced by his admiration for Velázquez, which earned him a

celebrity position within the established Parisian art world. His breakthrough painting was *The Lady with the Glove* at the Salon of 1869 (Musée d’Orsay, Paris). While the identity of the sitter was well known (the artist’s wife, Pauline Croizette) in the title she is defined by an accessory, the single glove’s pearly gray color a singular note of contrast to her somber black promenade dress—worn in the newly fashionable style without a crinoline petticoat beneath.¹⁴ Carolus-Duran’s studio provided an avant-garde alternative to the government-sponsored ateliers of Jean-Leon Gérôme and Alexandre Cabanel. Sargent had been disappointed by Gérôme’s paintings, finding them “so smoothly painted with such softened edges, and such a downy appearance as to look as if they were printed on ivory or china,”¹⁵ an early expression of distaste for the traditional Salon-sanctioned, polished school of Parisian painting. Carolus-Duran’s portraits were applauded for “his power of detaching the sitter from superfluous accessories and *décor*,” according to Sargent’s earliest biographer, Evan Charteris.¹⁶ This tenet seems to have been a guiding principle for Sargent’s art throughout his life, and one that he also applied when painting fashionable clothing.

In his 1937 book, *Taste and Fashion*, the dress historian James Laver outlined his theory of the stages of fashion, which proposed that clothing styles of a certain era are perceived very differently depending on how much time has passed since they were in vogue.¹⁷ So an outfit will go through stages, initially considered daring, then smart, hideous, amusing, charming, and eventually beautiful. Known as “Laver’s Law,” this principle has held up surprisingly well (with some caveats, including a compression of his suggested time intervals for the postmodern world) and has been applied to a variety of creative media including design, architecture, and music.

The clothes worn by fashionable New York women visiting the Grand Central Art Galleries exhibition in 1924 could hardly have been more different from those depicted in the portraits they were there to see. Dresses were far simpler with low waistlines, raised hemlines, and a loose construction that gave little indication of the female form beneath. In the introduction to its “Fashion Book,” the *Pictorial Review* of spring 1924 wrote, “The straight youthful silhouette, so essentially becoming to all figures, leads in these latest modes.”¹⁸ This was a radical departure from the structured, complicated, and constrictive Belle Epoque styles that emphasized an hourglass physique, exaggerated by the S-line corset and epitomized by the Gibson Girl type.

LAVER'S LAW	
Indecent	10 years before its time
Shameless	5 years before its time
Outré	1 year before its time
Smart	Current fashion
Dowdy	1 year after its time
Hideous	10 years after its time
Ridiculous	20 years after its time
Amusing	30 years after its time
Quaint	50 years after its time
Charming	70 years after its time
Romantic	100 years after its time
Beautiful	150 years after its time

Source: Laver 1937, p. 202

Laver's Law would suggest that to fashionable New York women of the 1920s visiting the exhibition, the clothes depicted in Sargent's female portraits of the 1880s, 1890s, and early 1900s might have been interpreted as ridiculous, or at the very least amusing. Yet the critical response demonstrates that this was not the case. An unusually large double-page feature published in *Vogue* a month after the exhibition closed included six portraits, with an editorial stating, "John Singer Sargent has demonstrated in these arresting portraits painted over a generation ago that a truly beautiful gown, no matter to what period it belongs, is a thing of charm when worn by a lovely woman. With the touch of genius, he has given to the portrayal of the gowns, as well as to that of their stately wearers, a dignity that will last as long as the pictures themselves."¹⁹ The commentary is an unusually prescient recognition of the longevity of fashion in Sargent's portraits. The use of the term "beautiful" by a critic presumably sensitive to the subtle fluctuations in fashion indicates that the dresses had achieved this status 120 years before Laver's Law would have predicted. One question to consider is whether Laver's Law is applied differently for fashions worn by people seen in everyday life than for those depicted in paintings and other fixed media. The fact that the longevity of the clothing portrayed was specifically remarked upon by this critic, however, suggests they were familiar with examples that already appeared dated.

Another long-form article on the exhibition that makes repeated reference to the clothing of Sargent's sitters appeared in *Art and Archeology* in September 1924. In a section contrasting three portraits of women wearing white gowns, Sargent's full-length portrait of the actress Ada Rehan (fig. 1) is discussed in depth by

the critic Rose Berry. Born in Ireland, Rehan was especially known for her comedic roles—after moving to Brooklyn as a child she later found success in both New York and Europe. Sargent's portrait of her was painted in his Tite Street studio in spring 1894 while she was in London performing as Viola in *Twelfth Night*. Berry writes, "Ada Rehan with the understanding of the actress has dressed her part; the gown she wears will be as fashionable two centuries from now as it was the day she wore it."²⁰ Like the critic for *Vogue*, Berry saw nothing ridiculous or amusing about Rehan's clothing. The critical reception of Sargent's portraits at the Grand Central Art Galleries signifies that the clothing of the sitters had stood the test of time, and indeed this is how they often appear to viewers today. Whether the effect was the result of a conscious attempt to achieve timelessness or was a coincidental by-product of a series of personal aesthetic preferences is debatable, as there are no records of Sargent's opinions on the subject.

While the designer of Rehan's gown was not documented, the abundant volume of luxurious silk satin fabric suggests it was made by one of the great French design houses of the 1890s—at this date it was common for wealthy women from across Europe, the United States, and Russia to travel to Paris for their clothes. One possibility here is maison Félix, run by the Poussineau brothers, who counted many well-known actresses among their clientele and who had designed the costume for Rehan in her role as Lady Teazle in *School for Scandal*.²¹ In her portrait by Sargent, however, Rehan is not wearing stage costume—which was more exaggeratedly decorative—but an evening gown, comparable to one by maison Félix of about 1895 (fig. 2).

In the Rehan portrait, Sargent seems to be drawing on Van Dyck's English portraits of the 1630s, such as *Lady Frances Cranfield* (fig. 3). Rehan's dress bears a marked similarity to this one worn 250 years earlier, and the poses of the two women are almost identical. In each the oyster white silk satin of the dress stands out brightly against the muted brown background (tapestry for Rehan, wilderness for Lady Frances), the skirt carefully arranged to create a strong diagonal, contrasting with the undulating curve as it meets the ground. Emilie Gordenker has discussed the way in which Van Dyck modified the appearance of dress through a carefully considered process of selection, omission, and addition.²² The same techniques are adopted by Sargent and the result—whether intentional or not—contributes to a sense of timelessness, removed from the specificity of one particular year. Accessories such as lace collars (heirloom lace was particularly popular about 1900) are

fig. 2 Maison Félix (French firm, ca. 1841–1901). Evening ensemble, 1895. Private collection



fig. 3 Anthony Van Dyck (Flemish, 1599–1641). *Lady Frances Cranfield, Lady Buckhurst, later Countess of Dorset*, ca. 1637. Oil on canvas, 75 $\frac{3}{8}$ × 52 $\frac{1}{8}$ in. (192.1 × 132.4 cm). Knole, Kent, The Sackville Collection, Accepted in lieu, 1992 (NT 129918)



removed, and softly fluttering scarves added instead, often arranged asymmetrically across the body. Construction features like waist seams and pleats are simplified or omitted entirely, and patterned fabrics are exchanged for plain, shimmering silks. Whereas many garments from the 1880s and 1890s were deliberately designed to show off dramatically patterned fabrics, Sargent rarely painted women in these garments.²³ Of his 290 single figure oil portraits depicting women, only eight clearly represent multicolored patterned silks.²⁴ Instead he portrays women dressed in fabric of a single color, sometimes decorated with trimmings but often left unadorned. Ribeiro has pointed out that a tendency to represent plain silks was a well-established preference for many artists (including Ingres, another artist whom Sargent admired) and notes that detailed depictions of figured materials can take over a portrait, creating a sense of imbalance.²⁵ Such fabrics also tend to date more quickly than plain ones.

The challenge for artists to achieve a sense of timelessness, while also invoking enough of the mood of the era and individuality of the sitter to avoid monotony or uniformity, was compounded in the seventeenth century by the hiring of drapery painters and the repetition of standard poses to meet demand in a busy studio such as Van Dyck's. By the late nineteenth century, however, drapery painters were rarely used, and Sargent never employed anyone to assist him with the painting process. Although he occasionally reused a pose, in general he appears to have approached the first portrait sitting with a fresh eye, as multiple surviving preliminary sketches for the same portrait indicate. While Sargent never reused a dress from one sitter to another in a commissioned portrait, he occasionally included the same accessory. Rehan's ostrich-feather fan was borrowed from Marion Greatorex (Mrs. Graham Moore Robertson), who was being painted about the same time in Sargent's studio, and appears again in a

fig. 4 John Singer Sargent. *In a Garden, Corfu*, 1909. Oil on canvas, 36 × 28 in. (91.4 × 71.1 cm). Private collection

portrait of Constance Wynne-Roberts (Mrs. Ernest Hills) on the sofa beside her.²⁶ In each portrait it is positioned differently.

Sargent did not like speaking in public, never wrote about his working methods, and did not teach students. Most of his private papers appear to have been destroyed. Therefore, in order to understand his attitudes to fashion we must look at the paintings themselves, and at the pieces of information that can be gleaned from letters kept by others. One comment from Sargent to Maud Lucia Heron-Maxwell (Mrs. Cazalet) in 1900, during discussions about what she should wear for her portrait, is illuminating: “I beg that it may not be the Ellis Roberts sort of thing, of limp muslin with a fichu and sash. I should much prefer white silk with rather an ample skirt and some opportunity for folds and arrangements. The other thing has no character and should be avoided.”²⁷ Rehan’s dress of stiff silk satin evidently allowed him his preferred “folds and arrangements.” During sittings for Sargent’s portrait of George Peabody in 1890, a servant would keep tidying “fine big folds” in the sitter’s coat, much to Sargent’s frustration.²⁸

Sargent’s fatigue with portraiture (which he abandoned about 1907) and for female sitters in particular may partly have been caused by repeated requests to represent the excesses of Belle Epoque fashions over an extended number of years. However, it is also possible that the change in fashion during the early years of the



twentieth century, whereby more structured fabrics were gradually replaced by lighter, diaphanous silks and cottons, often abundantly decorated with lace and busy trimmings, may have contributed to his increasing distaste. The large number of his sitters painted in the years either side of 1905 wearing dresses that he might have characterized as “limp muslin” in the style of Ellis Roberts attests to the fact that his underlying preference for stiff silks and sharp folds was being overruled by the tyrannous march of fashion.²⁹ Periodicals of this date are flooded with images of flounced dresses, often accessorized with what was described as a “grand fichu Marie-Antoinette.” Sometimes when Sargent is tasked with representing this type of dress—for example in his portrait of Maud Coats of 1906 (private collection) his bravura brushstrokes are successful in adding movement and variation in tone to the delicate white fabric.³⁰ The inclusion of a bright orange sash echoes the touches of coral in her lips and the flesh tones in her ears, fingers, and cheeks and breaks up the expanse of white fabric.

The paintings Sargent made for his own enjoyment in the years after giving up formal portraiture further indicate this preference for stiff plain silks. *In a Garden, Corfu* of 1909 (fig. 4) depicts Sargent’s friend Jane de Glehn posed against a wall in the garden of the Villa Soteriotisa, reading during one of their holidays together. According to Eliza Wedgwood, another friend who was also present, the skirt—of “robin’s egg taffeta”—belonged to Sargent, who had brought it with him from London specifically for his sitters to wear.³¹ We get a sense of how much pleasure he takes in depicting the light falling on the dress, resulting in a shimmering range of yellow, blue, and green brushstrokes representing sharply angular folds. The same skirt appears in many other oils and watercolors by Sargent from about this date and its voluminous proportions and stiff creases are completely at odds with dress of the time, which had moved toward a more columnar line for women, soon to become the hobble skirt. De Glehn is not wearing fashionable dress—it is Sargent’s view of what makes painterly dress. Similarly, a cream-colored cashmere shawl with blue pinecone or “botch” design along its borders recurs frequently in Sargent’s later formal portraiture and informal watercolors of the early 1900s. The popularity of this type of shawl had peaked in the early to mid-nineteenth century, long before Sargent painted it. Nevertheless, it evidently suited Sargent’s preferred aesthetic and the artist appears to have owned at least two similar shawls, one of which is now at Houghton Hall in Norfolk. Izme Vickers

describes how she was often pricked by the pins he used to secure it around her body during sittings for her portrait in 1907.³²

In general little documentary evidence exists to reveal whether the clothing worn in a portrait was the decision of the artist, sitter, or patron. However, numerous surviving accounts reveal how the process worked for Sargent. When making arrangements to paint Jane Norton Morgan (Mrs. John Pierpont Morgan) in 1905, Sargent wrote, “The question to be settled is the one of the dress and that can best be determined in the light of the studio. So that the usual thing is at a first sitting to bring a box with different dresses and actually put one or two on—if Mrs Morgan would not mind that trouble we would be much more certain of making the right choice, than if I saw the dresses in another light.”³³ Ultimately he selected a pale pink silk satin Worth gown, trimmed with net and decorated with applied glass beads, pearls, and rhinestones, that still survives.³⁴ Elizabeth Ebsworth (Mrs. George Swinton) was told, “The more dresses to choose from the better.”³⁵ Edith Minturn Phelps Stokes modeled several dresses for the artist “like a mannikin” for her 1897 portrait with her husband.³⁶ At this early stage in the process Sargent did not specify what type of dresses they should bring—simply that there should be lots of them.

Sargent clearly held strong opinions and considered it his right to have complete authority over the final choice of dress, however inconvenient. In 1907, Lady Speyer (Leonora von Stosch) “had come the first morning with a large selection of her costliest gowns, all of which he found unsuitable, though he kept her popping into the dressing room off the studio with her maid, trying on one after the other. Eventually the maid was sent back to Grosvenor Square for more outfits.”³⁷ In the end he selected a white underslip designed to be worn beneath a gold brocaded tea-gown, discarding the expensive outer garment. Sargent happily rejected the newest, most fashionable designer gowns in favor of one more to his taste. For a portrait of Mrs. Widener (Ella Holmes Pancoast) of 1903 (private collection) he passed over “every recent Paris model,” choosing instead a dress of “Nattier blue velvet, old and torn” that had been retained to be made into sofa cushions. Sargent proceeded to rip off the trimmings.³⁸ A maid was brought in to pin and sew it back together.³⁹

One comment is particularly insightful. Discussing the dress to be worn by Rehan, Sargent wrote to the patron, Catharine Lasell Whitin, saying that the actress was coming to visit his studio “with several dresses to choose from, and there in the proper light, I will be able

to come to a conclusion about the proper treatment of the picture.”⁴⁰ While he was able to establish the full-length format of the picture up front and the fact that Ada was to be painted as herself rather than in character, it seems that the “treatment of the picture” (presumably pose, but also possibly background, setting, and props) could not be determined until he had made a decision on the dress.

Belle Epoque fashion for elite women was opulent and extravagant. Photographs, illustrations, and surviving garments indicate that less was rarely more, utilizing lavish materials, ornate embroidery, and abundant trimmings, particularly lace. The female silhouette also reached extreme proportions during the period, with the silhouette taking the form of the bustle (1880s), then gigot, or “leg of mutton,” sleeves (1890s), then the S-curve corset of the 1900s. Determining how much of the spirit of contemporary dress to incorporate may have been especially difficult in the year that Sargent was painting Rehan, 1894, when gigot sleeves for women were reaching their largest circumference, creating a silhouette that had the potential to overpower the wearer. Even allowing for a sense of exaggeration that is typical of fashion plates, it is clear that such clothing would have presented a challenge to an artist with an eye to posterity. Given his role in the process of choosing clothes, Sargent appears to have deliberately selected dresses that avoided the most excessive dimensions, and carefully considered the composition so that the most extreme features were not dominant. In many of his female portraits of the mid-1890s in which his sitters wear the gigot sleeves, the composition is cropped tightly to the figure, rarely showing the full width across the shoulders.⁴¹ His frequent use of a bust-length format in many paintings of this date also means that the viewer is not forced to assess the ratio between shoulder width and narrow corseted waist that would emphasize these extraordinary proportions.

In the same way that Sargent tended to favor plain silks rather than patterned ones, and minimized the excesses of fashionable dress, he also pared down the accessories and jewelry that his sitters wore. He most commonly depicted women in evening attire suitable for a ball or the opera, which would have been accompanied by the most ornate jewelry. The new S-shape corset meant that the chest became the focal point for the female silhouette and jewelers concentrated their attention on necklaces and brooches decorating the décolletage. Necklaces were often worn layered on top of one another. In Sargent’s portraits, however, it is striking how rarely women in evening gowns wear

fig. 5 John Singer Sargent. Detail of *In the Generalife*, 1912. Watercolor, wax crayon, and graphite on white wove paper, 14 3/4 × 17 1/2 in. (37.5 × 45.4 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Purchase, Joseph Pulitzer Bequest, 1915 (15.142.8)

fig. 6 Estelle Mershon (American, act. 1910–20). Hat, ca. 1910. Straw, silk, bird, feathers. Brooklyn Museum Costume Collection at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of the Brooklyn Museum, 2009; Gift of Amelia Beard Hollenback, 1966 (2009.300.1564)

necklaces at all—he much preferred to leave a woman’s décolletage bare. Describing her portrait sitting, Consuelo Vanderbilt, Duchess of Marlborough, recalled that Sargent had “a predilection for a long neck, which he compared to the trunk of a tree. For that aesthetic reason he refused to adorn mine with pearls, a fact that aggrieved one of my sisters-in-law, who remarked that I should not appear in public without them.”⁴²

Where Sargent does include a necklace it is usually a single strand of pearls or a simple black velvet choker, rather than the garland or fringe necklaces constructed from diamonds that were most in vogue and which covered more of the chest. The black chokers he paints are of plain silk rather than the more fashionable examples that set diamonds against the dark background and were more akin to those worn in the mid-eighteenth century. For wrists he favored unadorned gold bangles—appropriate for daywear but too understated for evenings. Sargent often applied the reflective highlights in these metallic jewels last, as stiff dabs of pale colored pigment that stand out from the picture surface.

Sargent sometimes placed jewelry in unconventional positions—for his portrait of Mrs. Widener he took the pearl necklace from her throat and draped it across the bodice of her dress, adding a diamond as the light focus.⁴³ Rings were limited to one or two—Widener was instructed to take off all her rings except her sapphire and diamond engagement ring, which is prominently shown in the foreground. At a time when

jewelry was deeply imbued with both status and emotional meaning, often linked to life events such as a marriage or the birth of a child, this may have been a difficult demand for a sitter to accept.

During this period women sought innovation in dress to stand out from the crowd, and one of the most bizarre fashions at the turn of the century involved incorporating live animals into outfits. Beetles, turtles, glowworms, and (most popular of all) color-changing chameleons, sometimes encrusted with jewels, were attached to outfits using small collars and chains, and were then free to roam across the body.⁴⁴ Unsurprisingly Sargent was not one for such novelties in his portraits—nor were other artists for that matter. What is perhaps remarkable, however, is how infrequently Sargent portrays fashionable Art Nouveau jewelry inspired by the natural world, or hats with ornithological decoration. Hats reached huge proportions in the early twentieth century, to match equally large hairstyles of the period, and were worn by most women on a daily basis. The wearing of a hat (as opposed to a bonnet) came to symbolize fashionability and emancipation. In general they are infrequently shown in Sargent’s portraits, being less commonly worn with the evening gowns he tended to portray. Hats more frequently appear in Sargent’s noncommissioned genre paintings, such as *In the Generalife* of 1912 (*fig. 5*). The watercolor shows Sargent’s sister Emily painting in the grounds of the former summer palace of the Moorish



sultans at the Alhambra in Granada, Spain. While her clothing is not clearly defined she apparently wears a dark cloak and skirt, white shirt, and a black choker around her neck. She is watched attentively—on her left by an elderly Spanish woman dressed all in black, her gray hair pulled back into a high bun, and on her right, by De Glehn, who wears a pale outfit accessorized with a wide-brimmed hat. In his characteristic manner Sargent gives the suggestion of the form of the hat without making clear its exact construction or composition, although it is likely to have been made of straw and seems to be decorated with the body or wings of a black bird. A similar example from about the same date by Estelle Mershon, a New York designer and importer based at East 46th Street, is shown in figure 6—here the upturned brim reveals contrasting black straw. It is decorated with the wings of a white bird, possibly a gull, which was especially desirable. The fashion for ornamental plumage was so great that many species were brought to the brink of extinction and the resulting decline in bird populations prompted the establishment of the first society for the protection of birds in America in 1896 (the Massachusetts Audubon Society), initiated by Harriet Lawrence Hemenway, who had been painted by Sargent six years earlier.⁴⁵ It would form the foundation for the modern National Audubon Society.

While it is sometimes difficult to determine the effect that Sargent's process of simplification in dress and jewelry has on the final work of art, an assessment against other artists with different styles can be revealing. The Russian painter Konstantin Makovsky was seventeen years older than Sargent, but there are many parallels between the two artists, and a comparison of two portraits of a similar date serves to highlight the impact of Sargent's unique approach to painting fashion. Like Sargent, Makovsky spent time in the 1870s in Paris, where he was influenced by Carolus-Duran and built his reputation as a portraitist, becoming known for delivering a flattering likeness that commanded a high price from his aristocratic sitters.⁴⁶ Like Sargent, Makovsky also achieved subsequent success in the United States, and in 1901 he was engaged to produce the first official portrait of President Theodore Roosevelt (location unknown), whom Sargent would paint two years later.⁴⁷ Both artists collected textiles for use in their paintings—Makovsky's studio included a cupboard filled with garments and beaded dresses,⁴⁸ while Sargent's studio included "a chest in his studio where he had stacks of silks and stuffs."⁴⁹ One might predict that two artists working at about the same date, with similar artistic backgrounds and a shared

recognition for the importance of textiles in their portraits, might adopt an analogous approach in their representation of fashionable dress. A closer look at one example demonstrates this not to be the case.

Documentary sources indicate that for Sargent's portrait of Marie Louise Thoron (Mrs. William Crowninshield Endicott Jr.) of 1903 the choice of dress was entirely that of the artist (fig. 7). The sitter recounted to Sargent's biographer that she had purchased a gown made by the House of Worth especially for her portrait. However, upon seeing her wearing it at dinner the night before the sittings were due to start Sargent dismissed it, asking instead, "Haven't you got something black and white?"⁵⁰ The final choice—a relatively understated pale gray dress decorated with black flowers—is accessorized with a diaphanous black scarf draped over one arm, a fan in one hand and a pink rose in the other. Her jewelry is restricted to a wedding ring, the ubiquitous gold bangle, and a simple necklace.

Makovsky's portrait of his third wife (fig. 8) dates from three years before the Sargent portrait of Endicott. Mrs. Makovsky (Maria Alexeevna Matavtina) is shown indoors but her gaze and the fact that she is wearing a hat with evening dress suggest she is preparing to leave, perhaps for a ball. The dress is more structured and offers a greater sense of the corset worn beneath; however, there is a similarity in silhouette, color (it is also black and white), and floral pattern. In the Makovsky painting light catches on the beads or sequins that make up the trailing tendrils, while the train and bodice are decorated with pink orchids. The sitter's copious accoutrements include a large black ostrich-feather fan, at least four rings, a black hat adorned with flowers, short and long loops of pearls decorated with a diamond cross, a Renaissance-inspired pendant necklace, a wide pearl choker set on blue silk, and long pearl drop earrings. Comparing the two portraits demonstrates how much simplification Sargent may have had to do when choosing accessories and jewels for his sitters. Photographs of other elite women about this time suggest that Makovsky's appearance would not have been considered excessive for evening dress worn at a high-profile social event.

Another way in which Sargent instills a sense of timelessness in his portraits is through color, and his request for a black-and-white dress from Endicott is characteristic. Sargent's preference for monochrome hues in fashion is indicated by their prevalence in his portraits. Of his 122 portraits of single female figures produced during the 1870s and 1880s, approximately half wore a gown with black as its principal color.



7

The next most common was white (31 portraits, 25%). These two shades continued to dominate although the proportions gradually shifted, so of his 76 female portraits produced during the 1890s, approximately equal numbers wore black (34%), white (36%), and other (30%), while by the 1900s we see an inverse of the pattern in the earlier decades (27% wore black and 49% wore white).⁵¹

Although the proportions reflect the general shift in fashion toward white and lighter colors and more diaphanous fabrics, surviving garments and fashion periodicals indicate that a wide range of colors was being worn throughout the period. In the article “Summer Fashions from Paris” in *Harper’s Bazar* of May 1905, approximately 40% of the color references are to white; the others include dark blue, red, gray, and yellow.⁵² While black is not mentioned (typically



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darker colors were worn in the winter, lighter ones in the summer) it was considered appropriate for female evening dress throughout the period. Sargent did not seem to consider the time of year relevant when dictating what color his sitters would wear. In July 1884 he painted the Misses Vickers (Florence Evelyn, Mabel Frances, and Clara Mildred Vickers)—two of the sisters wear black and one wears white. In June 1892 he painted Gertrude Vernon (Lady Agnew) in white, while in June the following year he painted Elizabeth Chanler in black.⁵³ In both portraits the sitters are twenty-seven years old. Sargent’s preference for black and white seems to reflect an aesthetic preference for the ageless or classic, like the little black dress today, or the white cotton T-shirt. Sargent’s frequent use of black paint (specifically ivory black) was one of the points in which he diverged from the work of the Impressionists.

fig. 7 John Singer Sargent. *Mrs. William Crowninshield Endicott, Jr.*, 1903. Oil on canvas, 56¼ × 35 in. (142.9 × 88.9 cm). Private collection

fig. 8 Konstantin Egorovich Makovsky (1839–1915). *Portrait of the Artist's Wife*, 1900. Oil on canvas, 84¼ × 43⅝ in. (214 × 110 cm). Andre Ruzhnikov Collection

Claude Monet recalled that on one occasion when the artists were painting together, Sargent had requested black: “I gave him my colors and he wanted black, and I told him: ‘but I haven’t any.’ ‘Then I can’t paint,’ he cried and added, ‘How do you do it?’”⁵⁴

Sargent’s best-known portrait of a woman in black is that of Virginie Amélie Avegno Gautreau, known as *Madame X* (Metropolitan Museum), which caused controversy at the Paris Salon of 1884 with critics decrying the representation of the sitter’s pale skin (exaggerated through the application of rice powder), the indecorously slipping jeweled shoulder strap—later repainted by the artist—and the manner in which the décolletage of the bodice “seems to flee any contact with the flesh.”⁵⁵ *Madame X* has been much discussed by scholars, who address both the sitter’s marble-like skin color and the simple lines of the heavily boned black velvet cuirass bodice and satin bustle skirt, which have affinities with theatrical dress.⁵⁶

Sargent’s portraits draw on both the past and the present in a way that was commercially successful and artistically complex. His range of influences was eclectic, and an element of historicism can often be detected in his portraiture. However, historicism was also a key characteristic of Belle Epoque fashion. The Parisian couturier Charles Frederick Worth was famously influenced by fashions of the past. He visited museums, studied paintings and drawings, collected photographs of portraits by artists, and built up a large reference library of costume histories and fashion magazines such as the *Ladies Cabinet of Fashion* from the 1830s. He used them as inspiration for the fancy dress costumes he was required to produce for the frequent masquerade balls that were held in Paris in the second half of the nineteenth century, but also to inform his designs for normal day and evening dress. While Worth was particularly interested in the eighteenth century he did not restrict himself to one historical period, at different points and for different customers taking inspiration from Renaissance, Baroque, Neoclassical, and First Empire styles. The resulting aesthetic, as described in *L’Illustration* in 1895, was “modernity inspired by history.”⁵⁷ Clearly art creates fashion, which in turn creates a new generation of art, a fact that did not go unnoticed in fashion journals of the time. The editor of the *Journal des modes* of June 1875 wrote,

We thus frequently see in a drawing-room living representations of pictures by Raphael, Titian, Veronese, Rubens, Rembrandt, Van Dyck & c. We are copying painters, just as painters are copying us: for . . . if a painter wishes

to be successful now, he must represent modern dress on his canvas, and at the same time ladies are trying to look as much as possible like old pictures, and the oldest fashions of every country are borrowed to make new ones.⁵⁸

One courtier wrote that Worth sometimes collaborated with artists during the production of a portrait helping to decide what the sitter should wear⁵⁹—most notably Franz Xaver Winterhalter working at the court of Empress Eugénie in the 1850s and 1860s.⁶⁰ While there is no direct evidence that this happened with Sargent, it is clear that Worth gowns would have suited the artist’s own aesthetic by combining a modern look with historical influences. In the same way that Sargent’s sitters were expected to acquiesce to the choices of the artist in terms of dress and accessories, Worth’s clients were expected to put themselves entirely in the hands of the couturier. In an interview Worth explained, “Those ladies are wisest who leave the choice to us. By so doing they are always better pleased in the end, and the reputation of the house is sustained.”⁶¹

The Ladies Alexandra, Mary and Theo Acheson (fig. 9) is one of the most historically allusive portraits Sargent produced, seemingly taking inspiration from grand manner British portraiture of the late eighteenth century. Specifically in terms of subject and pose contemporary critics and later authors have recognized a connection between this painting and Joshua Reynolds’s portrait of Lady Elizabeth Keppel, later Marchioness of Tavistock (1761–62; Woburn Abbey) as well as *Three Ladies* (known as *The Montgomery Sisters*) (1773; Tate).⁶² Yet the clothing worn by the Acheson sisters is very different from that in either of the Reynolds portraits. Keppel wears the stiff-bodied gown she had worn as a bridesmaid to Queen Charlotte in 1761 (although without the wide paniers underneath that would normally have given the skirt more volume) while the Montgomery sisters wear the classicizing drapery that Reynolds favored for sitters in the 1770s. Instead, the Acheson sisters wear gowns inspired by the robe à l’anglaise popular in the last quarter of the eighteenth century, seen for example in the genre paintings of Louis Léopold Boilly such as *At the Entrance* (1796–98; State Hermitage Museum, Saint Petersburg). Sleeves are tight and reach the wrist, while the tiny waist, wide skirt, and prominent bosom recall the fashionable pouter pigeon shape of this period. The wide lapels and crossover front also evoke the silk wrapping gown worn by the actress Sarah Siddons in her portrait by



fig. 9 John Singer Sargent. *The Ladies Alexandra, Mary and Theo Acheson*, 1902. Oil on canvas, 8 ft. 10 in. × 78 in. (269.2 × 198 cm). Collection of the Duke of Devonshire, Chatsworth House

fig. 10 *L'Art et la mode*, no. 35 (September 2, 1899), p. 691



Gainsborough (1785; National Gallery, London), while the sash reflects the fashion for stripes in the 1780s. Other echoes of fashionable late eighteenth-century dress include Mary Acheson's black plumed headdress and the black silk ribbon chokers.

Yet Sargent's sitters are not wearing full historical fancy dress. A fashion plate from *L'Art et la mode* (fig. 10) depicting a day dress of 1899—three years before the *Acheson Sisters* commission—demonstrates that late eighteenth-century dress was a key influence for fashion designers in the late 1890s. Presented with such dresses at the first sitting for the *Acheson Sisters*, Sargent may have seen an opportunity to emphasize those features of fashionable Edwardian dress that are shared with this period of eighteenth-century English fashion, subconsciously contributing to the spirit of grand manner portraiture that is pervasive in the work. Similarly while Sargent's portrait of Lady Margaret Spicer of about 1906 (private collection) clearly has parallels with the portrait of Anne, Duchess of Cumberland, by Reynolds of 1772–73 (Waddesdon Manor) as Ormond has proposed,⁶³ she wears one of the new silk satin capes—the best were made by Liberty of London—that start to appear in fashion magazines at about this date. The cape is fashionable dress, not a length of unstructured fabric draped by the artist in the studio.

Worth was not the only French couturier to be inspired by the past. A pink silk ball gown by Jeanne Hallée (fig. 11) is clearly influenced by the Rococo designs and pastel colors at the court of Louis XV and immediately brings to mind Sargent's portrait of *Mrs. Carl Meyer and Her Children* (fig. 12). The existence of a number of similar dresses from the period demonstrates that rather than being a creation of the artist or an item of fancy dress, Meyer's gown would have been a fashionable garment. Perhaps seeing a dress in this style among the offerings during the costume selection process inspired Sargent to develop the eighteenth-century aesthetic of the portrait, which includes an upholstered Louis Quinze canapé decorated with Beauvais tapestry and gilt boiserie paneling in the background (a prop from Sargent's studio). Meyer's dress is spread as widely as possible on the seat and shows the full expanse of its pink silk satin, lending it the appearance of an eighteenth-century court dress arranged over wide paniers, and evoking François Boucher's portraits of Madame de Pompadour. Photographs of Meyer from this date show her with dark hair and yet Sargent paints it conspicuously gray, suggesting the powdered hairstyles of the mid- to late eighteenth century.



fig. 11 Jeanne Hallée
(French, 1880–1914).
Dress, ca. 1892. Silk. The
Metropolitan Museum of
Art, Gift of Mrs. W. Ogden
Ross, 1962 (C.I.62.36.4a–c)



fig. 12 John Singer Sargent.
*Mrs. Carl Meyer and Her
Children*, 1896. Oil on can-
vas, 82½ × 53½ (209.9 ×
135.9 cm). Tate (T12988)

Henry James proposes in his review of the painting that perhaps Meyer has powdered her hair, something that some women considered flattering at this date just as in the eighteenth century.⁶⁴ Yet such historical references are always filtered through Sargent’s vision of the present, and his eye for posterity, so that Sargent’s portraits never look like historical set pieces or characters attending a fancy dress ball.

Scholarship on Sargent has highlighted the portrait of Charlotte Louise Burckhardt—known as *Lady with the Rose*—as one of his most important early successes in breaking into the highly competitive Parisian art scene (fig. 13). First shown at the Salon of 1882 alongside Sargent’s portrait of his master, Carolus-Duran, it was one of the key paintings discussed in James’s renowned article about Sargent in *Harper’s Magazine*

five years later that helped launch his career in London.⁶⁵ Contemporary critics frequently referred to the style of clothing Burckhardt wears, and their views were notably divergent and sometimes contradictory. A number of commentators described the dress as old-fashioned or antique, recognizing specific historical precursors in its style, with Velázquez and Watteau most frequently invoked. Clarence Cook wrote in 1883 that Burckhardt “stands straight up in her Watteau dress”⁶⁶ and Henry Houssaye noted in *Revue des deux mondes* of 1882 that she wears a “black dress whose Watteau style coat does not thin her hips.”⁶⁷ Comparing the portrait against Watteau’s figure studies such as *Seated Woman Turning toward the Left*, *Holding a Fan* (1716–17; private collection)⁶⁸ suggests that the separate ruff above the square neckline is

distinctive to both, although they also share the same pointed waistline, narrow sleeves, and wide skirt. Yet the dark color is completely at odds with the pastel shades that dominated fashion in the eighteenth century.

At the same time, various critics also saw in *Lady with the Rose* the influence of Velázquez and some specifically singled out the dress as the feature that most evoked the Spanish artist. In 1887 James wrote, “The dress, stretched at the hips over a sort of hoop, and ornamented in front, where it opens on a velvet petticoat with large satin bows, has an old-fashioned air, as if it had been worn by some demure princess who might have sat for Velasquez.”⁶⁹ Sargent had produced a copy of *Margaret Theresa, Infanta of Spain* (ca. 1665, then attributed to Velázquez although now attributed to Juan Bautista Martínez del Mazo) during a trip to the Prado three years before finishing *Lady with the Rose*. The very broad skirt the Infanta wears, which gets its shape from the stiff *verdugado* hoop beneath, was a key feature of Spanish court dress. Retained well into the seventeenth century in Spain, it represented a form of dress that by then had long been discarded in other European countries.

While some read Burckhardt’s dress as historical and old-fashioned, others saw it as the very latest fashion and used this as a point of criticism. The *Boston Evening Transcript* was not impressed with her attire, noting that “a possibly graceful figure is disguised by a badly made black gown,”⁷⁰ while the critic for the *Nation* was distinctly unenthusiastic about “the ugly costume, which sadly deforms the figure. We have no doubt the picture is truthful in these points; but it is a pity that an artist should devote so much skill to giving enduring form to the monstrosities of a fashionable Parisian costume.”⁷¹ These examples indicate that to some, the choice of clothing worn by a sitter was enough to determine a painting’s success or otherwise, however well executed.

Comparing the portrait to surviving garments, it becomes clear that Burckhardt wears a modish gown that would have been quite appropriate for the streets of Paris in the early 1880s, but which itself is heavily influenced by styles of earlier centuries. A surviving dress in the Costume Institute (fig. 14) shows many of the same features, including the low-cut square neckline and elbow-length sleeves finished with lace ruffles. The silhouette too is remarkably similar, suggesting that Sargent has not excessively exaggerated the narrowness of the waist, although by placing the sitter at a slight angle he has emphasized the width at the hips,

showing part of the bustle projecting to the back. Another slightly later example incorporates the ribbon bows joining the gown across the petticoat (a style of decoration historically known as *en échelle*) and the spotted mesh fabric that covers the décolletage and decorates the sleeves, both features also visible in the portrait.⁷²

In December 1903 *Vogue* published a special supplement that included twelve reproductions of famous portraits that were specifically marketed (and regularly advertised in subsequent editions) to readers as “of special interest as studies of costume.”⁷³ The selection was chosen for the way in which “the painters have given as much attention to details of dress—finely delineated laces, intricate embroideries, exquisite accessories, elaborate textile design—as to the likeness, pose and expression of the sitter.”⁷⁴ Artists represented included Holbein, Gainsborough, Bellini, Veronese, and Reynolds. The editorial stated,

In marked contrast with the method of such masters . . . is the school of to-day with its sweeping draperies, indefiniteness as to detail and reliance upon effects of composition, color and action. Whether the twentieth-century portrait-painter adopts his method from inability to present costume adequately, or by a deliberate choice, in the belief that modern ways are an improvement upon those of the past, is an open question.⁷⁵

Sargent probably would have epitomized the “sweeping draperies” and “indefiniteness as to detail” of which the *Vogue* writer disapproves. Yet by 1924 *Vogue*, in its review of Sargent’s paintings at the Grand Central Art Galleries, had changed its opinion on his depiction of dress, and recognized an ability to create representations of fashion that stand the test of time.⁷⁶

Sargent’s portraits retain an air of agelessness because he carefully controlled the dress and jewelry of his sitters, selecting and modifying both to fit within his preferred aesthetic, which for the most part was a simplified version of modern dress with echoes of the fashions of the past. It remains difficult to establish how much the depiction of historically influenced costume is driven by the preferences of the artist and how much can be attributed to the fashion designers who were patronized by these sitters and whose clothes they brought with them to the studio. Given the numerous accounts that reveal Sargent dictated the choice of a subject’s dress at the first sitting, fashion seems to have played a greater role in the overall conception and development of Sargent’s paintings than has been



fig. 13 John Singer Sargent. *Lady with the Rose (Charlotte Louise Burckhardt)*, 1882. Oil on canvas, 84 × 44¾ in. (213.4 × 113.7 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Bequest of Valerie B. Hadden, 1932 (32.154)



fig. 14 American or European designer. Evening dress, 1881–84. Silk. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of Orme Wilson and R. Thornton Wilson, in memory of their mother, Mrs. Caroline Schermerhorn Astor Wilson, 1949 (49.3.31a, b)

previously recognized. Within this context the dresses his sitters brought along would have served as inspiration, enabling Sargent to draw from his wide-ranging visual memory, helping him create the overall mood for the portrait, to determine the pose, and also perhaps influence the props and background. Whether it be in the style of Van Dyck, Velázquez, Gainsborough, Boucher, or Reynolds, the selection of the dress is never a mere afterthought but the starting point for the entire image-making process.

NOTES

- 1 Mechlin 1924, p. 170.
- 2 Ormond and Kilmurray 2003, p. 3.
- 3 Flügel 1930, p. 111. While this interpretation is now seen as overly simplistic given the increasing availability of various styles of menswear for different seasons and activities during the nineteenth century, female dress remained more varied and colorful, and this is reflected in Sargent's portraits.
- 4 Of Sargent's 237 single-figure portraits of men, 63% portray men in dark suits with white shirts, 11% wear military uniform, 6% wear official dress, 6% wear a pale suit, 4% wear outdoor dress, and 2% wear an overcoat. In 8% of the portraits the dress is not well enough defined to determine a category. Only *Dr. Pozzi at Home* (1881, Hammer Museum, Los Angeles) wears a dressing gown. Source: author's database analysis.
- 5 "La finesse du drap, la perfection de la coupe, le fini de la façon, et surtout le bien-porté de tout." Gautier 1858, p. 15.
- 6 For a complete analysis of the dress worn by Pozzi and a discussion of Sargent's willingness to deviate from existing standards of male portraiture, see Bellow 2012.
- 7 Robertson 1931, p. 235.
- 8 Addison 1711, p. 409.
- 9 Reynolds 1842, p. 138.
- 10 Baudelaire 1981, p. 402.
- 11 Gautier and Lehmann 2015, p. 209.
- 12 Ribeiro 2017, p. 461.
- 13 Ibid.
- 14 It is rare for portraits by Sargent to be titled anything other than the name of their sitter. The two best-known examples named after specific items of clothing are *Lady with a Blue Veil* (1890, private collection) and *Cashmere* (1908, private collection).
- 15 Sargent to Heath Wilson, May 23, 1874; quoted in Fairbrother 2000, p. 46.
- 16 Charteris 1927, p. 25.
- 17 Laver 1937, p. 202.
- 18 *Pictorial Review* 1924, p. 5.
- 19 *Vogue* 1924, p. 68.
- 20 Berry 1924, p. 89.
- 21 Brevik-Zender 2015, p. 210.
- 22 See Gordenker 2002, pp. 22–25.
- 23 See, for example, House of Worth, Evening cloak, 1889. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Brooklyn Museum Costume Collection at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of the Brooklyn Museum, 2009; Gift of the Princess Viggo in accordance with the wishes of the Misses Hewitt, 1931 (2009.300.1708).
- 24 Author's database analysis.
- 25 Ribeiro 1999, p. 163.
- 26 The same ostrich-feather fan appears in the portraits of *Mrs. Graham Moore Robertson (Marion Greatorex)*, 1894, Watts Gallery, Surrey (COMWG.568), and *Constance Wynne-Roberts, Mrs. Ernest Hills of Redleaf*, ca. 1894, National Galleries of Scotland, Edinburgh (NG 1787).
- 27 Ormond and Kilmurray 2003, p. 47.
- 28 Ormond and Kilmurray 2002, p. 49.
- 29 For an example of a portrait by Ellis Roberts that appears to exemplify the type of limp muslin to which Sargent objected, see *Lady Cunard of 1897 (British Pictures, 1500–1850 & Victorian Pictures, sale cat., Christie's, London, November 26, 2002, lot 179)*.
- 30 For an image, see Ormond and Kilmurray 2003, p. 170.
- 31 Ormond and Kilmurray 2014, p. 84.
- 32 Ormond and Kilmurray 2003, p. 189.
- 33 Ibid., p. 163.
- 34 The gown, by the House of Worth, is in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (2003.288.1-2). I thank Pamela Parmal for drawing it to my attention.
- 35 Ormond and Kilmurray 2002, p. 114.
- 36 Stokes 1941, p. 116.
- 37 Mount 1957, p. 217.
- 38 For an image, see Ormond and Kilmurray 2003, p. 114.
- 39 Widener 1940, pp. 67–68.
- 40 Ormond and Kilmurray 2002, p. 90.
- 41 For examples of portraits by Sargent with the figure tightly cropped to remove the visual impact of gigot sleeves, see *Mrs. William Shakespeare*, ca. 1896, Memorial Art Gallery, University of Rochester, New York; *Madame Flora Reyntiens*, ca. 1895, private collection; *Mrs. William Russell Cooke*, 1895, private collection; and *Mrs. William Lionel Wyllie*, ca. 1895, destroyed (all illustrated in Ormond and Kilmurray 2002).
- 42 Balsan 1953, p. 146.
- 43 Widener 1940, pp. 67–68.
- 44 Long 2009, p. 112.
- 45 Mason 2002, p. 1.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Elizabeth Arenaro, William Gassaway, Stephanie Herdrich, Erica Hirshler, Kevin Jones, Elaine Kilmurray, Dorothy Mahon, Richard Ormond, Pamela Parmal, Jessica Regan, Aileen Ribeiro, Annamarie Sandecki, Beth Carver Wees, Ruth Bigelow Wriston Curator of American Decorative Arts at the Metropolitan Museum, and the staff of the Costume Institute.

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- 46 Salmond, Martin, and Zeisler 2015, p. 81.
- 47 Published in the *New York Herald*, January 24, 1902.
- 48 Salmond, Martin, and Zeisler 2015, p. 32.
- 49 Ormond and Kilmurray 2003, p. 171.
- 50 Mount 1957, p. 240.
- 51 During the 1870s–80s, 59 portraits by Sargent depict women wearing black (48%), 31 white (26%), 32 another color (26%). During the 1890s the figures are 26 black (34%), 27 white (36%), 23 other (30%). During the 1900s the figures are 25 black (27%), 45 white (49%), 22 other (24%). Source: author's database analysis.
- 52 *Harper's Bazar* 1905.
- 53 *The Misses Vickers*, 1884, Sheffield City Art Galleries (VIS.2601); *Lady Agnew*, 1892, National Galleries of Scotland, Edinburgh (NG 1656); *Elizabeth Chanler*, 1893, Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, D.C. (1980.71).
- 54 Gimpel 1966, p. 75.
- 55 Houssaye 1884, p. 589.
- 56 Notable examples include Sidlauskas 2001; Davis 2003; De Young 2017; and Block 2018.
- 57 "la modernité s'inspirait de l'Histoire." *Etincelle* 1895, p. 217.
- 58 *Journal des modes*, June 1875, p. 5.
- 59 Carette 1889, p. 176.
- 60 De Marly 1980, p. 112.
- 61 Lonergan 1907, p. 199.
- 62 See Ormond and Kilmurray 2003, p. 66.
- 63 *Ibid.*, p. 181.
- 64 James 1956, p. 257.
- 65 James 1887, p. 686.
- 66 Cook 1883, p. 124.
- 67 Houssaye 1882, p. 852.
- 68 For an illustration, see Stein and Holmes 1999, p. 15.
- 69 James 1887, p. 686.
- 70 *Boston Evening Transcript* 1883, p. 6.
- 71 *Nation* 1883, p. 328.
- 72 MMA C.1.68.53.8a, b.
- 73 *Vogue* 1903, p. [s2]; *Vogue* 1904, p. 621 (quote).
- 74 *Vogue* 1903, p. [s2].
- 75 *Ibid.*
- 76 *Vogue* 1924, p. 68.

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